

Peer Support Core Concept: Recovery Capital

Catching Up With COSSAP, August 2020

Building up recovery capital—the sum of internal and external assets that can be brought to bear to initiate and sustain recovery from alcohol and drug problems—is an essential goal of peer recovery support services as they partner with individuals toward a healthier future. Whether or not they succeed depends, in part, on the quality of the recovery plans they develop through that collaboration—and recent examples point to positive trends on that front.

At their initial connection with a peer specialist, individuals may have moderate -to -low levels of recovery capital. Long periods of substance use—exacerbated by a history with criminal justice systems—can seriously deplete whatever capital might have previously existed. Individuals in early recovery may be without a stable place to live, a means of generating legitimate income, a family that is able to offer support, access to a substance-free environment, or any sense of purpose. They may also have histories that include poor education, bad credit and financial debt, or legal trouble. On top of everything, many require strategies to overcome the barriers that have resulted from their involvement with criminal justice systems. Regardless, the most salient point is that even the smallest amount of recovery capital is a foundation on which to build a recovery plan.

One particularly helpful recovery capital framework is organized according to four domains: social, physical, human, and cultural. Adapted from this work, Table 1

provides a key question in each domain that peer specialists may use to identify individuals’ resources and corresponding examples of available resources and where they might be found.

Recovery Capital Key Questions

Domains	Key Questions	Examples
Social	What kinds of support are available from family, social networks, and community affiliations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and kinship networks • Friendships • Support groups • Community affiliations
Physical	What tangible assets (e.g., property, savings, job) are available to expand the participant’s recovery options?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Savings • Personal property • Job • Home
Human	What intangible assets (e.g., skills, aspirations, personal resources) will enable the participant to flourish in recovery?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills and talents • Education • Aspirations • Personal resources
Cultural	What network of values, principles, beliefs, and attitudes will serve to support the participant’s recovery?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to cultural activities • Connection to cultural institutions • Belief systems and rituals

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When a peer specialist begins work with individuals in early recovery, he or she often initiates a recovery plan that helps the peer participant determine goals and create a road map to achieve them. Not to be confused with a treatment plan, a recovery plan is a simple document with recovery capital at its core. This strengths-based approach focuses on assets as a fulcrum from which to build while generating self-esteem and self-efficacy.

The Community and Law Enforcement Assisted Recovery Program in Winthrop, Massachusetts, provides a good example of a [COSSAP Peer Recovery Support Services Mentoring Initiative](#) mentor site conducting natural recovery planning. By asking focused questions about participants' assets, the program's peer recovery coaches provide support and accountability as participants take the lead in their recovery. Peer coach Chip McHugh notes that the process is crucial in working with recoverees over the long term. The process of developing the plan is a collaboration between the individual and the peer worker to set clear personal goals for a life in recovery and build hope and enthusiasm. The peer recovery coaches can then offer information, resources, and perspective, helping to identify strategies to overcome roadblocks to success.

Projects interested in assessing this process can make use of a recovery capital assessment, a tool that can determine

the level of a person's recovery capital (Arndt et al., 2017). There are a few validated instruments available that measure intrinsic and extrinsic resources that an individual must draw upon at a given point in time in order to chart changes and progress. Combined, the recovery capital assessment and recovery plan are powerful tools that peer specialists can use to help participants organize and prioritize their life goals, take action steps, and reach milestones toward long-term recovery.

Data from recovery capital assessments can also be useful at the program level. By regularly reviewing aggregate participant data, and by assessing that community recovery capital, administrators can use changes in recovery capital data to evaluate program performance. COSSAP grantee Palm Beach County, Florida, uses aggregated data from individual recovery capital assessments to identify system gaps—that is, external recovery capital that many individuals lack such as access to stable housing—and to inform its use of public funding support. Project Director John Hulick notes that although they are early in their grant program, the data has already been invaluable in shaping and informing their work. Programs can also assess their impact by looking at long-term increases or decreases in that community recovery capital: the more community recovery capital built, the more impactful the program.

Resources

[BARC-10 Recovery Capital Assessment](#)

[REC-CAP Assessment & Recovery Planning Tool](#)

[Recovery Capital Assessment Plan and Scale \(ReCAPS\)](#)

[Recovery Capital Index](#)

[Measuring an individual's recovery barriers and strengths \(Addiction Professional\)](#)

[Strengths-based approaches for working with individuals \(Iriss\)](#)

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References

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