

FACT SHEET

Peer Support for Maternal Mental Health (MMH)

KEY POINTS

Peer support has long been acknowledged as an integral part of addressing behavioral health. Peer support occurs when people provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to each other. Peers share lived experience with a particular experience, situation, or event, providing a mutual bond and sense of "we're all in this together."

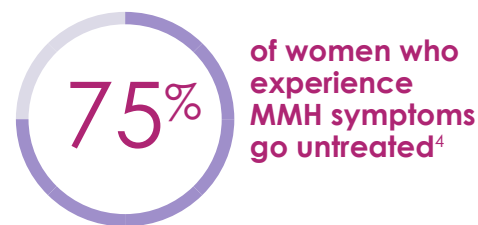
According to Mental Health America, peer support programs:

- > Increase social support and participation in the community
- > Reduce symptoms and improve well-being, self-esteem, and social functioning
- > Decrease lengths of hospital stays and costs of services
- > Encourage more thorough and longer-lasting recoveries

Peer support leverages shared experience to foster trust, decrease stigma, and create a sustainable forum for those seeking help by sharing information about support resources and positive coping strategies.



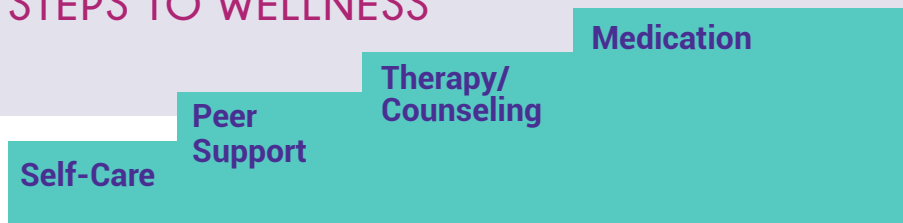
1/5 women will experience MMH conditions during pregnancy or first year following pregnancy¹⁻³



75% of women who experience MMH symptoms go untreated⁴

You are not alone. You are not to blame. With help, you will be well.
Postpartum Support International

STEPS TO WELLNESS



Social isolation caused by the coronavirus pandemic can exacerbate feelings of loneliness. Fortunately, many support groups are now available online.

IMPORTANCE & VALUE OF PEER SUPPORT

- New mothers often feel isolated and alone, and peer support can offer an opportunity to connect with others sharing similar emotions.
- Knowing that other new mothers are coping with anxiety and/or depression can be reassuring and validating.
- Peers can offer tips for navigating emotions, relationships, and the challenges of new motherhood.
- Support groups provide a safe, nonjudgmental space.
- Peer support decreases shame and stigma, provides hope for recovery, increases access to care, and fills gaps in mental healthcare.
- Peer support is FREE.

TYPES OF PEER SUPPORT

Emotional Support



- > Create warmth, nurturing, caring
- > Share empathy, concern, acceptance
- > Provide support and encouragement

Practical Support



- > Prepare meals
- > Fold laundry
- > Watch children
- > Run errands

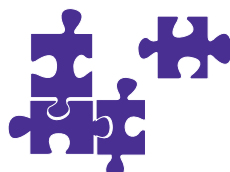
Information

- > Guidance and suggestions
- > Information and resources



Companionship

- > Provide a sense of belonging
- > "You are not alone"



MMH PEER SUPPORT RESOURCES

PSI is the go-to resource for families experiencing mental health issues related to pregnancy and postpartum. PSI provides the following peer support services:



POSTPARTUM SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL

www.postpartum.net
1-800-944-4773

- Helpline with phone and text options in English and Spanish
- Daily on-line support groups
- Specialized support for military families, fathers, birth mothers who choose adoption, and postpartum psychosis
- Links to local resources in all 50 states (and many countries around the world)
- Moderated private Facebook group and Smart Patients forum
- Online directory with information about support groups and mental health providers with advanced training in MMH

Many other organizations provide free peer support groups, most of which are online since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, including



getmomswell.com/vsg



LEARN MORE ABOUT PEER SUPPORT



mhanational.org

MHA's Center for Peer Support offers a wealth of information about peer support, including webinars, research and reports, and a peer certification program.



nami.org

NAMI provides advocacy, education, support and public awareness. NAMI's peer-to-peer classes provide an opportunity for mutual support and growth.



samhsa.gov

SAMHSA provides core competencies for peer workers, tools for those supervising peer workers, free training and technical assistance, and an overview of the value of peers.

WHERE DID PEER SUPPORT FOR NEW PARENTS START?



Jane Honikman is an author, coach, speaker, and trainer who has been talking about pregnancy and bringing baby home for almost 50 years.



Jane, along with her friends in Santa Barbara CA, started the social support movement for new parents in the United States when they launched Postpartum Education for Parents (sbpep.org) in the 1970s. Jane then founded Postpartum Support International (postpartum.net) in 1987 and the Postpartum Action Institute (postpartumaction.org) in 2015.

Jane's vision is that every community in the world has a postpartum parent support network. Learn more at janehonikman.com.

PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

Peer support specialists are people with "lived experience" who have been trained and credentialed to support others struggling with mental health issues. Peer support specialists assist in

- Articulating goals for recovery
- Learning and practicing new skills
- Monitoring progress
- Modeling effective coping techniques and self-help strategies
- Developing and implementing recovery plans

In 2007, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recognized peer support services as an evidence-based mental health model of care which consists of a qualified peer support provider who assists individuals with their recovery from mental illness.⁵

Since then, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services have paid for peer support services.

Citations

1 ACOG Committee Opinion 757 (2018).

2 Gavin (2005). *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 106, 1071-83.

3 Fawcett (2019). *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* (80)

4 Byatt (2015). *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, 126(5): 1048-1058.

5 CMS Letter to State Medicaid Directors. SMDL 07-011, dated August 15, 2007