



Ohio Recovery Housing

## Best Practice Guidance for Serving Residents with Mental Health Disorders

Ohio Recovery Housing | 2021



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## Introduction

The Ohio Recovery Housing Best Practice Guidance for Serving Residents with mental health disorders was developed by a team of our partners who are committed to creating a safe and supportive environment for residents within recovery homes who are also in recovery from mental health disorders.

Many individuals who develop substance use disorders (SUD) are also diagnosed with co-occurring mental health disorders. Multiple national population surveys have found that about half of those who experience a mental illness during their lives will also experience a substance use disorder and vice versa<sup>1</sup>. This is also true in studies involving youth; over 60 percent of adolescents in community-based substance use disorder treatment programs also meet diagnostic criteria for another mental illness<sup>2</sup>.

Some mental health disorders that are commonly associated with SUD include generalized anxiety disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), borderline personality disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) antisocial personality disorder, and schizophrenia. A serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, can lead to a higher chance of developing an SUD; about 1 in 4 of individuals with a SMI also suffer from addiction<sup>3</sup>.

This guidance will focus on how to implement strategies to provide support for residents who have mental health disorders within recovery homes to ensure they are able to live in environments that is supportive of their recovery while also accessing any needed mental health supports.

While Ohio Recovery Housing hopes you consider the information listed in the following toolkit, please recognize that the advice given is not legal advice. If you are concerned about legal matters, please contact your local legal aid office or private counsel. This guide is also not intended to provide clinical guidance. Each resident should consult with their personal counselor, treatment provider or other health care provider for clinical guidance.

This document is intended to be reviewed in coordination with other quality standards and best practice recommendations that have been made by the National Alliance of Recovery Residences (NARR), and Ohio Recovery Housing, the state affiliate of NARR.

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<sup>1</sup> Find full definitions and comparisons of mental illness and substance use disorders here:

<https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/common-comorbidities-substance-use-disorders/part-1-connection-between-substance-use-disorders-mental-illness>

<sup>2</sup> See link above

<sup>3</sup> See link above



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You may also feel free to contact us at any time for information, short-term technical assistance or support.

### Definitions

**Mental Illness:** A mental illness is a health condition involving changes in emotion, thinking, or behavior, or a combination of these. Mental illnesses are also associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work, or family activities. (<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>).

Mental illness is very common and affects about 1 in 5 of adults in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> It is most often treatable and many people with a mental illness can continue to function in their daily lives with the help of medication and/or counseling or other treatment services.

**Substance Use Disorder:** Substance use disorder or substance abuse disorder is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior and leads to an inability to control the use of a legal or illegal drug<sup>5</sup>. The risk of addiction can vary based on factors such as how addictive the substance is (opioids are highly addictive and taking these drugs leads to a higher risk of developing a SUD) and genetic factors.

Symptoms of an SUD include:

- Feeling that you have to use the drug regularly – daily or even several times a day
- Having intense urges for the drug that block out any other thoughts
- Taking larger amounts of the drug over a longer period of time than you intended
- Experiencing withdrawal symptoms when you attempt to stop taking the drug
- Continuing to use the drug, even though you know it's causing problems in your life or causing you physical or psychological harm<sup>6</sup>

People who have depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder, ADHD or other mental illnesses may engage in excessive drinking and drug use to help cope with the symptoms of mental illness. The use of alcohol and illicit substances may cause the symptoms of mental illness to worsen.

**Recovery Housing:** According to Ohio Revised Code Section 340.01 (A) (3), "Recovery Housing" means housing for individuals recovering from drug addiction that provides an alcohol and drug-free living environment, peer support, assistance with obtaining drug addiction services, and other drug addiction recovery assistance.

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<sup>4</sup> See a full definition of mental illness here: <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-mental-illness>

<sup>5</sup> See a full definition of substance abuse disorder here: <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/drug-addiction/symptoms-causes/syc-20365112>

<sup>6</sup> See link above



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It is important to note that recovery homes are not care facilities. They do not provide medication management, personal care services, or assistance with other activities of daily living.

For more information on recovery housing visit [ohiorecoveryhousing.org](http://ohiorecoveryhousing.org)

### Recovery Housing and Fair Housing

Some recovery homes may have formal or informal policies that exclude individuals with specific mental illnesses or exclude individuals who are taking certain medications from participating in their program or living in their homes. People with mental illness are considered individuals with a disability, thus they are considered in a protected class under the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Fair Housing Act.

Recovery homes are required to make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities under these laws. **It is highly recommended that recovery homes contact legal counsel to determine which laws apply to their operation and what types of accommodations they are required to provide.**

In addition to contacting legal counsel, recovery homes can take the following steps to support housing choice

- Maintaining Clear Marketing and Communication - ensure that all marketing materials describe your program clearly including what expectations are both financial and behavioral.
- Clear application process - During the application process, educate and inform potential residents about what services are offered as well as what services are not offered.
- Understand other housing options - learn about what other housing options exist in your community and develop relationships with them. This way residents can be informed of all of their options and make the best choice possible that will fully support their recovery

Additionally, residents may be diagnosed with a mental illness after moving into the home. Recovery homes are required to maintain a process where residents can request accommodations at any time. These accommodations need to be carefully considered on an individual basis to learn if the residents needs can be reasonably accommodated.

### Recommendations for Implementation within the home

Every recovery home will have their own ways of providing support for residents who have a mental health disorder. The implementation of these recommendations will



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also very based on the Level of Support available in the recovery home<sup>7</sup>. Each of these strategies can be considered as ways to support residents with mental illness.

### Partnerships:

Recovery homes seeking to support residents with mental health disorders should form partnerships with mental health services agencies, treatment centers and hospitals. Having staff and other residents knowledgeable about these resources can assist if a resident ever appears to be struggling with a mental health condition. The recovery home can quickly identify that the person may need more support and connect them to the most appropriate partners in the community who are able to assist that resident.

- Learn about what services are offered and how referrals can be made.
- Start with your local Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board. Learn about what mental health services are available, and what partners implement these services in the local community.
- Reach out to these partners and learn about the most effective way to make referrals for support

### Training:

Staff should be prepared and trained to work with individuals with mental health disorders. They do not need to be mental health experts or therapists but should be at least willing to learn and provide support when needed. Well trained staff can help residents who may not be aware that they have a mental health disorder connect with appropriate professionals and get the care that they need.

- OhioMHAS offers mental health 101 trainings regularly. The link to sign up for those trainings is in the resources section. These trainings will help staff members to recognize when a person may have a mental illness and when they should recommend that the person get connected for help. These trainings will also help staff understand that a person's behavior may change while in the home. Being educated on what mental health disorder a resident is diagnosed with and the behavioral changes it can cause can help staff be better prepared to help in case those changes do occur.
- There are also mental health first aid trainings offered by ADAMH and MHA. These 8-hour long trainings give people the tools to identify when someone might be struggling with a mental health or substance use problem and to

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<sup>7</sup> Find information on NARR Levels here: [https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NARR\\_levels\\_summary.pdf](https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NARR_levels_summary.pdf)



connect them with appropriate support and resources when necessary. These trainings tend to fill up fast but there is a wait list put in place for future trainings. The link to sign up will be listed in the resources section.

- There are different trauma informed care trainings offered throughout Ohio. These trainings provide a definition of trauma, the ways in which it is caused, and how to best respond to persons who have been impacted by trauma. A link to a directory of different trauma informed care trainings will be listed in the resources section.
- LOSS Community Services and ADAMH offer suicide prevention trainings both in person and via Zoom. These trainings are meant to help anyone learn about the warning signs of suicide and offer support before it's too late. The link to the LOSS website will be linked in the resources section.

### Medication:

Residents with mental illness may have a variety of prescribed medications. It is very important that residents have support so they can access and take the medications they need.

It is important to note that recovery housing staff never handle, prescribe, or dispense medication. However, recovery homes can provide support for residents as the resident manages their own medication in a healthful manner, including

- **Safe Medication Storage** – provide residents with a locked location to store medications. Observe as residents place their medication in the cabinet and as they take out medication.
- **Use medication logs** – create a medication log that describes the medication, when medications are taken, and how much medication is currently stored. Observe as residents count and log their medication to ensure there is an appropriate amount.
- **Help residents set timers or reminders for their medications** – create a calendar or other schedule to help the resident remember when to take their medication. Also have them mark on their calendar when they need to see their health care provider or request any refills of their medications.
- **Provide support to residents in speaking with health care providers:** Sometimes, a person with a mental illness may struggle with understanding their medication and speaking with their health care provider about their medications. Recovery homes can provide peer support, encouraging the resident to speak openly and honestly about their concerns with their health care providers. Recovery homes can help the resident come up with questions



to ask their health care provider. Recovery homes can also help residents remember to tell each of their health care providers about all their medications. *Any decisions about medication are to be made by the resident and their health care provider.*

- **Being knowledgeable of side effects** - It is also helpful to make sure that staff working in the homes have general knowledge about medications and the possible side effects that can occur. They can notice potential side effects and discuss these with the resident and encourage them to talk to their health care provider.
- **Learn about local resources to help pay for medication**- sometimes, residents struggle to pay for their medication. Reaching out to the local mental health board to see what resources are available can be very helpful in case a resident runs out of their medication or needs a refill. Other local resources may also be available to help a resident pay for their medication

**Have a written medication policy** - This medication policy should include where medications will be stored, how residents will access their medication and how staff will support residents as they take their own medication. Ensure all staff and residents are fully aware of the policy and make copies available.

### Employment Requirements:

Many recovery homes require residents to be working at least part-time in order to be allowed to stay in the home as working or volunteering can often be a critical component of a person's pathway to recovery. However, some residents with a serious mental illness may be unable to work. To accommodate such residents, allow residents to participate in volunteer activities instead of working. You can also connect these residents with appropriate job placement services for people with disabilities to assist them in finding employment if that is their goal.

Residents who are not working may also struggle to meet basic needs. Such residents who are not already receiving public benefits should be given resources and assistance to sign up. Information on how to sign up for Social Security, Medicaid and SNAP (food stamps) are linked in the resources section below.

### Integrate Life Skills into Recovery Plans:

All residents of recovery housing can benefit from learning about basic life skills, such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting. For many residents who also have a mental illness, learning these skills can be extra challenging. You can support residents by providing a non-judgmental environment for residents to learn these skills. Take the time to teach residents basics on cleaning, hygiene, grocery shopping and cooking.



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You can also look for local resources, as there may be trainers in your area who are willing to come to your recovery home to provide classes or support on such life skills. Integrate life skills development into recovery plans to ensure that residents have these skills developed by the time that they are ready to move out of recovery housing.

### **Move out Considerations:**

It is hard enough learning to transition after leaving a recovery home, but mental illness can make this more difficult. As you prepare residents to leave the recovery home, ensure that they have copies of their medication logs so they can continue to keep track of their medications. Provide them with any cleaning or chore checklists so they can continue this behavior while on their own. Also provide them with names and contact information for any mental health resources. If possible, get them connect to these resources before they move out, so they are familiar with them prior to moving out of the recovery home.

### **Emergency and Disaster policies**

Many people may experience symptoms of a mental illness during or after an emergency or disaster, such as a tornado, fire, or even the recent COVID19 pandemic. Each recovery home should have plans and responses for a disaster, including plans and policies for managing the ongoing pandemic. To support residents with mental illness, integrate into your plans follow up with residents to talk to them about mental health resources, care lines and other supports.

Include phone numbers for the Suicide Prevention Hotline, as well as the Care Line along with other emergency phone numbers to be posted in the house.

### **Special consideration in regard to COVID-19\***

Recovery home operators should have rules and regulations within their homes regarding the threat of COVID-19. Making sure residents are wearing masks, switching appointments to telehealth, checking in with residents who test positive and must be isolated, making sure that community connection is still there, and holding outside recovery meetings are all ways to make sure the home is as safe as possible. You can find the link to the CDC COVID-19 guidelines listed in the resources section below.

### **Creating a Positive Environment: Environmental Psychology**

According to NARR, a recovery home must provide a home-like environment, meaning “the residence is comfortable, inviting and meets residents’ needs.” (Domain 2, Principle E, Standards 14 and 15, page 6, [https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NARR\\_Standard\\_V.3.0\\_release\\_11-2018.pdf](https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NARR_Standard_V.3.0_release_11-2018.pdf)) Not only are these requirements important for ethical reasons, but the environment within a home



can have a significant effect on mental health. A recovery home that is overcrowded, unorganized, too hot or too cold, or not fully furnished would not be suitable for a resident who suffers from depression or anxiety, for example. Providing a safe and clean place to stay benefits everyone who is living in the home but can also help improve mental health.

[See NARR Standard Document Here](#)

**Environmental Psychology:** Environmental psychology is an interdisciplinary field that focuses on the transactions between individuals and their surroundings. It examines the way in which the natural environment and our built environments shape us as individuals<sup>8</sup>. The term environment can be defined broadly to include natural environments, social settings, built environments, learning environments, and informational environments. In regard to recovery homes, the environment within the home can have a major factor into residents' mental health whether it's positive or negative.

Environmental psychology discusses issues such as density and crowding, noise pollution, sub-standard living, and personal space. The following are suggestions for implementing environmental psychology in creating a supportive environment

- Having windows that can open and provide light and having high ceilings and enough space between furniture can decrease feelings of being crowded or overwhelmed, which could make an anxiety disorder, for example, worse than it already is.
- Discuss with residents the benefits of single or shared rooms - Room size and number of roommates can also be an important environmental factor for a person's mental health. For some, having a roommate can be supportive. For others, a single room may be more appropriate. Discuss the needs with the resident and determine with them the most appropriate room.
- Allow residents to decorate their room - Having pictures of one's family members or including personal items such as artwork within the living space can make residents feel more comfortable and at home which in turn leads to more stable mental health. Encourage residents to decorate their rooms and work together to decorate common spaces.

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<sup>8</sup> Find more information on environmental psychology here:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental\\_psychology#:~:text=Environmental%20psychology%20is%20an%20interdisciplinary,between%20individuals%20and%20their%20surroundings.&text=The%20field%20defines%20the%20term,learning%20environments%2C%20and%20informational%20environments.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_psychology#:~:text=Environmental%20psychology%20is%20an%20interdisciplinary,between%20individuals%20and%20their%20surroundings.&text=The%20field%20defines%20the%20term,learning%20environments%2C%20and%20informational%20environments.)



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- Provide supplies for activities at the house such as art and crafts, games, air hockey or other items to encourage positive social interaction as well as creativity for mental wellbeing.

### Encourage positive social interactions

Different activities provided for residents within homes can help improve mental health as well. An example of some of these activities that all residents can participate in that can promote positive mental health include:

- Meditation
- Yoga and exercise classes
- Cooking classes
- Arts and crafts
- Access to wellness centers and outdoor activities (maintaining good physical health can lead to good mental health)
- Recreational activities- pool table, air hockey, etc.
- Stress balls and fidget spinners

### Conclusion

Ohio Recovery Housing hopes to have provided an informational guidance on how to best serve residents with mental health disorders. We hope that this guide will be used as a resource when implementing mental health practices within recovery homes. If you have any more questions or concerns, please refer to the resources section at the end of the guide or reach out to Ohio Recovery Housing.

Ohio Recovery Housing (ORH) is a state affiliate for the National Alliance of Recovery Residences (NARR). ORH certifies recovery houses across the state of Ohio that meet the quality standards set by NARR. The purpose of the ORH standards is to ensure integrity and quality of recovery housing programs, services and environments for people recovering from substance use. ORH Board, Staff, and Associates recognize that recovery takes time and that residential support has many facets, ranging from residential treatment models to long-term recovery housing. ORH affirms the necessity of a continuum of care to adequately address the total needs of people recovering from addiction.

### Resources

Social Security Benefits <https://www.ssa.gov/benefits/forms/>

Medicaid Eligibility <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/606>

Food Stamps and SNAP Benefits <https://jfs.ohio.gov/ocomm/applyforbenefits>

CDC COVID-19 Guidelines <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>



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Mental Health 101 Training <https://mha.ohio.gov/Schools-and-Communities/Community-and-Housing/Housing-Resources/Training-Learning-Series#1896314-mental-illness-101>

Mental Health First Aid Trainings <https://mhaohio.org/get-help/workplace-community-program/mental-health-first-aid-2/>

Trauma Informed Care Trainings Directory <https://d2hfgw7vtz2tl.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/opr-trauma-training-directory-state-agencies-updated.pdf>

Suicide Prevention Trainings <https://losscs.org/qpr-training/>

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) <https://nami.org/Home>

Ohio MHAS (Mental Health and Addiction services) -<https://mha.ohio.gov/>

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services) -<https://www.samhsa.gov/>

NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse)- <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>

### References

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[https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NARR\\_levels\\_summary.pdf](https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NARR_levels_summary.pdf)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental\\_psychology#:~:text=Environmental%20psychology%20is%20an%20interdisciplinary.between%20individuals%20and%20their%20surroundings.&text=The%20field%20defines%20the%20term,learning%20environments%2C%20and%20informational%20environments.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_psychology#:~:text=Environmental%20psychology%20is%20an%20interdisciplinary.between%20individuals%20and%20their%20surroundings.&text=The%20field%20defines%20the%20term,learning%20environments%2C%20and%20informational%20environments.)

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