



The world of peers' engagement in care

How to find our way around?

Healthcare systems are increasingly interested in engaging peers, in Quebec, as elsewhere.

Peers are people with significant life experiences, mobilizing their knowledge for the purpose of accompaniment and support.

Today, a wide range of words are used to name them: peer support, peer helper, navigator, street worker, community health worker or self-help groups.

How do we find our way around such terms? What differentiates them? And why use one rather than another?



Here's a "road map" to find our way around.



What are the objectives of the support ?

Build relationships

Establish trusting, authentic and reciprocal relationships

Provide emotional support

Listening without judgment, highlighting individuals' strengths, empowering

Navigate services

Bridge to resources, offer administrative support, go to appointments

Promote health

Inform about disease and treatments, provide tips to care for ones' self

Advocate

Raise awareness about inequalities, educate on one's rights



Is the support offered formal or informal?



Informal

Spontaneous, self-help support

- Flexible, without a formalized frame
- Possible pressure on one's social networks

Formal

Intentional support, more or less formalized

- Offered within a framework, or a program
- May create unequal relations between peers

Peers' engagement, in the community, is not a new practice!

Peer-led support groups



Since the 18th century, peers have been mobilizing to help each other and defend their rights, in Europe and North America, in the fields of mental health, addiction and poverty.

Citizen mobilization in care



At the beginning of the 20th century, notably in Asia, citizens were mobilized to screen for disease and provide care or medicines.

Engaging peers to navigate services



In 1990, in Harlem, New York, black women were hired to help reduce the barriers their community experienced in breast cancer screening and care.



On what basis do peers connect?

Lived experience



Having lived through hardships, such as homelessness or illness

- Supports mutual understanding

Shared identities



Sharing social identities, such as gender, age or ethnicity

- Facilitates trust and recognition

Embedded in the community



Being part of a local community or neighborhood

- Provides an intimate outlook on local needs



Who acknowledges the peers' status?

Peers



Whether it's those receiving support, or their community

- This mutual recognition process is usually at the heart of peers' work

Training programs



With or without certification

- May facilitate compensation
- Can recreate inequalities (if training require a certain level of education)

Workplaces



Hiring peers for their knowledge and intervention skills

- Formal recognition of peers' expertise

More than one answer is possible for each question!

- When offering support, a peer can
- mobilize experiences and identities;
 - be informal at first and more structured later;
 - move between living and institutional environments.

The questions are tools for orientation, not definitive answers!



What is the peers' network?

The community

- Not affiliated to a program
- Freedom in interventions
- Limited resources for the peer

Community organizations

- That may or not be peer-led
- Facilitates access to management positions
- Less hierarchical environment

Clinical settings

- Opportunities for interprofessional collaborations
- Less flexible framework
- Rather hierarchical settings



Where is support provided?



From daily-life...

- Offering support in the street, at home, etc.
- Going where people are
- Direct and real-time interventions



...to institutions

- Providing support in hospitals, community resources, etc.
- Bridging to other providers
- Advocating for patients' rights



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This roadmap is the result of knowledge synthesis of international scientific literature, carried out with peers, researchers and practitioners.

To find out more about the project, please consult our article :

- [Engaging with peers to integrate community care: Knowledge synthesis and conceptual map](https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.14034), co-authored by Andreea-Catalina Panait, Odile-Anne Desroches, Émilie Warren, Ghislaine Rouly, Geneviève Castonguay, Antoine Boivin and published in the journal Health Expectations in 2024 (<https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.14034>).

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