

# **SAMHSA News Release**

**Date:** 12/22/2011 10:00 AM

**Media Contact:** SAMHSA Press Office

**Telephone:** 240-276-2130

## **SAMHSA announces a working definition of “recovery” from mental disorders and substance use disorders**

A new working definition of recovery from mental disorders and substance use disorders is being announced by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). The definition is the product of a year-long effort by SAMHSA and a wide range of partners in the behavioral health care community and other fields to develop a working definition of recovery that captures the essential, common experiences of those recovering from mental disorders and substance use disorders, along with major guiding principles that support the recovery definition. SAMHSA led this effort as part of its Recovery Support Strategic Initiative.

The new working definition of Recovery from Mental Disorders and Substance Use Disorders is as follows:

A process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential.

“Over the years it has become increasingly apparent that a practical, comprehensive working definition of recovery would enable policy makers, providers, and others to better design, deliver, and measure integrated and holistic services to those in need,” said SAMHSA Administrator Pamela S. Hyde. “By working with all elements of the behavioral health community and others to develop this definition, I believe SAMHSA has achieved a significant milestone in promoting greater public awareness and appreciation for the importance of recovery, and widespread support for the services that can make it a reality for millions of Americans.”

A major step in addressing this need occurred in August 2010 when SAMHSA convened a meeting of behavioral health leaders, consisting of mental health consumers and individuals in addiction recovery. Together these members of the behavioral health care community developed a draft definition and principles of recovery to reflect common elements of the recovery experience for those with mental disorders and/or substance use disorders.

In the months that have followed, SAMHSA worked with the behavioral health care community and other interested parties in reviewing drafts of the working recovery definition and principles with stakeholders at meetings, conferences and other venues. In August 2011, SAMHSA posted the working definition and principles that resulted from this process on the [SAMHSA blog](#) and invited comments from the public via SAMHSA Feedback Forums. The blog post received 259 comments, and the forums had over 1000 participants, nearly 500 ideas, and over 1,200 comments on the ideas. Many of the comments received have been incorporated into the current working

definition and principles.

Through the Recovery Support Strategic Initiative, SAMHSA has also delineated four major dimensions that support a life in recovery:

- **Health** : overcoming or managing one's disease(s) as well as living in a physically and emotionally healthy way;
- **Home**: a stable and safe place to live;
- **Purpose**: meaningful daily activities, such as a job, school, volunteerism, family caretaking, or creative endeavors, and the independence, income and resources to participate in society; and
- **Community** : relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope.

### **Guiding Principles of Recovery**

***Recovery emerges from hope:*** The belief that recovery is real provides the essential and motivating message of a better future – that people can and do overcome the internal and external challenges, barriers, and obstacles that confront them.

***Recovery is person-driven:*** Self-determination and self-direction are the foundations for recovery as individuals define their own life goals and design their unique path(s).

***Recovery occurs via many pathways:*** Individuals are unique with distinct needs, strengths, preferences, goals, culture, and backgrounds ? including trauma experiences ? that affect and determine their pathway(s) to recovery. Abstinence is the safest approach for those with substance use disorders.

***Recovery is holistic:*** Recovery encompasses an individual's whole life, including mind, body, spirit, and community. The array of services and supports available should be integrated and coordinated.

***Recovery is supported by peers and allies:*** Mutual support and mutual aid groups, including the sharing of experiential knowledge and skills, as well as social learning, play an invaluable role in recovery

***Recovery is supported through relationship and social networks:*** An important factor in the recovery process is the presence and involvement of people who believe in the person's ability to recover; who offer hope, support, and encouragement; and who also suggest strategies and resources for change.

***Recovery is culturally-based and influenced :*** Culture and cultural background in all of its diverse representations ? including values, traditions, and beliefs ? are keys in determining a person's journey and unique pathway to recovery.

***Recovery is supported by addressing trauma :*** Services and supports should be trauma-informed to foster safety (physical and emotional) and trust, as well as promote choice, empowerment, and collaboration.

***Recovery involves individual, family, and community strengths and***

**responsibility:** Individuals, families, and communities have strengths and resources that serve as a foundation for recovery.

**Recovery is based on respect :** Community, systems, and societal acceptance and appreciation for people affected by mental health and substance use problems – including protecting their rights and eliminating discrimination – are crucial in achieving recovery.

For further detailed information about the new working recovery definition or the guiding principles of recovery please visit: <http://www.samhsa.gov/recovery/>

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SAMHSA is a public health agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. Its mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.

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