

Washtenaw County Community Mental Health

CONSUMERS AS EMPLOYEES – (guidelines)

A recovery and self-determination vision is consistent with CMH's mission to support consumers in leading lives rich in community membership and personal fulfillment. As consumers develop their individual visions for recovery and self-determination, many are led to contribute to the lives of others with disabilities through advocacy and mutual support. Others choose to contribute through pursuing professional goals that include working within the service system.

Consumers working within a system where they receive supports and services provide particular value but are also faced with unique challenges. It is our obligation to ensure a supportive structure for the employment of consumers within CMH.

The inclusion of consumers in the workplace at CMH supports our core values:

Excellence

We provide the highest level of service to promote recovery, quality of life and self-sufficiency through proven and innovative practices. We recognize that the foundation of excellent service is our relationships.

Growth

We believe in the capacity for change at every stage of development. We grow through shared learning, lived experiences and mentoring.

Well-being

We cultivate well-being through a commitment to physical and emotional safety, active listening, and a culture of appreciation.

Inclusion

Together we build a welcoming, respectful environment for all people. Through active engagement and shared decision-making, we build a stronger community.

Community

We develop strong, trusting partnerships with the people we serve, in our broader community, and within our own organization.

Accountability

We are accountable to those we serve, to the larger community, and to each other for the equitable, effective, and efficient use of our resources.

Equity

Services will be delivered with a focus on eliminating health inequities by addressing and reducing the racial and economic disparities frequently impacting Black, Indigenous and People of Colors' health status, access, and outcomes.

There are demonstrable benefits to employing consumers, both to those receiving and to those providing services.

Benefits to those receiving services:

- To provide positive, credible role models to consumers
- To promote enhanced self-efficacy as a result of interaction with peers in recovery
- To provide input and feedback and support to consumers based on experiential knowledge
- To provide an ongoing consumer voice within the design and delivery of services
- To reduce stigma

Benefits to those providing services:

- To provide opportunities for consumers to benefit from helping others
- To provide opportunities for consumers to share their extensive expert knowledge
- To provide a sense of interpersonal competence through making a positive impact on others lives
- To gain new personal insights and further personal recovery through the helping process
- To gain a greater sense of equality
- To gain increased positive status in the community

In order to support consumer employees, we have developed guidelines in the areas of hiring, work assignment, supervision, dual relationships, confidentiality and professional development. These guidelines are intended to promote a supportive atmosphere, where consumers and other employees can communicate openly and frankly about both the benefits and challenges of working within a system where one also receives services.

DEFINITIONS

Consumer employee: An individual who both receives services and is employed within the same service system.

Parity: Parity refers to equity in benefits for mental health and substance abuse services as compared to other health care benefits. For example, co-pays and benefits limits for mental health and substance abuse services should be no higher than those for other services covered under an insurance plan.

Dual Relationships: Dual relationships exist when more than one relationship, either professional social, personal, business or financial exists between an individual, and another individual or organization.

Hiring:

- As with all employees, job descriptions and position specific responsibilities must be very specific and detail all the essential skills required to perform a particular position. If a particular position is targeted toward hiring a consumer this should be clearly identified in the posting and in the desired position specific responsibilities. The expected level of performance (output, units of service, and types of activities) must be clearly delineated. During the interview process, the expectation and parameters of the position must be made clear to each applicant.
- The hiring supervisor or manager must proactively clarify what accommodations are reasonable and can be made. Reasonable accommodations shall be made in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Programs are encouraged to assume an affirmative approach to employment including supported employment when feasible.
- Applicants are expected to identify any accommodations they may need (flex work hours, privacy needs, personal assistance, and adaptive equipment) during the application process and the hiring supervisor needs to determine whether or not these accommodations can be made prior to completing the process. It is also understood that some needs may not become apparent until the applicant is on the job.
- The supervisor and manager must determine whether or not standard qualifications such as education, degree, licensure or certification can be waived for consumer employees in a particular job assignment and if so, whether enhanced supervision will be required and made available.
- If some level of self-disclosure is expected as a part of the position, the applicants comfort level with self-disclosure must be openly explored during the hiring process. Opportunities to continue to discuss any new issues arising related to self disclosure will be provided during on-going supervision.
- The potential role of supported employment/job coaching should be explored during the hiring process and made available if appropriate.

Work Assignments:

- It is generally expected that consumers not work at a site where they currently receive services or where they have received services in at least the last two years. The intent of this guideline is to protect the consumer/employee's therapeutic relationships, to avoid potential conflicts of interest, and minimize dual relationships.
- During the hiring process the supervisor shall assure that the work location is clearly identified and proactively discuss with the applicant whether or not they have received services at this location during the last two years.
- As separation of location of services and employment may present a transportation barrier for consumer employees, special arrangements may be made to provide transportation funds.
- Exceptions to this guideline should be reviewed with the Program Administrator, Director and Office of Recipient Rights for final approval.

Supervision:

- The consumer/employee's supervisor should never be an individual person who has provided clinical services to the consumer within the past two years. The supervisor should also not be the current supervisor of the consumer/employee's current clinical team. If the supervisor was previously the consumer/employees clinician (more than two years ago) the prospective employee and supervisor will mutually determine whether or not this presents a conflict of interest or discomfort for either party.
- CMH has an obligation to ensure that adequate supervision is available to the consumer/employee. At minimum all standards in the CMH supervision policy shall be met. If enhanced supervision is needed (such as more frequent contact, additional reviews of work) it is the responsibility of the hiring supervisor to assure that they will be able to meet the employee's supervision needs prior to hiring and to reach agreement on the level/frequency of supervision that will be available.
- Consumer Employees will be offered the opportunity to participate in team meetings and staff meetings based on their job assignment just as any other employee.
- The supervisor and employee have a mutual responsibility to address any accommodation needs that may become apparent once the employee is on the job.
- Supervisors should assure proactive supervision in the areas of dual relationships and confidentiality.
- As with any employee, the supervisor will address any signs or symptoms of physical or mental illness that appear to be impacting an individual's performance directly with the individual. As with all employees, this will be handled privately and sensitively. The supervisor or fellow employees should not break the bounds of privacy and communicate directly with the consumer employee's treatment providers without either the person's permission or based on a consultation with the Program Administrator and Office of Recipient Rights. The Supervisor and Consumer Employee shall consider developing a Crisis Plan that identifies the steps to be taken in the event of a recurrence of severe symptoms or relapse.
- Consumer employees hired into permanent positions are afforded with all the rights, benefits and opportunities associated with county employment, including representation by the appropriate bargaining unit.

Dual Relationships:

- Work assignments and supervisory assignments should be made to reduce the potential for dual relationships as noted above.
- Consumer employees are not expected to give up social relationships with other consumers. However, consumer employees shall adhere to the CMH guidelines regarding active dating and/or sexual relationships as described in the CMH Ethics policy and under Michigan law.
- In evaluating the potential conflict in a dual relationship, the supervisor and consumer employee shall consider whether or not the social relationship predated the consumer's

employment. The supervisor shall assure that consumers are not assigned to provide direct clinical services to individuals with whom they have had a close personal relationship.

- The consumer employee and his/her supervisor are responsible for proactively discussing potential dual relationships and assuring that any potential conflicts are reviewed and resolved. The Office of Recipient Rights is available for consultation when needed.
- Consumer employees are included in socialization that routinely occurs in the workplace and this shall not constitute a violation of CMH ethics so long as boundaries regarding current or former therapeutic relationships are maintained.
- All employees are encouraged to remain positive role models for each other during after hour's socialization and should recognize the potential impact of their social behavior on their professional relationships.
- Other employees must recognize the consumer employee as a peer.
- All employees are encouraged to provide mentoring and coaching to each other based upon their individual knowledge, experiences and skills.
- Self disclosure can be an important benefit provided by consumer employees. Self disclosure shall always be at the consumer employee's discretion and not "required" or publicly elicited by other employees. Consumer employees must balance self disclosure to ensure that it promotes hope, understanding and education for other consumers. Self disclosure should be used only when it can inform or enhance the other person's learning.
- As with all employees, consumer employees maintain their right to advocacy even when their views may differ from that of management, or when pointing out apparent gaps or failures in the service system. All staff is expected to follow the guidelines established in the policies on Public Testimony and Media Contact and all Washtenaw County Human Resources policies and procedures.
- The department shall assure that individual's rights as a consumer are never jeopardized on the basis of their employment.

Confidentiality:

- Consumer employees maintain their rights to the confidentiality of their private information both as consumers and as employees separately. As noted above, treatment providers, supervisors and other employees must clearly distinguish what information they have or need about the consumer employee based on their particular professional relationship and must maintain clear boundaries.
- As with all employees, consumer employees must also be particularly aware of their relationships to other consumers and maintain appropriate confidentiality of information obtained as a result of their employment.
- Consumer employees must also be sensitive to potential damage to their personal friendships with other consumers if they freely share information about their friends with fellow employees who may be service providers to those individuals and balance this

with health and safety concerns they may have about other consumers. The Office of Recipient Rights is available to consult on such issues as needed.

- When making work assignments, the supervisor should consider access to protected health information and the potential for incidental disclosure that might negatively impact the consumer employee or place the consumer employee in a position to have unnecessary information about consumer peers. Assignment to a site where the consumer has not received services in two years will help prevent incidental disclosure.
- As with all employees, consumer employee's access to clinical information is on a need to know basis and the supervisor shall insure adequate training and ongoing supervision related to confidentiality issues.
- Both supervisors and the Office of Recipient Rights must be particularly sensitive to these potential role conflicts and support an environment where both consumer employees and other professionals feel free to consult regarding potential confidentiality or other dual relationships issues.

Professional Development

It is the responsibility of CMH management to assure professional development for all staff, including consumer employees that promote a positive environment for the employment of consumers. Professional development shall include:

- Training and discussion on all of the topics covered in these guidelines.
- Ways to sensitively offer assistance to co-workers with disabilities, including education on disability etiquette.
- Exploration of stigma and its impact on consumer employees in particular.

Area for ongoing advocacy:

- Identification of opportunities for consumers to become employees
- Stigma reduction
- Parity in benefits to reduce disincentives to full time employment for those with disabilities

REFERENCES:

Best Practice Guidelines for Consumer-Delivered Services: Developed by Mark Salzer and the Mental Health Association of Southeastern Pennsylvania Best Practices Team
Michigan Penal Code ACT 328 of 1931
Michigan Mental Health Code Sec 100 (b)
Michigan Certification Board for Addiction Professionals Code of Ethical Conduct
ATOD Prevention Code of Ethical Standards
Administrative Rules for Substance Abuse Service Programs in Michigan
CMHPSM Crisis Planning Policy
WCCMH Policy – Media Contact
WCCMH Policy – Publicity
WCCMH Policy – Testifying at Public Hearings
CMHPSM Policy - Ethics