

## Multiple Pathways of Recovery

Because everyone has unique experiences and identities (including their culture, goals, and backgrounds), it follows that everyone has different needs for their recovery journeys – *remember, recovery is not one-size-fits-all*. This is why peer professionals should affirm that there are multiple pathways of recovery. In other words, there are multiple different activities, perspectives, and journeys that people take to find and maintain recovery.

Here are some examples of different recovery pathways (this is *not* an exhaustive list).

- Clinically Supported Recovery – *with this pathway, recovery is supported by clinical services, like therapy, medications, or treatment;*
- Abstinence – *this is a recovery pathway where people do not use any illicit substances or alcohol, often viewed as a lifelong commitment to abstaining from those substances;*
- Harm Reduction – *this is a set of strategies meant to reduce the negative impact of things like drug use, self-harm, etc. (as noted below, harm reduction can be used as a recovery pathway or as a survival tool that is not connected to a recovery journey);*
- Mutual Aid & Support – *this is where people with shared lived experience receive and give support to each other (this includes peer support!);*
- Family Recovery – *also known as family resiliency, this pathway focuses on improving the health and wellness of the entire family unit;*
- Self-Led Recovery Plans – *these are tools that people can create to work towards living the life that they want to live (e.g., Wellness Recovery Action Plan, Personal Medicine, Substance Use Recovery Plans, etc.);*
- Art & Creativity – *many people use writing, sculpture, pottery, painting, drawing, dance, theater, and more to connect to healing and their sense of self;*
- Movement – *things like taichi, qigong, dance, yoga, and other forms of exercise are used to support and sustain recovery*
- Mindfulness – *this is the practice of developing and focusing on the “ability to be fully present, aware of where we are and what we’re doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what’s going on around us”<sup>9</sup>*
- Natural Recovery – *this is where people experience recovery entirely outside of formal systems or support*

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<sup>9</sup> *What is mindfulness?* (2020, July 8). Mindful. Retrieved March 25, 2023 from <https://www.mindful.org/what-is-mindfulness/>

- Community-Specific Recovery – *these are services and supports that are created by and for specific communities, using language, traditions, and practices that are meaningful to those specific communities (e.g., Wellbriety Circles for Native American communities)*
- Youth-Specific Recovery Pathways – *these are supports and services that are specific to children and young people, often provided in youth-specific environments (e.g., Recovery High Schools, Alternative Peer Groups, and accommodations in educational settings)*

*The following information explores a few different recovery pathways in greater detail.*

### **Medication-Assisted Recovery (or Medication-Assisted Treatment)<sup>10</sup>**

Even though many people with mental health challenges use medication to assist in their recovery journey, the term “Medication-Assisted Recovery” refers to a specific evidence-based practice<sup>11</sup> in substance use recovery where medication is used as part of other recovery support services (like peer support!) to support people with substance use challenges. There are certain medications can help reduce cravings and symptoms of withdrawal for people with substance use challenges, which are broadly called Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD) or Medications for Alcohol Use Disorder (MAUD). These medications can reduce the need for inpatient treatment and can be life-saving (especially for people who experience significant withdrawals when beginning their recovery journey). These medications can also help people stay in treatment and recovery, including by helping people maintain employment as they are navigating recovery.

### **Harm Reduction**

Harm reduction refers to a “set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences” of drug use, self harm, suicide, etc.<sup>12</sup> The goal of harm reduction is to promote a person’s quality of life and well-being, not to stop a person’s drug use or other actions perceived as harmful. Examples of harm reduction include: sterile needle exchange (or sharps, for self-harm), safer drug use education, overdose prevention, and safety planning (for mental health crisis, suicide, self harm, drug use, etc.).

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<sup>10</sup> Pennelle, O. (2019, September 27). *Medication-assisted recovery: what you need to know*. Faces & Voices of Recovery. <https://facesandvoicesofrecovery.org/2019/09/27/medication-assisted-recovery-what-you-need-to-know/>

<sup>11</sup> *Medications, Counseling, and Related Conditions*. (2023, March 23). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved March 25, 2023 from <https://www.samhsa.gov/medications-substance-use-disorders/medications-counseling-related-conditions>

<sup>12</sup> National Harm Reduction Coalition. (n.d.) *Principles of Harm Reduction*. Retrieved November 27, 2022 from <https://harmreduction.org/about-us/principles-of-harm-reduction/>

It's important to note that harm reduction does not ignore the harm that can occur; instead, it places the power, goals, and planning with the person affected (*not the peer professional*). A huge benefit of harm reduction is that it increases conversation between people using drugs/alcohol and trusted others (instead of isolating the person affected). Harm reduction also centers safety, replacing condemnation or stigmatization.

### **Abstinence**

Abstinence refers to the practice of abstaining from all illicit substances and alcohol. In substance use service systems, abstinence is often viewed as the predominant recovery pathway by our society. There are many reasons this is true, but one of the reasons is that 12 Step Programs (i.e. Alcoholics Anonymous) are abundant in the wider recovery community and focus on lifelong abstinence as the pathway to recovery. Although abstinence works for many people, it does not work for everyone. Regardless of our own journey, peer support specialists support each individual on their self-directed pathway for recovery. This honors a person's inner wisdom about what is best for them.

### **Natural Recovery**

Natural recovery refers to recovery that occurs without any formal treatment or services – in other words, people who find recovery through their own exploration and change. In fact, many studies have identified natural recovery as *the most common* approach to recovery, with millions of people every year finding recovery outside of services.<sup>13</sup> Natural recovery can look like many different things, but many people report that they were able to find recovery because they found something to support their wellness and recovery, like exercising and movement, art and creativity, meditation and mindfulness, or connection to community and spirituality.

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<sup>13</sup> Facing Addiction with NCADD. (2018). *Multiple Pathways of Recovery: A Guide for Individuals and Families*. <https://massclearinghouse.ehs.state.ma.us/PROG-BSAS-YTH/SA5826.html>