



## WHY THIS MATTERS

Peer support is a form of community care where those with lived experience help others navigate an issue through supportive relationships. Peer support helps fill gaps in the mental health workforce with roles such as recovery coaches, community health navigators, and certified peer specialists. Youth-led peer mental health groups play an important role as kids often turn to their friends and peers first for help. Peer support can be an effective, accessible, empowering, and affordable approach to meeting the mental health needs of families.

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Youth who have peers they can relate to and positive teen friendships, have better mental health outcomes into adulthood.<sup>1</sup> Positive outcomes are more likely when people talk with someone who has lived through the same experience.<sup>2</sup> Because peer support providers have lived experience, they understand the stigma often associated with mental health issues. These experts also tend to be culturally competent and trauma-informed, allowing for a better understanding and more effective support network for families.<sup>3</sup>

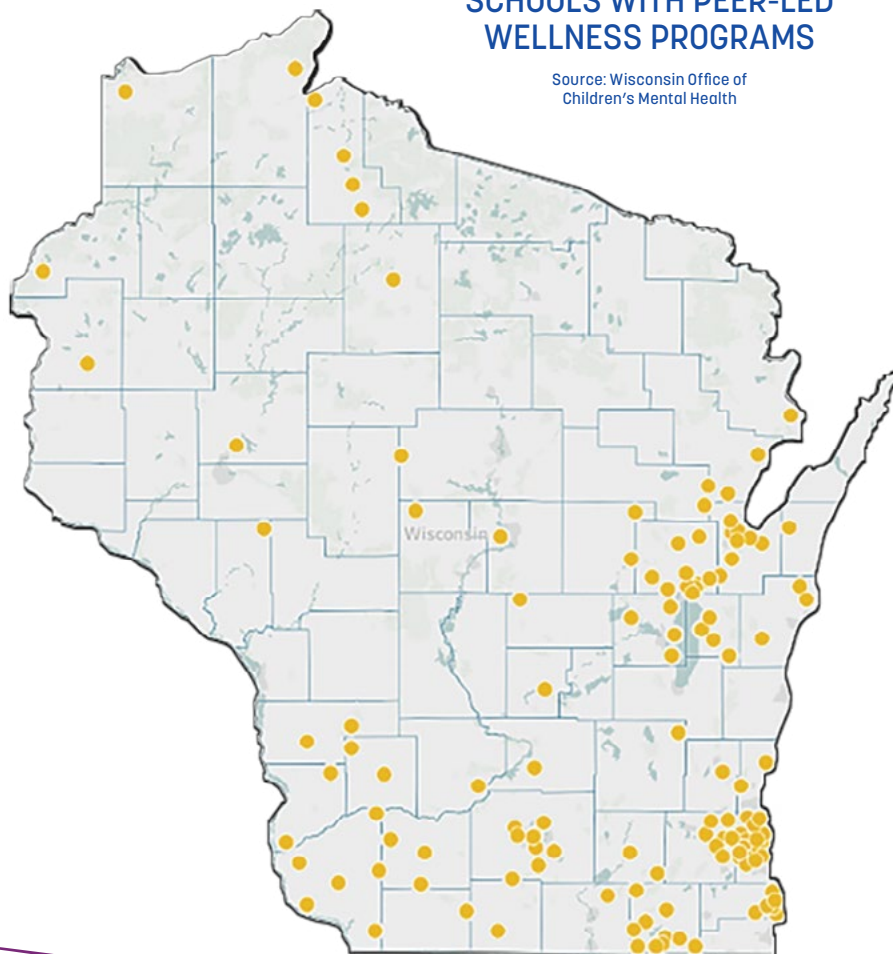
Given the shortage of mental health professionals, especially racially and culturally diverse practitioners, peer support fills a critical gap. Most psychologists have used peer consultations to manage burnout, and the nation's leading mental health organizations support the use of peer support. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration identifies the use of peers as the first essential quality of a comprehensive mental health crisis system.<sup>4</sup> In addition, peer support has been found to significantly reduce hospital readmission rates.<sup>5</sup>

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WISCONSIN?

Peer support services are growing in many sectors throughout the state. There are family support services to help caregivers, community mental health navigators, and peer-led wellness programs in over 200 Wisconsin schools.

### SCHOOLS WITH PEER-LED WELLNESS PROGRAMS

Source: Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health



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## SCHOOL-BASED PEER-LED WELLNESS PROGRAMS

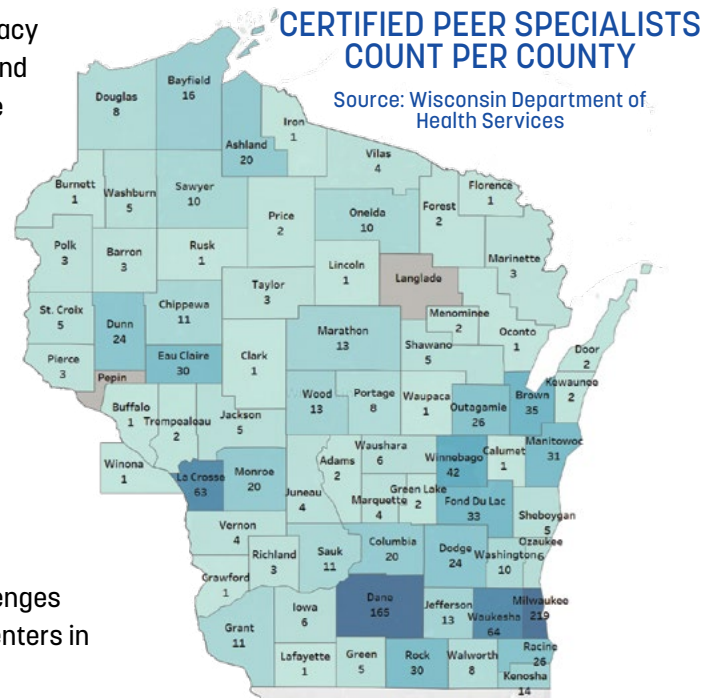
Wisconsin schools are home to peer-led youth mental health groups. Student leaders and adult advisors are increasing mental health literacy in their schools; raising awareness of resources available to youth; and actively supporting their peers in wellness, mental health and suicide prevention activities.

## CERTIFIED PEER SPECIALISTS

Wisconsin offers a certification program for *Certified Parent Peer Specialists*, those trained to provide peer support to other parents raising a child with behavioral health challenges; and *Certified Peer Specialists*, those trained to support adults with mental health and substance use issues. Certified Peer and Parent Specialists must complete a training course and pass an exam to be certified.<sup>6</sup> As of 2022, there were over 1,200 people certified for peer support in the state.<sup>7</sup>

## PEER RECOVERY CENTERS

Those living in recovery from mental health and substance use challenges can serve as a safe resource for peers. There are 11 Peer Recovery Centers in Wisconsin, eight of which focus on mental health recovery.<sup>8</sup>



## WHAT WE CAN DO<sup>9</sup>

### ➤ PARENTS AND YOUTH:

- Support use of [TeenLine](#), a text line run by teens for teens. Text 839863 or Call 800-852-8336.
- Seek out peer confidential support specific to your identity (e.g. [parents](#), [LGBTQ](#), [Hmong](#), or [people with disabilities](#)).
- Consider becoming a [Certified Parent Peer Specialist](#) if you have experience to share.

### ➤ SCHOOLS

- Create opportunities for youth to provide peer support in whole school wellness and school-based mental health programs (see [map of peer-led offerings in Wisconsin schools](#)).
- Cultivate a [Trauma Sensitive School](#).

### ➤ POLICYMAKERS:

- Support Medicaid reimbursement rates for peer support services.
- Expand peer specialist programs that offer paid employment for the peer workforce.

### ➤ PROVIDERS

- Employ peer specialists, following [best practices](#) and implementing [resources](#).
- Explore technical assistance offerings from [Youth MOVE National Peer Center](#).
- Identify peer-based resources that complement clinical care and share with families.
- Evaluate your program's [cultural competency](#).

#### REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Peer Services: Peer Recovery Centers. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/peer-services/peer-recovery-centers.htm>.  
<sup>2</sup> SAMSHA. National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care – A Best Practice Toolkit. Page 13. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> SAMSHA. Bringing Recovery Supports to Scale. (2017). Family, Parent and Caregiver Peer Support in Behavioral Health. Retrieved from [https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/brss\\_tac/family-parent-caregiver-support-behavioral-health-2017.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tac/family-parent-caregiver-support-behavioral-health-2017.pdf).  
<sup>4</sup> SAMSHA INFOGRAPHIC, [https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/brss\\_tac/family-parent-caregiver-support-behavioral-health-2017.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tac/family-parent-caregiver-support-behavioral-health-2017.pdf)  
<sup>5</sup> RI International. (2022) Recovery Innovations Programs and Outcomes. Retrieved from <https://riinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/RIA-Programs-and-Outcomes.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Peer Services: Peer Specialists. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/peer-services/peer-specialists.htm>.  
<sup>7</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Peer Specialist Initiative. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02541-02.pdf>.  
<sup>8</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Peer Services: Peer Recovery Centers. Retrieved from <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/peer-services/peer-recovery-centers.htm>.  
<sup>9</sup> Mental Health America. (August 2022). *Youth and Young Adult Peer Support: Expanding Community-Driven Mental Health Resources*. <https://mhanational.org/research-reports/youth-and-young-adult-peer-support-expanding-community-driven-mental-health>