

Working Definition of Recovery

Recovery from alcohol and drug problems is a process of change through which an individual achieves abstinence and improved health, wellness and quality of life.

Guiding Principles of Recovery:

There are many pathways to recovery: Individuals are unique, with specific needs, strengths, goals, health attitudes, behaviors and expectations for recovery. Pathways to recovery are highly personal, and generally involve a redefinition of identity in the face of crisis or a process of progressive change. Furthermore, pathways are often social, grounded in cultural beliefs or traditions, and involve informal community resources, which provide support for sobriety. The pathway to recovery may include one or more episodes of psychosocial and/or pharmacological treatment. For some, recovery involves neither treatment nor involvement with mutual aid groups. Recovery is a process of change that permits an individual to make healthy choices and improve the quality of his or her life.

Recovery is self-directed and empowering: While the pathway to recovery may involve one or more periods of time when activities are directed or guided to a substantial degree by others, recovery is fundamentally a self-directed process. The person in recovery is the “agent of recovery” and has the authority to exercise choices and make decisions based on his or her recovery goals that have an impact on the process. The process of recovery leads individuals toward the highest level of autonomy of which they are capable. Through self-empowerment, individuals become optimistic about life goals.

Recovery involves a personal recognition of the need for change and transformation: Individuals must accept that a problem exists and be willing to take steps to address it; these steps usually involve seeking help for a substance use disorder. The process of change can involve physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of the person’s life.

Recovery is holistic: Recovery is a process through which one gradually achieves greater balance of mind, body and spirit in relation to other aspects of one’s life, including family, work and community.

Recovery has cultural dimensions: Each person’s recovery process is unique and impacted by cultural beliefs and traditions. A person’s cultural experience often shapes the recovery path that is right for him or her.

Recovery exists on a continuum of improved health and wellness: Recovery is not a linear process. It is based on continual growth and improved functioning. It may involve relapse and other setbacks, which are a natural part of the continuum but not inevitable outcomes. Wellness is the result of improved care and balance of mind, body and spirit. It is a product of the recovery process.

Recovery emerges from hope and gratitude: Individuals in or seeking recovery often gain hope from those who share their search for or experience of recovery. They see that people can and do overcome the obstacles that confront them and they cultivate gratitude for the opportunities that each day of recovery offers.

Recovery involves a process of healing and self-redefinition: Recovery is a holistic healing process in which one develops a positive and meaningful sense of identity.

Recovery involves addressing discrimination and transcending shame and stigma: Recovery is a process by which people confront and strive to overcome stigma.

Recovery is supported by peers and allies: A common denominator in the recovery process is the presence and involvement of people who contribute hope and support and suggest strategies and resources for change. Peers, as well as family members and other allies, form vital support networks for people in recovery. Providing service to others and experiencing mutual healing help create a community of support among those in recovery.

Recovery involves (re)joining and (re)building a life in the community: Recovery involves a process of building or rebuilding what a person has lost or never had due to his or her condition and its consequences. Recovery involves creating a life within the limitation imposed by that condition. Recovery is building or rebuilding healthy family, social and personal relationships. Those in recovery often achieve improvements in the quality of their lives, such as obtaining education, employment and housing. They also increasingly become involved in constructive roles in the community through helping others, productive acts and other contributions.

Recovery is a reality: It can, will, and does happen.