



# Peer Support Workforce at the City and County of Denver

A Participatory Assessment  
&  
Action Plan

*June 2023*



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# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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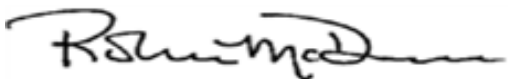
Through funds made available to us from the Caring for Denver Foundation, the Denver Department of Public Health & Environment facilitated a yearlong, multiagency effort to assess and develop an action plan in collaboration with the Peer Support Workforce at the City and County of Denver (CCD), specifically staff members who have shared lived experience with the communities they work with. In partnership with our contracted consultants with the University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work, we conducted focus groups, interviews, and surveys to explore equity, opportunities for and barriers to advancement, training, and supervision. This report is a result of those findings.

Peer support arose out of social justice movements tied to healthcare consumer driven programming and is an evidence-based, non-clinical service embodying the principles of health equity and social justice. Statewide, peer support professionals are asking for better support, less stigma, and more opportunities to remain in the important and fulfilling roles they love. This assessment and action planning process attempted to harness their passion and expertise to spur future action within the City and County of Denver (CCD).

Through collaborative analysis, five priority areas emerged that lead to actionable steps to strengthen CCD's Peer Support Workforce. The top action steps for CCD related to cross agency collaboration, increased pay and opportunities for advancement, improved hiring and recruitment practices, alignment of peer navigator roles with peer support principles, and creating a tool for supervisors and hiring managers to better onboard and support peer navigators.

The recommendations from this pivotal project and support in advocacy efforts of peer support professionals will ensure we can retain and promote individuals who have dedicated their lives to supporting others embarking on the same journey of recovery and resiliency.

Sincerely,



**Robert McDonald**  
Executive Director | Public Health Administrator  
Denver Department of Public Health & Environment

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Objectives:

- Identify classifications at the City and County of Denver (CCD) involving peer support services (i.e., expected to use lived expertise in daily activities of the job and follow peer support principles).
- Understand the successes, barriers, and desires of the peer support workforce at CCD through a participatory process (including representatives from all interested parties at CCD).
- Establish an action plan to address barriers and elevate successes through a cross-agency collaborative approach.

## Methods:

- Through a mixed method, two-phase process (assessment and action planning) over the course of ten months, secondary analysis of OHR data, surveys, focus groups, and participatory facilitation (e.g. assessment and analysis tools to elicit experience from varied interested parties) methods were used to (1) assess needs, barriers, and desires for the peer support workforce at CCD and (2) develop recommendations and action plan to implement strategies for strengthening peer support workforce at CCD.

## Overview of what was learned:

- **Peer support classifications:** Peer Navigators (PN) were determined to be the only classification at CCD providing peer support according to established national peer principles. SAMHSA promotes key peer support principles as: *relationship-focused*, *person-centered*, *recovery-oriented*, *voluntary*, and *trauma-informed* (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] Advisory, 2022)
- **Successes for PNs:** PNs generally loved the direct service and peer support components of their roles and had a desire to stay in the role long-term with some portion of their job remaining in direct service. Generally, PNs were appreciative of their direct supervisors and felt well-supported through supervision.
- **Barriers for PNs:** Many PNs experienced stigma from multidisciplinary colleagues within CCD who did not understand or value their role. Many PNs described role drift where PNs were asked to work outside of the scope of peer support principles. PNs felt their pay was insufficient to meet the cost of working and living in Denver and was a barrier to retention in their positions. Upward movement opportunities (and associated pay increases) were not available to PNs; as a result, PNs felt they had to make lateral shifts to other agencies or classifications (in the form of acquiring new skills) or apply for supervision / administrative roles that would pull them away from direct service—a part of the role often most enjoyed and desired. PN supervisors described systems barriers to recruiting and hiring PNs at CCD.
- **Desires from PNs:** Advocacy across CCD to highlight the value and legitimacy of the peer support role; adequate and dignified compensation; ability to stay in the role and meet living standards; upward mobility; role responsibilities that have institutional influence at CCD, and an infrastructure to allow for collaboration and consultation across PNs in different agencies.

## Recommended Actions:

### ALIGN PEER NAVIGATOR ROLE WITH PEER SUPPORT PRINCIPLES

**KEY FINDINGS:** Although PNs generally felt valued for their lived expertise on their individual teams; this was not always true in their interactions with upper management or other collaborating agencies (particularly those that did not have PNs). Misunderstanding of the PN role could lead to role drift and undervaluing of the peer support profession.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Create pathways to elevate PN presence throughout CCD in order to reduce stigma and actualize the value of integrating the Peer navigator as a professional role into the CCD workforce through 3 suggested strategies.
  - a) Establish and maintain a long-term advisory group for PNs at CCD
  - b) Host 1-2 open houses for CCD employees to learn about peer support
  - c) Post in the Denver Employee Bulletin
- 2) Create a comprehensive tool (manual) to support PNs across agencies with a focus on continuity and alignment to peer principles.
- 3) Support the emotional well-being and professional development of PNs through promotion of existing trainings at CCD.

### DEVELOP CROSS AGENCY-COLLABORATION

**KEY FINDINGS:** PNs are employed across several agencies, there is a need and desire to reduce siloes across CCD interested parties to share learnings and continue collaboration toward best practices to support the PN workforce.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Establish monthly gatherings organized and facilitated by PNs to continue building trust and offering support to one another, and to explore opportunities for collaboration, co-training, and peer-to-peer support and supervision.

### IMPROVE CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION

**KEY FINDINGS:** PNs are passionate and care deeply about their work yet feel that compensation and upward mobility are a barrier to staying in the role long term.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Provide opportunities for increases in pay in keeping with similar professional roles.
- 2) Create structured opportunity for upward movement within the PN classification.

### EASE RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PRACTICES:

**KEY FINDINGS:** Peer navigator roles can be hard to recruit for and fill based on limitations on what can be asked about lived expertise, educational requirements, and cumbersome hiring procedures.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Improve hiring platform (Workday) to be easier to navigate for those posting and those applying.
- 2) Utilize an interview and selection guide for hiring and recruiting peer navigators.

# GLOSSARY

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- **CCD:** City and County of Denver.
- **DDPHE:** Denver Department of Public Health & Environment.
- **EAP:** Employee Assistance program
- **Interested parties:** Commonly referred to as ‘stakeholders’, this term will be used throughout the report to refer to parties who have vested interests in the Peer Support Workforce (peer navigators, supervisors of peer navigator positions, administrators, upper management, CCD officials, funders).
- **Lived expertise:** The skillful practice of applying knowledge and wisdom gained through lived experience with a range of adversities (e.g., substance use, justice system involvement) and navigating related service systems to seek support for such adversities.
- **MHSUC:** Mental Health Substance Use Conditions.
- **Office of Human Resources (OHR):** Human resources at CCD.
- **Outreach Case Coordinator (OCC):** OHR job classification at CCD currently included under peer support workforce umbrella.
- **Peer Navigators (PN):** OHR job classification at CCD designating staff who utilize lived expertise to assist program participants in navigating service systems to access available benefits and resources.
- **Peer Support Values and Principles:** Foundational principles advanced by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration ([SAMHSA](#)) 2022 to guide peer support practices: relationship-focused, person-centered, recovery-oriented, voluntary, and trauma-informed.
- **Peer Support Workforce Advisory Group (PSWAG):** Varied interested parties from Denver Department of Public Health & Environment, Denver Human Services, Denver County Court, Office of the Municipal Public Defender, Department of Housing Stability and Denver Public Library.
- **WRAP:** Wellness Action and Recovery Plan

## KEY CONTRIBUTORS

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**The Affirming Ground Project:** The Affirming Ground Project (AGP) at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work is made up of university-based and community-based researchers who have a combined decade plus of experience in peer support program administration and research. AGP served in a consultant role to co-facilitate PSWAG meetings, conduct data collection, analyze data, facilitate action planning, and create this report.

**Peer Support Workforce Advisory Group.** The Peer Support Workforce Advisory Group (PSWAG) comprised of CCD peer support interested parties (including peer navigators, outreach case coordinators, supervisors of these roles, administrators, and human resources professionals) across five agencies (Denver County Court, Denver Human Services, Denver Public Library, Department of Public Health & Environment, and the Office of Municipal Public Defender). This group met monthly for the past year (2022-2023) to develop assessment strategies and tools, share insights from assessments, and plan for the future of peer support at CCD. Membership and participation gained momentum over the course of the project with new group members joining to contribute throughout.

**Denver Department of Public Health & Environment (DDPHE).** This project was conceptualized and lead by DDPHE's Workforce Section of its Shared Services and Business Operations Division. Elise Matatall, Caring for Denver Administrator, was the project manager and worked across DDPHE, Caring for Denver, and CCD to gather interested parties, facilitate communication, and lead advisory group meetings.

**Caring for Denver Foundation:** Caring for Denver Foundation was founded and funded in 2018 by overwhelming voter approval to use tax revenue to fund efforts addressing mental health and substance misuse services and supports in the CCD. DDPHE received a grant through Caring for Denver's Responsive & Innovative funding area titled "Strengthening the City's Peer Support Workforce to Improve Community Mental Health and Substance Use Services: Grant ID# 202201-01804".

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# BACKGROUND

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**Peer support** is an established professional model wherein individuals with lived experience (e.g., of homelessness, substance use, justice system involvement, and mental health challenges) offer formal (employment-based) and informal (voluntary) support for others navigating similar lived experiences. Peer support has emerged as a particularly important care practice amidst adverse experiences with conventional service providers (Mead & MacNeil, 2006). Peer support relationships center on shared lived experiences and the following principles: 1) *relationship-focused: the relationship between the peer worker and peer is mutual*, 2) *person-centered: services are always directed by the person receiving care*, 3) *recovery-oriented: recognizing multiple pathways to recovery, peer workers empower those they serve to identify their pathway*, 4) *voluntary: as partners or consultants, peer workers do not dictate the types of services provided or recovery plans*, and 5) *trauma-informed: utilizing strength-based framework, peer workers emphasize physical, psychological, and emotional safety and create opportunities to rebuild a sense of control* (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA] Advisory, 2022). Receiving peer support services has been associated with wellbeing outcomes, such as hope for recovery, reduced stigma, and increased empowerment, self-esteem, self-confidence, and community integration (Repper & Carter, 2011). Peer support workers have also benefited from increased confidence, self-esteem, and personal recovery goals while serving in these roles (Bracke et al., 2008).

## Peer Support at the City and County of Denver

**Why Peer Support at CCD?** Responding to growing community needs related to Mental Health Substance Use Conditions (MHSUC) and their intersection with people experiencing homelessness and court systems, CCD agencies have increasingly recognized the value and best practice of peer support as a service model and have turned to hiring peer support staff at CCD. In doing so, CCD created a classification for peer support staff to elevate and legitimize this new segment of the workforce. This work is also closely aligned with CCD's commitment to equity.

**Who is considered a Peer Supporter at CCD?** CCD presently includes two classifications under the peer support umbrella: most commonly, Peer Navigators (PN) and Outreach Case Coordinators (OCC). Currently, eight city agencies employ about 80 staff who have the OHR job classification of Peer Navigator or Outreach Case Coordinator who provide a variety of services and resources to community members who need MHSUC support.

## Need for assessment of Peer Support at CCD.

Given the rapid growth of the peer support workforce at CCD, agencies recognized that peer support has been siloed and operationalized differently across departments. CCD recognized the need to be more strategic in aligning and unifying PS services to improve MHSUC outcomes.

When service provision is siloed, it can result in inefficiencies, role misalignment, and diluted community impacts. Each CCD agency may have distinctly different peer support practices,

philosophies, and approaches to the equitable provision of services and how staff are classified, compensated, and trained. Peer support program representatives across multiple CCD agencies thus partnered to determine how best to coordinate and leverage MHSUC services across the city for a more integrated approach to the work.

**Desired outcomes of assessment:** In valuing its peer support staff and recognizing this moment as a critical time to align a stronger and more sustainable peer support workforce, CCD's aims of this assessment were to:

- Develop a more unified approach to optimizing peer support services and supervision;
- Develop a broader, cross-agency understanding about peer support roles and responsibilities;
- Inform peer support staff development and training needs;
- Identify strategies for how best to align peer support across agencies;
- Identify additional investments needed to ensure more consistent and efficient practices across CCD agencies;
- Develop consistent standards for training and practice;
- Ensure peer supporters are working in the most impactful ways to serve and support community members experiencing MHSUC.

### **Whose perspectives are included in this report?**

At the start of the assessment phase, Affirming Ground Project included employees with OCC and PN classifications. After narrowing in on the definition of peer support services, AGP (in consultation with the advisory group) decided to include PNs and only those OCCs in the survey and focus group assessment who *explicitly* use lived experience in their work, recognizing the scope of work for many outreach case coordinators was outside that of the of peer support role (see *Methods* for details). During the focus group analysis and action planning phases, PNs and PN supervisors' experiences specifically became the focus of the project, as those were the people officially in peer support roles at CCD. Findings from OCC focus groups, were shared with CCD to inform future planning processes, but did not directly inform action planning for PN roles,

### **Project Overview**

This yearlong project employed a two-part assessment and action planning process. (1) An assessment was implemented using participatory methods to work closely with advisory group staff to identify practices, priorities, and strategies that can strengthen and align the peer navigation workforce at CCD and the MHSUC services they provide. These assessment methods and findings will be shared first. (2) A collaborative action planning process was used to develop shared goals and aims from all interested parties as to how to best leverage and incorporate named priorities and suggestions for sustainable change. The methods of this action planning and final recommendations will be shared second.

# ASSESSMENT

## Developing a collaborative advisory group:

Assessment began by inviting members from across agencies to join in planning. Representatives from each agency were invited to join the Peer Support Workforce Advisory Group (PSWAG), and employees from each agency (with the OHR job classification of Peer Navigator and Outreach Case Coordinator) were included in data collection through the initial survey and invitations to focus groups if eligible.

Eight agencies were invited to participate in the assessment phase: Denver County Court, Denver Human Services, Denver Police Department, Denver Public Library, Department of Public Health & Environment, Department of Safety, Human Rights & Community Partnership, and the Office of Municipal Public Defender. Denver Police Department, Department of Safety, and Human Rights & Community Partnerships did not participate in the action planning phase; it was determined early in the assessment process (through employee answers to survey questions) that these agencies did not have roles that were expected to use lived expertise in their daily duties.

An overview of the process used to co-create the assessment process is described in the table below. This included AGP consultants and the project manager collaborating with the PSWAG on project design, review of existing administrative data, clarification of priority areas, and collection of data via survey, interview, and focus group methodologies.

Assessment Process		
ASSESSMENT STEP	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME
Establish an advisory board comprised of varied interested parties.	With an experienced external facilitator in participatory practice, gather employees with classification of PN and OCC, supervisors, and administrators to inform and participate in assessment and action planning phases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified strategies that will be included in a City-wide action plan to support PN workforce.</li> <li>Understood what MHSUC services are being provided by CCD agencies, what practices and services are currently in place, where the gaps are, and how to better align and maximize the benefits for the people served by the PN workforce.</li> </ul> <p>Identified mechanisms for quality improvement and strategies that can be implemented to better assist the City's PN staff to ensure a strong and sustainable workforce</p>
Design assessment overview using mixed methods assessment and participatory practices.	Facilitate the assessment data collection and analysis and action planning processes to include and elevate voices/experiences of all interested parties.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-developed survey and interview guides with advisory group to determine priority areas and recommendations for increasing the success of PNs at CCD.</li> </ul> <p>Co-authored an action plan to coordinate and sustain efforts for cross-agency PN workforce.</p>

## Assessment Process

ASSESSMENT STEP	OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME
Secondary analysis of existing data from each City program with PN and OCC employees.	Gather and analyze existing secondary data from each City program for numbers served and types of MHSUC services provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified subsequent areas that need to be explored further throughout assessment phase.</li> </ul>
Identify priority areas through secondary analysis and advisory board input.	Identify key areas to understand challenges, successes, and areas of growth within the PN workforce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified key priority areas to inform assessment</li> </ul>
Confidential electronic survey to all City PN and OCC staff.	Gather and analyze needs and areas to explore through focus groups and then review with advisory group to determine questions for subsequent FG.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identified needs and areas for more exploration through focus groups and interviews.</li> </ul>
Focus groups and individual interviews with PN and OCC staff and supervisors conducted by consultants and team members.	Narrow in on key priority areas important to PSS areas and map barriers, assets, and change agendas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developed an inventory of assets, barriers, and needs related to success of PN and sustainable practices.</li> </ul> <p>Further developed key priority areas and suggestions to inform action planning process.</p>

The PSWAG met monthly for 4 months to review existing administrative data and identify specific priority areas to guide and focus the assessment. Priority areas were identified via discussion, sharing of challenges in different roles, and consensus building. These are shared in the table below.

Priority areas identified by the advisory group through the assessment process	
PRIORITY AREA & DEFINITION	RATIONALE FOR MEASURING
<p><b>Definition of peer support specialist (role, ethos, title):</b> The current understanding of how expertise is used and expected to be used by those in PN and OCC roles. Additionally, how has understanding of the role shifted over time?</p>	<p>Developing a clear role definition for those using lived expertise would be valuable in: 1) supporting the implementation of daily activities while avoiding role drift, 2) providing and finding appropriate trainings that build knowledge and skills for carrying out responsibilities, 3) encouraging supervision that is affirming of used expertise and aware of role nuances.</p>
<p><b>Pay and classification:</b> The impact pay rate and classification has on those using lived expertise.</p>	<p>Understanding how the current pay status and classification associated with roles impact employees may increase accessibility to upward mobility and pay equity and ultimately retention.</p>
<p><b>Recruiting and hiring criteria:</b> Understanding the barriers of hiring those with lived expertise, as well as recommendations for accessibility in hiring those with lived expertise.</p>	<p>Scope of work that encourages lived expertise as a significant and important credential is an important and key element to peer support roles. Increasing accessibility to hiring those with lived expertise is essential.</p>
<p><b>Upward movement:</b> Understanding the sense of upward mobility for PN and OCC employees, with lived expertise within their agency and other agencies at the city, as well as recommendations for increasing upward mobility or retention of employees with lived expertise.</p>	<p>The opportunity to grow and improve within a role or agency could increase employee retention and institutional knowledge.</p>
<p><b>Supervision:</b> Understanding how supervision is carried out for those using lived expertise in their role. Identifying what is needed and wanted in supervision as well as recommendations for supervision for those using lived experiences in their roles.</p>	<p>Improvements in supervision could lead to increased retention and overall employee satisfaction. Additionally, with supervision, employees may have increased confidence in their ability to appropriately apply their lived expertise within the duties of their role.</p>
<p><b>Training &amp; certification:</b> Identifying current trainings &amp; certifications, and the benefits and challenges of pursuing them. Additionally, identifying which trainings &amp; certifications are desired.</p>	<p>Understanding what training and certification support is helpful to both employees and supervisors could increase confidence in ability to complete scope of work.</p>

To explore these priority areas, with PSWAG input, the AGP consultants designed confidential surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews to collect input from PNs, OCCs, and supervisors. These assessment points included the following guiding questions shared below.

#### Questions for Confidential Surveys

- Current agency, title
- What lived experiences are used in daily work?
- Workforce training needs?
- Type of training employees have received; what additional training may be needed to promote crosscutting skills and competencies?
- Opportunities for advancement; what are priority areas for quality improvement?
- Screening question to determine which OCCs use lived experience in their daily work

#### Sample Questions for Focus Group & Individual Interviews

- *What personal shared lived experiences do you feel are necessary for your role?*
- *To what extent are your job duties aligned with your role as someone hired with shared lived experience?*
- *How would you improve recruitment efforts?*
- *To what extent do you feel you have opportunities for advancement within your role?*
- *What is your experience of supervision? (What's helpful? What can be improved?)*

Data collected via mixed methods approaches (administrative data, survey, interview and focus groups) was analyzed by the AGP consulting team and the project manager. Results were shared back with the PSWAG for member checking and deeper interpretation based on their expertise having worked in these roles. Final findings are described below.

# FINDINGS

## What was learned about current Peer Support services as CCD

### Findings from Secondary Analysis of Administrative Data

*Retention.* Existing administrative data from OHR was used to examine retention rates. In August 2022 (when the OHR data was pulled), there were nine employees in Peer Navigator roles (across the Denver County Court, Denver Human Services, and the Office of the Municipal Public Defender) and 70 in Outreach Case Coordinator roles (across Denver County Court, Denver Human Services, the Department of Safety, the Denver Police Department, the Department of Public Health & Environment, the Denver Public Library, Department of Housing Stability, and the Office of the Municipal Public Defender).

Retention rates across PN and OCC roles were analyzed from 2020-2022 (the height of the COVID-19 pandemic) and are shown in the table below.

Job profile	Turnover Rate		
	2020	2021	2022
PN	66.7%	30.8%	37.50%
OCC	13.9%	19.9%	30.3%

Turnover was particularly high for the PN role across the 3 years analyzed, suggesting retention of PNs is an area of needed focus.

*Role clarification.* Job classifications for PN and OCC were reviewed to compare tasks and responsibilities across the two roles. Based on tasks expected of these roles, it was clear that OCC roles differed significantly from PN roles, did not include peer support principles, and included tasks (e.g., client assessment and evaluation) inconsistent with peer support.

*These findings suggest PNs should be focused on to increase retention and including OCC staff under the classification of peer supporter is problematic as primary components of the job classification (assessment and evaluation) indicate that these staff do not function as peer supporters.*

### Findings from Confidential Survey

The AGP team conducted a confidential survey of OCCs and PNs at CCD in February 2023.

#### Survey aims included:

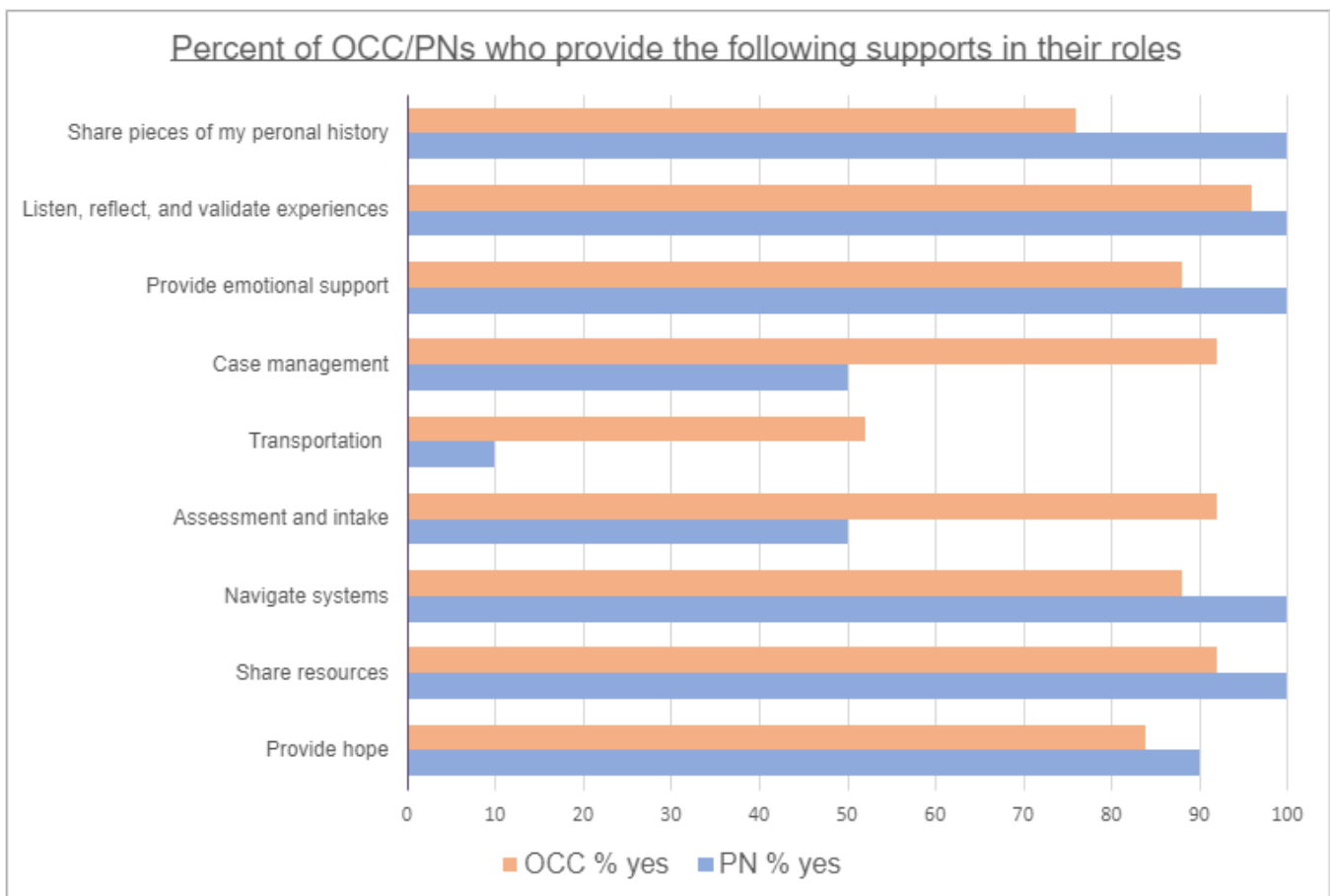
- To get a general sense of the landscape of peer supporter work at the city across roles/titles.
- To identify and assign people into focus groups for deeper qualitative understanding.
- To capture preliminary areas for change needed in terms of role, title, and training needs for peer navigators.

### Who participated:

- 10 peer navigators (average of 2.4 years in role)
- 25 outreach case coordinators who may use lived experience in their role (average 3.3 years in role)

### Who was using lived expertise in their work?

- It was clear, among 100% of peer navigators, using lived experience was expected of their role and was practiced in the daily activities of their jobs. This consistency and role clarity is a significant strength.
- However, the picture was less clear with OCCs, where 84% felt they used lived experience in their role, but a smaller proportion felt it was expected of them in their role (44%). This indicates some role ambiguity and/or drift, where employees doing peer support work may be employed as Outreach Case Coordinators *and* Outreach Case Coordinators may be less clear whether and how their lived experience may be used.



- The figure indicates that, while there is some overlap, the roles are distinct. While peer navigators focused primarily on sharing resources, helping others navigate systems, and providing emotional support, Outreach Case Coordinators spent much more time in case management, transportation, and assessment & intake.



- These findings aligned with earlier findings that indicate it would be advantageous to consolidate one classification (PN) that provides peer support for CCD and develop clear recruitment, hiring, job description, and supervision practices that make explicit the expectation that lived expertise is essential and expected in the daily work of the job.

#### Needed support for peer navigators:

- The majority of PNs desired opportunities for advancement within their roles (70%) and state certification (60%), but only half felt they had adequate opportunities for advancement (50%).
- PNs did not generally request significant changes to their title although alternative suggestions mentioned, included “peer supporter” and “peer specialist”.
- PNs valued trainings from several sources (e.g., Colorado Mental Wellness Network, Wellness Recovery Action Plan) as well as desire for management training, motivational interviewing, and additional specialist training.
- *These findings were integrated as available assets into action planning.*

#### Focus Group and Individual Interview Findings

##### Focus group aims included:

- To gain a deeper understanding of individuals’ perspectives of identified priority areas
- To allow for discussion among those in similar roles to stimulate deeper understanding of assets, challenges, and needs

##### Who participated:

Based on understanding that PNs are expected to (and do) use lived expertise as a critical aspect of their role, the following findings reflect themes from:

- 1 PN focus group (N=5)
- 1 PN supervisor focus group (N=10)
- 5 individual PN interviews

The following themes resulted from analysis of interview and focus group data.

#### Alignment between peer principles and role

*Reducing stigma around the PN role at CCD was a salient priority for all participants.*

It doesn’t always feel well understood by upper management or adequately supported by the current system that peer navigators hold an emotionally challenging job – it can be **difficult to navigate the ups and downs of each client’s journey**, sometimes with very difficult outcomes (hospitalization; incarceration; death). Many PN felt upper management in agencies treat PN employees like a "client", resulting in worry of losing their jobs during a hard time.

*There are misunderstandings of PN role.*

**Role drift was of concern for PNs.** Some PNs felt very supported, and their role was understood and valued on the team, while that was not the case for others. It was reported at times, multidisciplinary teams did not use peer navigators correctly or did not know how to utilize

skills and competencies inherent to the position. **Role drift occurred when PNs were mistakenly considered synonymous with clinical positions or case managers** (e.g., asked to do evaluation and assessment of their clients) or when PNs were asked to take on miscellaneous tasks outside their scope of work, leading PNs to feel “**stretched thin**”. For some, the **role of lived expertise did not match up with the job task** (for instance, having personal experience with mental health but being asked to work with people who use substances). At times, PNs found it **difficult to actualize peer support principles amidst systems that did not understand the role**. There was a strong desire to increase education to all interested parties (client to upper management) around the value, benefit, and proper practices of the PN role.

### Classification and compensation; Opportunities for upward advancement

*Surveyed and interviewed employees reported feeling that pay is insufficient to live and work in Denver.*

Peer navigators felt current **pay and compensation does not adequately reflect the challenge, expertise, and emotional demands of the job**; furthermore, PNs report their pay to be insufficient to meet the cost of working and living in Denver. There is a sense among some PN and supervisors that peer support roles, like many other helping professions, are underpaid, relying on workers to stay in positions based on intrinsic motivation and passion for the work. Currently, PNs who participated in focus groups and individual interviews reported feeling that **pay does not honor additional training, education, or certifications as PN grow** in their roles or obtain training specific to carrying out their roles and responsibilities.

This subjective data would need to be confirmed with market data in partnership with OHR Classification and Compensation Division as OHR has strict requirements to address pay and classification under the City’s Career Service Rules and the Denver Revised Municipal Code.

*PNs have insufficient benefits; accessing existing benefits is unclear.*

It was not always clear to PNs how to access all benefits (e.g., education and training). Many PNs showed interest in accessing **mental wellness days** to provide respite and to acknowledge **the emotional burden of the role**. This was a benefit lauded by employees in agencies like Denver Public Library that offer quarterly “Mental Wellness Days,” but the benefit was not regularly being utilized in other PN roles whether due to lack of awareness or practice of the benefit. PNs also sought **training stipends** as a potential benefit to honor their time and desire to gain skills.

*Tension between low pay/benefits and high motivation make long-term PN employment conflictual.*

PNs described generally **enjoying their jobs**; there was at least one example of a current CCD employee taking an \$8/hour pay cut to take on a PN role (feeling this was a more congruent experience for their desire to be involved in the workforce). The employee wanted to stay and felt very effective in the role **but was feeling constrained by the wage and benefits as a long-term employment option**.

*Lack of opportunities for upward movement was a concern among PNs.*

The job classification of peer navigator offered limited potential for upward mobility in current agencies at CCD and to other organizations outside of CCD. Despite the desire to stay in the role for an indefinite amount of time, the position was described by many as a **“dead end” and being “pigeonholed”**. Additionally, the only reported and understood route to upward movement and better pay, within CCD, was to apply for limited administrative roles unrelated to peer support, or to apply for social caseworker roles that likely deemphasize the value and use of lived expertise.

*Barriers to taking on supervisory roles.*

The notion of moving into a direct supervisory role without intermediary steps was not desirable for many PNs and was met with significant hesitation. Past disagreements and distrust between CCD leadership and peer navigators made some **current employees hesitant to seek peer supervisory roles**. There was majority agreement that a **supervisory role was undesirable and would pull individuals away from being connected to clients**—which was touted as a favorite part of the job by most. Additionally, the supervisory roles available seemed to require a BA or social work degree and at least one PN noted that going back to school was "not in the cards." PNs felt that this requirement undermined the value of lived experience or years of work experience in the field at CCD as a legitimate credential.

### **Hiring and recruitment practices**

*Hiring processes are long and difficult to navigate.*

A widely shared sentiment across PNs and Supervisors is that the **CCD recruitment process was long, difficult to navigate, and could inadvertently screen out eligible candidates**. Additionally, it was reported that ideal candidates were lost in the process due to the length of time to hire and screening criteria being difficult to navigate (e.g., entering number of years of experience; confusion concerning degree requirements). **Job postings felt confusing and unclear if lived experience was a legitimate and desirable trait for the position**. To clarify this criterion, some PNs suggested: highlighting character traits important to the role (e.g., passionate, compassionate, and want to help others); using the term "reducing stigma" in postings to help highlight what the role does and draw in candidates who align with this goal; and to list in job posting volunteering with mutual aid groups as applicable experience. Some reported that an online interview process with several rounds was not only time consuming, but inaccessible for qualified candidates. Limited access to these types of technological infrastructures may, in effect, screen out qualified candidates. During the development of the peer navigator OHR job classification in 2019, a guide for PN Screening and Interviewing was developed by CCD subject matter experts, however, the implementation of the manual has been underutilized by interested parties and circulation of the guide has been low.

Though the role can be meaningful and current PNs generally enjoy their duties, current peer navigators are hesitant to advise others to get into peer roles due to a cumbersome process and inadequate wages. There was a request to increase interconnection between agencies as a means to recruit between agencies and to refer clients to apply for available positions.

### Supervisor training

*Supervisory relationships were generally good; more supervisor training is warranted.*

Generally, PNs were happy with their supervisors and reported feeling supported. However, there was a **call for more day-to-day support and for greater adherence to Peer Support Principles**. Not all PNs felt that supervisors needed lived experience to be an effective supervisor but requested also accessing peer-to-peer support and cross supervision advocated for by one's direct supervisor.

Supervisors echoed that it would be **helpful to learn from others supervising PNs** to learn best practices, evaluation tools, and to work through unique challenges in this emerging CCD workforce. Supervisors sometimes found themselves **not wholly sure how to best support their supervisees in newly emerging situations**, especially when honoring the emotional demands of the role.

It was reported that **PNs were not consistently treated as equals with those in similar roles**, with some employees who were not as familiar with the role actively dismissing these employees' expertise. Furthermore, supervisors reported a need to elevate the value and role of Peer Navigators to reduce experienced stigma across CCD, prevent role drift, and increase decision-making power within team settings and upper-management channels.

### Cross-agency collaboration

*Need to meaningfully integrate PN role in CCD workforce.*

Both PNs and Supervisors strongly endorsed the **sharing of resources, experiences, and best practices to increase the success of the overall PN workforce and support the individual and unique needs of this emerging workforce**. There is a clear need to better integrate the PN role into the overall relevant CCD workforce, to reduce stigma associated with the role, to affirm the value of the role, and to reduce burnout and increase retention.

The findings shared here were utilized to develop an action plan to guide work at CCD described below.

# ACTION PLANNING

AGP consultants, DDPHE, and PSWAG employed a four-step collaborative process that centered the experiences of agencies working with PNs to develop a one-year action plan. The plan focused on meeting PN needs, reducing barriers discovered in the assessment phase, and eliciting recommendations related to assessment.

Please note findings from the assessment phase indicated that OCC roles and expectations were largely *outside* the scope of peer support principles and competencies. As a result, OCC data were retained and shared with DDPHE for other planning purposes, but these data were not included in subsequent recommendations and action planning.

After analyzing all data, the six priority areas were distilled into four areas to focus on during action planning phase: *alignment between peer navigator role and peer principles; pay and equity, hiring and recruitment practices; cross-agency collaboration.*

- Two of the four priority areas (*alignment between peer navigator role and peer principles; and cross-agency collaboration*) were expanded on using a participatory process over 4 action planning meetings (described below).
- Two of the four priority areas (*pay & equity, hiring and recruitment practices*) were tabled to be discussed in smaller working groups to allow for detailed planning and exploration of pre-set bureaucratic processes.

The table below describes the process advisory group members, DDPHE, and AGP consultants participated in to develop an action plan.

Action Planning Process		
ACTION PLANNING STEP	CONSULTANT STEPS PRIOR TO MEETING	PARTICIPATORY FACILITATION DURING PSWAG ACTION PLANNING MEETINGS
Identify and clarify priorities and goals	Compiled and synthesized data from surveys, secondary analysis, and FGs to present preliminary goal statements to advisory board.	Advisory group made amendments and affirmations of presented statements. Members also began to clarify assets, barriers, and needed resources for each goal.
Identify objectives for goals	Systematically identified specific barriers, assets, and suggestions from data coordinated to each priority action area and compiled for advisory board to make suggestions of objectives to meet each goal.	Advisory group made suggestions using respective lived and professional experiences, then organized and prioritized suggestions into an impact/effort matrix
Developed actionable steps based on suggestions	Synthesized suggestions from previous meeting through thematic grouping to determine objectives to identify actionable steps, existing and needed resources, interested parties, responsible parties.	Advisory group members brainstormed existing and needed resources, interested parties, and developed the beginning steps for each actionable objective.
Developed monitoring and evaluation plan for goals	Further developed the action plan for each priority area started by the advisory group, using all assessment data and shared knowledge.	Advisory members built on previous plans to identify indicators of success that center lived expertise and accountability mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

The detailed action plan with specific strategies, action steps and measures of progress is appended below. This plan is intended for use as CCD implements changes in the future. Key recommendations from the plan include:

### **ALIGN PEER NAVIGATOR ROLE WITH PEER SUPPORT PRINCIPLES**

**KEY FINDINGS:** Although PNs generally felt valued for their lived expertise on their individual teams; this was not always true in their interactions with upper management or other collaborating agencies (particularly those that did not have PNs). Misunderstanding of the PN role could lead to role drift and undervaluing of the peer support profession.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Create pathways to elevate PN presence throughout CCD in order to reduce stigma and actualize the value of integrating the Peer navigator as a professional role into the CCD workforce through 3 suggested strategies.
  - a. Establish and maintain a long-term advisory group for PNs at CCD
  - b. Host 1-2 open houses for CCD employees interested in learning more about peer support
  - c. Post in the Denver Employee Bulletin
- 2) Create a comprehensive tool (manual) to support PNs across agencies with a focus on continuity and alignment to peer principles.
- 3) Support the emotional well-being and professional development of PNs through promotion of existing trainings at CCD.

### **DEVELOP CROSS AGENCY-COLLABORATION**

**KEY FINDINGS:** PNs are employed across several agencies, there is a need and desire to reduce siloes across CCD interested parties to share learnings and continue collaboration toward best practices to support the PN workforce.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Establish monthly gatherings organized and facilitated by PNs to continue building trust and offering support to one another, and to explore opportunities for collaboration, co-training, and peer-to-peer support and supervision.

### **IMPROVE CLASSIFICATION AND COMPENSATION**

**KEY FINDINGS:** PNs are passionate and care deeply about their work yet feel that compensation and upward mobility are a barrier to staying in the role long term.

#### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Provide opportunities for increases in pay in keeping with similar professional roles.
- 2) Create structured opportunity for upward movement within the PN classification.

## **EASE RECRUITMENT AND HIRING PRACTICES:**

**KEY FINDINGS:** Peer navigator roles can be hard to recruit for and fill based on limitations on what can be asked about lived expertise, educational requirements, and cumbersome hiring procedures.

### **SUGGESTED ACTIONS:**

- 1) Improve hiring platform (Workday) to be easier to navigate for those posting and those applying.
- 2) Utilize an interview and selection guide for hiring and recruiting peer navigators.

# FUNDING NEEDED AND OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE

*Adequate funding for this work is vital to build infrastructure and support the success of the action plan.*

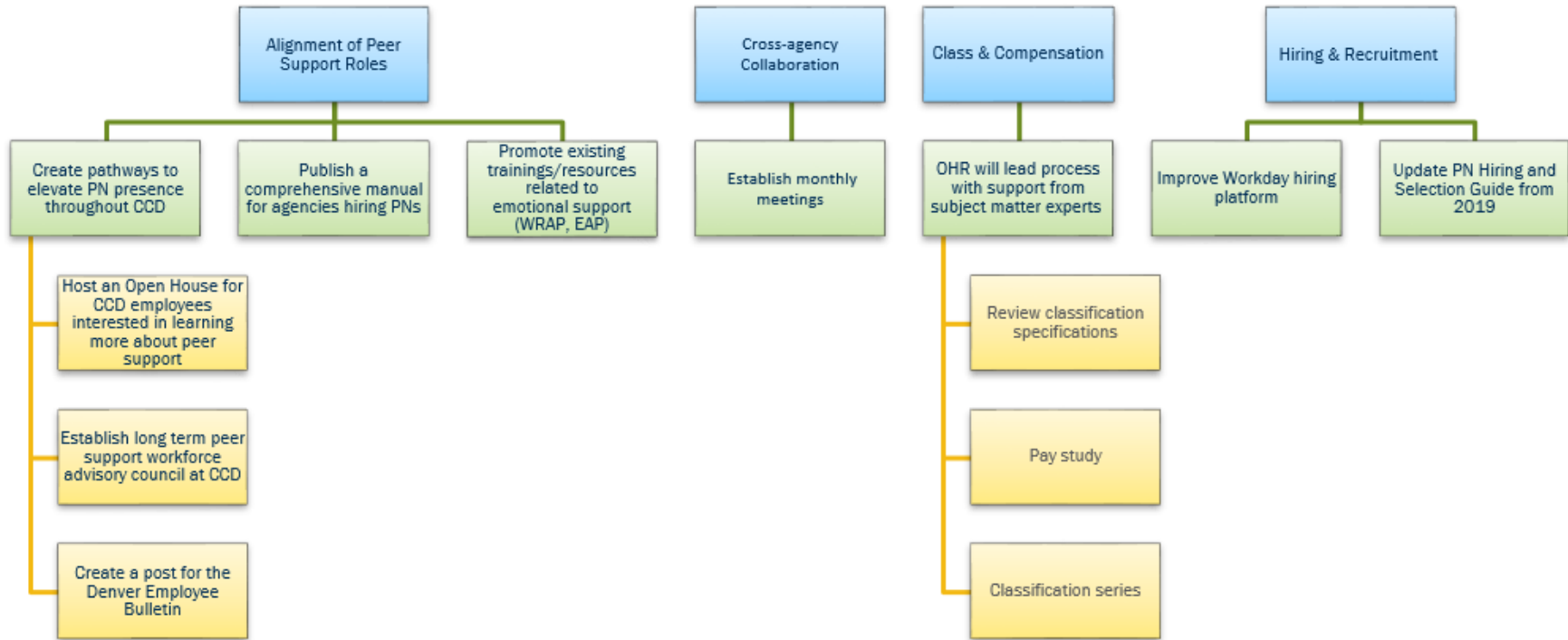
Potential funding opportunities include: the Behavioral Health Administration’s Peer Support Workforce request for proposals (planned for Summer 2023) and the Caring for Denver Foundation’s Community Centered Solutions call for proposals (open in late Summer 2023). Interested parties will need to follow CCD grant proposal processes. A number of Peer Support Workforce Advisory Group members expressed interest in supporting the proposal development process. **There was agreement among PSWAG members that a full-time employee is needed to support the implementation of this action plan.**

Primary areas to fund	Funding opportunities
2-3 years of funding for a full-time position to initiate, implement, monitor, and sustain many strategies and goals in the action plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of manuals and trainings</li> <li>• Coordinate cross-agency resource guides</li> <li>• Hosting advisory group—coordinate establishment of group</li> <li>• Coordinate planning of open house</li> <li>• Coordinate and monitor action steps for each strategy</li> <li>• Maintain monitoring and evaluation plan</li> </ul>	Behavioral Health Administration's Peer Support Workforce  Caring for Denver Foundation’s Community Centered Solutions
Food for gatherings & events	
Event spaces	
Advertisement for events	
Continued evaluation and assessment of Peer Support Workforce	



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN

## Goals Identified During Action Planning



*The following template was adapted from "Racial Equity Action Plan," Office of Social Equity and Innovation at CCD*

## Priority Area: Alignment between Peer Navigator Role and Peer Support Principles

Although PNs generally felt valued for their lived expertise on their individual teams; this was not always true in their interactions with upper management or other collaborating agencies (particularly those that did not have PNs). Misunderstanding of the PN role could lead to role drift and undervaluing of the peer support profession.

**1) Create pathways to elevate PN presence throughout CCD—** to reduce stigma and elevate the value and expertise of lived experience as a credible, legitimate and integrated part of the CCD workforce, through 3 suggested strategies.

<b>Strategy 1:</b>				
Establish and maintain a long-term advisory group for PNs at CCD to maintain continuity and accountability of the action plan while continuing to elevate concerns and the success of the PN workforce.				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	For the past year, monthly meetings have been held by the Caring for Denver grant administrator to gather interested parties (PN, select OCC, supervisors, select OHR representatives) related to Peer Navigator position at CCD. To date, the group has been gathered to co-create and inform an assessment and action plan related to the needs of PN staff at CCD.			
<b>Future State:</b>	Monthly meetings will continue for advisors to gather for the purpose of 1) supporting the completion of the proposed action plan, 2) holding responsible person(s) and/or entities accountable to action plan and the charges within this report, 3) continuing to elevate PN presence and importance at CCD, 4) support CCD interested parties in continued development of evaluation and goals related to success of PN programming at CCD.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Currently established monthly meetings; preliminary listserv; interested parties are invested and interested in continuing			
<b>Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Establish buy-in from supervisors of each agency and appropriate leadership positions	<i>By when?</i>	<i>By who?</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	Letter of commitment for at least 1 year from each agency			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.	Determine person or entity that will host and organize monthly meetings			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.	Establish mission, purpose, and agenda for advisory group			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.	Mid-year check-in on progress of group and accountability plan for action plan			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
6.	End of year assessment measuring success of the group and determine desire to renew group's charge			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done

<b>Strategy 1:</b> Establish and maintain a long-term advisory group for PNs at CCD to maintain continuity and accountability of the action plan while continuing to elevate concerns and the success of the PN workforce.			
7.	Renew commitment to advisory group		<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured through <b>quarterly qualitative self-assessment</b> during meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Monthly meetings will be aligned with determined purpose and not be co-opted by outside or alternative agendas</li> <li>○ Supervisors will remain supportive of PNs participating in the group and PN will feel valued and elevated for their participation in the group.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Measured through <b>attendance tracking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attendance will be high and have continuity in membership.</li> <li>○ Newly onboarded interested parties will be invited and welcomed to attend.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>			
<b>Progress:</b> Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.			

<b>Strategy 2:</b> Host 1-2 open houses for CCD employees interested in learning more about peer support to center the value and importance of PNs in the workforce and in the service delivery model (e.g., spotlights of current PN work, how to incorporate this role into teams, how to onboard new PNs)			
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized			
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>	
<b>Current State:</b>	There is little knowledge and understanding of the PN role across CCD agencies who support and employ peer navigators. Role drift, stigma, and misunderstanding of the role are current barriers for PNs.		
<b>Future State:</b>	A broad audience of interested parties (multidisciplinary teams, and external agencies) will be made aware the PN role through a series of spotlights, formal presentations, education around peer principles (e.g., the difference between peer support and caseworker), elevate the value of lived experience in the workforce and service delivery system, and recruiting future PNs. It is expected that participants will have a clearer understanding of the PN role at CCD with the aim of reducing stigma and role drift while elevating lived experience throughout the CCD. With the support of OHR Learning and Development teams, open houses will be developed and hosted by a PN advisory group (as described in earlier steps).		
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	OHR Learning and Development Team; networking groups; community media outlets; advisory group.		
<b>Action Steps/ Tactics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1. Contact OHR L&D to determine timeline for creating a multimedia presentation	By when?	By who?	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done

<b>Strategy 2:</b>				
<b>Host 1-2 open houses for CCD employees interested in learning more about peer support</b> to center the value and importance of PNs in the workforce and in the service delivery model (e.g., spotlights of current PN work, how to incorporate this role into teams, how to onboard new PNs)				
2.	Set date and agenda			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.	Determine presenters and confirm dates			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.	Reserve an event space and order refreshments			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.	Invite attendees			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
6.	Advertise event widely			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
7.	Host event			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
8.	Evaluate event through surveys for attendees and feedback/planning loops with organizers			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured through a <b>brief follow-up survey</b> for open house attendees will identify <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Attitude shifts in attendees,</li> <li>○ Increased understanding of ways to integrate PNs into the workforce, while demonstrating attentiveness and accuracy to the Peer Support Role as it related to principles of peer support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Measured through <b>brief qualitative methods (e.g., email surveys)</b> and integrated into participatory planning processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Peer Navigators will feel accurately represented and experiences valued not tokenized</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
<b>Progress:</b> <i>Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy. .</i>				

<b>Strategy 3:</b>				
Post in the Denver Bulletin (weekly newsletter for all employees) spotlight stories and success to highlight the work of PNs and elevate PN visibility as part of the CCD workforce.				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	The PN role is widely misunderstood or overlooked as a role in the CCD workforce. The role at times, can be conflated with case management tasks; utilizing lived expertise can be undermined or misdirected in daily activities by staff who do not understand peer support principles.			
<b>Future State:</b>	Among all CCD employees, there will be an increased awareness of the PN position in the workforce. Among agencies collaborating with PNs, there will be a clearer understanding of the role of lived expertise.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Existing pod casts, resources, and stories (e.g., Elevated Denver)			
<b>Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Identify number of desired posts and how readers will connect with PN resources, if interested	By when?	By who?	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	Receive permission from advising parties to post in the Denver Bulletin.			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.	Curate existing material			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.	Launch post			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured through IT monitoring of virtual engagement “clicks” on PN website content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ CCD employees, at large, will gain increased awareness of the PN role as valuable part of the CCD workforce</li> <li>○ Directly interested parties (e.g., agencies related to PN role and work) will show increased interest measured through visiting PN resources or contacting advisory group with interest</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
<b>Progress:</b> Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.				

## Priority Area: Alignment between Peer Navigator Role and Peer Support Principles

PNs are new to the CCD workforce and roles are spread across multiple agencies. While there are principles to guide peer support work there are little collective guiding practices for agencies hiring and supporting PNs.

### Create a tool to support PNs across agencies with a focus on continuity and alignment to peer principles

<b>Strategy 1:</b> Publish a manual for agencies at CCD hiring peer navigators to create continuity in best practices across agencies for the lifecycle of PN role (i.e., from recruitment to exit).				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	Advice and tools for hiring, recruiting, supervising, and general practices related to peer principles exist in disjointed places and require interpersonal networking to locate materials. Some tools and best practices have been developed by subject matter experts at CCD, while other tools are still in need of development and best practices agreed to for cross-agency use.			
<b>Future State:</b>	Agencies that work with the lifecycle of the PN role will be trained and supported in the use of a comprehensive manual that outlines best practices for recruiting, hiring, onboarding, supervising, and exiting PNs. Additionally, the manual will have explicit guidance for adhering to peer principles related to roles at CCD, along with best practices for gathering and accessing resources for personal development and daily tasks. A team will review existing materials (both internal and external to CCD) to assess for: fit to the growing Peer Navigator workforce in the CCD context, alignment of peer principles, and points of adaptation and creation for the CCD context.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Existing internal toolkits for recruiting and hiring practices; external existing trainings and toolkits to adapt to the CCD context			
<b>Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Define or establish a position/person(s), or entity, to hold process of manual development	<i>By when?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	Establish a committee to assist in developing and holding process			
3.	Literature review of existing resources and current best practices			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.	Reach out to DHS/DDPHE key staff for resources and desired involvement			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.	Meet with existing programs 1) Academy of peer support at Rutgers; 2) Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done

**Strategy 1:**  
**Publish a manual for agencies at CCD hiring peer navigators** to create continuity in best practices across agencies for the lifecycle of PN role (i.e., from recruitment to exit).

6.	Meet with OHR Learning and Development to determine assistance and timeline for creating a manual			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
7.	Based on L&D timeline, Compile Training and Manual			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
8.	Train and orient internal staff to the use of the manual			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
9.	Develop train-the-trainer program for internal and external trainings			

- Measurement of Success:**
- Measured through **accountability structure** developed by established Peer Support Advisory Group (referenced earlier)
    - Position or entity identified to hold the development process of the manual.
    - Ensure the manual is informed by extant literature and adapted (with permission) to best fit the CCD context.
    - Fostering relationships with external organizations to both bolster the profile and work of PN at CCD.
  - Measured through **tracking of training completion** and **OHR performance data** (retention, job satisfaction)
    - Build and train current workforce members rather than externalizing training—with the aim of leading to higher retention, job satisfaction, and the possibility of growing the PN workforce at CCD,
  - Measured through continued **participatory evaluation processes** (surveys and FG)
    - Cross-agency agreement to align best practices for PN positions to peer principles.
    - Peer principles will be centered and elevated through all steps of the PN life cycle and endorsed as best practice for interested parties.
    - Manual and materials are aligned with cross-agency agreement.
    - Manual is in use and efficacy is high.

**Progress:** *Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.*

**Priority Area: Alignment between Peer navigator Role and Peer Support Principles**

PNs have access to existing trainings and resources at CCD, but these trainings and resources are not always well-utilized.

**Support the emotional well-being and professional development of PNs through promotion of existing trainings at CCD.**

<b>Strategy 1:</b>				
Promote existing trainings and resources related to emotional support (Wellness Recovery Action Plan, Employee Assistance Plan) to attend to the emotional nuance and difficulty of the PN job; to support employees to navigate currently available resources				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	PNs are seeking support for the emotional challenges and weight of the role. PNs report some available resources, but name that it can be difficult to get connected to or know how to utilize them.			
<b>Future State:</b>	PNs will have a curated list of resources that currently exist at CCD that are aimed at emotional support and professional development related to peer support services.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	WRAP training, Colorado Mental Wellness Network			
<b>Action Steps/ Tactics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>	
1.	Create a work group of interested parties to compile existing trainings	<i>By when?</i>		<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	Develop survey to determine interest in training topics			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.	Create an inventory of available surveys and conferences			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.	Identify a location to store inventory for consumer access			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.	Promote inventory through networking channels			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
6.	Develop follow-up survey to identify missing trainings			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
7.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
8.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured through <b>initial and follow-up surveys</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Trainings and resources of interest and relevance to PNs will be included in the inventory.</li> <li>○ PNs have found and completed trainings that are of interest and are within the scope of their role.</li> <li>○ Majority of PNs have completed an individual WRAP plan</li> <li>○ Majority of PNs endorse positive impact from implementing skills gained through relevant trainings.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
<b>Progress:</b> <i>Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.</i>				



## Priority Area: Cross-Agency Collaboration

While several agencies employ PNs, there is need to bolster and support the ongoing efforts to decrease siloing across CCD interested parties and provide peer-to-peer support to Peer Navigators.

<b>Strategy 1:</b> Establish monthly gatherings organized and facilitated by PNs to continue building trust and offering support to one another, and to explore future opportunities for collaboration, co-training, and peer-to-peer support and supervision.				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	While several agencies employ PNs, there are currently limited pathways for cross-agency collaboration. This can lead to siloed departments, a sense of isolation, and limited activation of collaborative opportunities.			
<b>Future State:</b>	There will be monthly meetings to support PNs across agencies. PNs will lead, set agendas, and co-create the purpose of the group. Newly onboarded PN staff will be invited and welcomed, and supervisors will give approval for all interested PNs to attend monthly (i.e., supervisors will not limit attendance to representatives from the agency). Meeting hosts and responsibilities will rotate between agencies. Though it will ultimately be determined after the group is established, potential outcomes of the group will be peer-to-peer supervision, case review, sharing relevant resources, cross-agency training/shadowing, development of an internal referral process.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Listserv of PNs; city buildings for meeting space; OHR for identifying newly onboarded PNs			
<b>Action Steps/ Tactics</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>	
1.	Schedule first monthly meeting	By when?	Dan Rahe	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	Develop an email list and a groups/Teams chat		Besty Craft, Elise Matatall to support, OHR to determine missing employees	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.	Create monthly agency rotation to spread the workload and representation of interested parties			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.	Reserve a meeting space		Dan Rahe	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.	Order snacks/refreshments		Dan Rahe	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
6.	Refine first agenda 1. High level goals 2. Mission of group 3. Meeting structure Hosting agency sign-up w/ expectations of acquiring space, agenda, refreshments		Dan Rahe	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done

**Strategy 1:**

**Establish monthly gatherings organized and facilitated by PNs** to continue building trust and offering support to one another, and to explore future opportunities for collaboration, co-training, and peer-to-peer support and supervision.

7.	Email and advertise the group to email list			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
8.	After group is established: determine mission, goals, structure of future meetings			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done

**Measurement of Success:**

- Measured through quarterly **qualitative self-assessment** during meetings
  - Monthly meetings will be peer-led and not co-opted by outside or alternative agendas.
  - Supervisors will remain supportive of PNs participating in the group and PN will feel valued and elevated for their participation in the group.
- Measured through **attendance tracking**
  - Attendance will be high and will have continuity in membership.
  - Newly onboarded, interested parties will be invited and welcomed to attend.

**Progress:** *Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.*

## Priority Area: Classification and Compensation

Although many peer supporters at the CCD are passionate about their work and would like to retain their employment at CCD and role in the peer support workforce, PNs are underpaid and have few opportunities for upward mobility within their roles. This has led to high turnover rates in PN roles.

*Note – all changes to pay must be discussed with agency leadership and cannot proceed without their support as these types of changes carry larger organizational impacts, including budget impacts.*

<b>Preliminary Strategy 1:</b>				
Provide opportunities for increases in pay in keeping with similar professional roles.				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	Even though PNs, enjoy their work, they struggle to stay in their positions because the pay does not meet the cost of working and living in Denver. This causes PNs to feel undervalued and experience financial strain. Available benefits for the role are also difficult to find and access. This causes hesitation to recruit others to the role. As a result, PNs leave their roles prematurely (before they want to), and CCD experiences costs related difficulty recruiting and poor retention rates.			
<b>Preliminary Future State:</b>	PNs are paid an adequate wage for living in Denver and can easily find and access the benefits associated with their role. PNs are easily recruited and retained in their roles.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Existing benefits and supports for the role Must follow city processes for approval and is led by OHR.			
<b>Preliminary Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Steps will be determined by OHR	By when?	By who?	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	OHR to review classification specification to ensure it describes work accurately and update document as needed			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.	OHR to conduct study of generally prevailing rates in the market to ensure pay grade is aligned to market data and present findings to management first, project team/sprint group upon management review and approval of any proposed recommendations using stanard approval process (note – the recommendations may be NO recommendation and therefore no changes to pay grades will be recommended)			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done

<b>Preliminary Strategy 1:</b> Provide opportunities for increases in pay in keeping with similar professional roles.			
4.	OHR to review incumbent employee pay upon each agency's management approval (each appointing authority can only approve requests for their employees; a citywide review is not allowed without their approval)		<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured through OHR data demonstrating improved PN retention rates</li> <li>Measured through annual survey of PNs, determining if they are satisfied with their pay and ability to access benefits of the role</li> </ul>			
<b>Progress:</b> Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.			

<b>Preliminary Strategy 2:</b> Create a structured opportunity for upward movement within the PN classification.			
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized			
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>	
<b>Current State:</b>	PNs enjoy the face-to-face value of being in their role, yet the expertise they gain in the role over time is not honored with opportunities for upward movement at CCD. This results in PNs getting stuck in the entry level job where they face low pay, stigma, and are not able to fully utilize their increased expertise over time to benefit CCD.		
<b>Preliminary Future State:</b>	PNs have the opportunity to be promoted to higher peer navigator positions with increased responsibility and complexity of role (e.g., advanced peer navigator, senior peer navigator, peer supervisor). This career ladder allows PNs to stay in their role but increase their pay while assuming increasingly greater responsibility and leadership as they develop their expertise. They are retained at higher rates, saving CCD costs of recruiting and onboarding new PNs.		
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Other classifications have career ladders that can serve as model and be tailored to the PN role. Sprint group will work with departments/agencies who have the PN role to identify the business case for increased levels of responsibility and complexity. Must follow city processes and is led by OHR. OHR will work with department/agency management who utilize PN positions to explore potentially adding additional classifications and building into a classification series. OHR will document the business case based on duties and responsibilities within each level in the series if appropriate.		

<b>Preliminary Strategy 2:</b> Create a structured opportunity for upward movement within the PN classification.				
<b>Preliminary Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Steps will be determined by OHR with advisement of subject matter experts	By when?	By who?	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured through OHR data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Establish a career ladder within the PN classification.</li> <li>○ Demonstrate PNs successful utilization of new career ladder for upward mobility.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Measured through OHR annual survey of PNs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine satisfaction with opportunities to advance within PN classification.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>				
<b>Progress:</b> Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.				

## Priority Area: Recruitment and Hiring Practices

Peer navigator roles can be difficult to recruit for and fill, based on (a) limitations for human resources professionals in what lived experiences can be elicited in hiring processes (b) educational requirements for certain roles, among other challenges, (c) hiring systems that are cumbersome and not accessible to potential PNs.

A smaller working group (sprint group) of interested parties (PNs, Supervisors, and administrators with expertise in hiring & recruitment at CCD) will continue to develop an action plan and iterate suggestions using a similar process described above.

<b>Preliminary Strategy 1:</b> Improve hiring platform (Workday) to be easier to navigate for those posting and those applying.			
<b>Strategy Status:</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Started	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress	<input type="checkbox"/> Actualized
			<input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized

<b>Preliminary Strategy 1:</b>				
Improve hiring platform (Workday) to be easier to navigate for those posting and those applying.				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	All parties described the hiring and recruiting process as cumbersome and leading to desirable candidates dropping from the process due to length of time and confusion of job credentials, criteria, and the value of lived experience.			
<b>Preliminary Future State:</b>	The hiring platform is easy for those hiring and those applying to PN roles to navigate. The value of lived experience is clear and the requirement for credentials is flexible. The platform can easily be tailored to the unique needs of those hiring into PN roles.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Assessment phase identified several concrete pain points in current hiring platform that could inform revisions to the system. Talent Acquisition in OHR has expressed openness to making the platform more accessible.			
<b>Preliminary Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Steps will be determined by sprint group	By when?	By who?	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measured through pilot testing revised platform and seeking user feedback from current or prospective PNs.</li> <li>Measured through pilot testing revised platform and seeking user feedback from PN hiring supervisors.</li> </ul>				
<b>Progress:</b> Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.				

<b>Preliminary Strategy 2: Utilize an interview and selection guide for hiring and recruiting peer navigators</b>				
<b>Strategy Status:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Actualized <input type="checkbox"/> Not Actualized				
<b>Start Date:</b>		<b>Target Completion Date:</b>		
<b>Current State:</b>	All parties described the hiring and recruiting process as cumbersome and leading to desirable candidates dropping from the process due to length of time and confusion of job credentials, criteria, and the value of lived experience.			
<b>Preliminary Future State:</b>	Hiring supervisors utilize a guide for efficient recruiting and hiring, effective posting strategies, drafting relevant job descriptions, offering multiple formats (virtual/in person) interviews, and conducting background checks that do not exclude candidates with needed expertise.			
<b>Assets to support strategy:</b>	Some agencies already have tools with tailored language to meet the needs of hiring PNs; CCD has some flexibility in tailoring job descriptions to meet needs of the role; 2019 Guide to Interview Questions for Peer Supporters/Navigators available as starting place; OHR Learning and Development group interested in supporting creation of training modules.			
<b>Preliminary Action Steps/ Tactics</b>		<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Status</b>
1.	Steps will be determined by sprint group	By when?	By who?	<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
2.	Update 2019 “Guide to Interview Questions”			<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
3.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
4.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
5.				<input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Done
<b>Measurement of Success:</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Measured through development of an interview and selection guide that is accessible to all hiring supervisors and recruiters.</li> <li>• Measured through pilot testing interview and selection guide and seeking user feedback from PN hiring supervisors and recruiters.</li> </ul>				
<b>Progress:</b> <i>Track your progress here. Include dates, progress and any barriers that come up along the way. Use this space to capture notes, progress on action steps and barriers or additional work needed. This should make it possible for people who join your team later (or years from now) to understand what happened, lessons learned and how you accomplished your strategy.</i>				





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