Center for Community Engagement at Chestnut Health Systems

SUD Recovery: Quick Reference Guide

A brief overview of recovery from substance use disorders, including core principles, supports, setbacks, and community roles.

What is Recovery?

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and work toward reaching their full potential. Recovery is personal and looks different for everyone. It can take time, and is ongoing, and may continue long after formal treatment ends.

Key reminder: A substance use disorder should be approached as a chronic health condition, not a personal failure. Effective recovery support is individualized, addresses co-occurring conditions, and focuses on the whole person.

Four Dimensions of Recovery

Dimension	What It Means
Health	Making informed choices that support physical and emotional well-being.
Home	Having a stable, safe place to live.
Community	Building relationships and social networks that provide encouragement, support, love, and hope.
Purpose	Engaging in meaningful daily activities that matter to the individual and having the independence and resources to participate in society.

Ten Guiding Principles of Recovery

1. **Hope:** Belief that recovery is real, motivates change, and can be strengthened by peers, families, providers, allies, and community members. No one has to do it alone.
2. **Person-driven:** Individuals define their own goals and choose their own paths.
3. **Many pathways:** Recovery looks different for each person based on needs, strengths, culture, preferences, and goals. What works for one person may not work for another.
4. **Holistic:** Recovery includes health, mind, emotions, body, spirit, family, housing, education, employment, and community connection.
5. **Peer and ally support:** Mutual support groups, sponsors, recovery coaches, mentors, and peer specialists can model and reinforce recovery, offering encouragement and understanding.
6. **Relationships and social networks:** Supportive people who believe in the person and in recovery help build empowerment, autonomy, and inclusion.

7. **Culturally based and influenced:** Services and supports should be culturally responsive and personalized. An individual's background, beliefs, and values matter and should be respected.
8. **Trauma-informed:** Supports should promote safety, trust, choice, empowerment, and collaboration. Supports should help one feel safe and in control of their choices.
9. **Strengths and responsibility:** One's own strengths, skills, and experiences can help in moving forward along with the support of individuals, families, and communities. These all bring strengths and share responsibility for supporting recovery.
10. **Respect:** Recovery requires courage; protecting rights and reducing discrimination are essential. Each individual deserves dignity, kindness, and fair treatment at every step.

Setbacks and Return to Use

As stability grows, setbacks can still occur. A setback is a decline in health, thoughts, activities, or functioning after improvement and does not always mean a return to use nor does it mean someone has failed. When setbacks happen, respond with support rather than shame, reassess needs, strengthen the recovery plan, and reconnect the person with appropriate services and supports.

Does a setback mean a return to use?

Not necessarily. It can mean setback in health, thoughts, activities.

Does a setback mean that treatment has failed?

No. The chronic nature of the disease means that lapsing back to substance use is not only possible but expected.

Reducing Stigma

Stigma is a major barrier to recovery. It can make people feel unwelcome in their own communities and delay them from seeking care. Community members can help those in recovery stay connected and move forward in confidence by challenging their own stereotypes, opinions, and judgments which increase the effect of stigma on people with substance use disorders. Because stigma creates a sense of not being welcome in one's own community, using respectful, person-first language, educating others, and treating people affected by substance use disorders with dignity and respect fosters a needed sense of belonging.

Community Roles in Recovery

Recovery is strengthened when communities create welcoming pathways to help. Businesses, media, schools, law enforcement, faith groups, nonprofits, youth, parents, and other community partners each play important roles in reducing stigma, increasing access to support, and promoting inclusion.



Quick Action Checklist

- Use person-first, respectful language.
- Recognize recovery as individualized and ongoing.
- Support all four recovery dimensions: health, home, community, and purpose. Encourage supports that fit one's culture, values and goals.
- Encourage peer support, family support, and culturally responsive services. Help individuals build their confidence to ask for help when they need it.
- Respond to setbacks with care and compassion, not blame. Reach out and help them restart without shame.
- Challenge stigma when you see or hear it. Help others reframe their thinking.
- Connect people to resources and supportive community networks. Help them build a support team they can trust.

The Center for Community Engagement is funded in full or in part through a State Opioid Response Grant (TI085769) to the Illinois Department of Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery, from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.