

YOUNG ADULT PEER MENTORS IN MASSACHUSETTS: 2022 WORKFORCE DETAILS & NEEDS



PROJECT PURPOSE & OBJECTIVES

This research project sought to learn more about the young adult peer mentor (YAPM) workforce in Massachusetts using a *Community-based Participatory Action Research Mixed-Methods Approach*. Project objectives included:

- 1 **Identify where YAPMs are geographically located, & what types of settings YAPMs are in across the State of Massachusetts.**
- 2 **Examine YAPM demographics, length of time in role, on-the-job experiences & their training + professional development needs.**
- 3 **Examine YAPM Supervisor perspectives on their training & support needs, as well as YAPM training & support needs.**

A team of young people, including those with lived & living experiences, in partnership with a PHD-level researcher designed the study, including online survey and interview content, recruitment materials & processes, and data analysis plan. The Massachusetts DMH IRB approved the study.

- 21 YAPMs (current & former) & 20 YAPM Supervisors completed an online survey.
- 10 YAPMs (current & former) completed a virtual interview.

CONTRIBUTORS & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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YOUNG ADULT PEER MENTORING (YAPM)

Young Adult Peer Mentors (YAPMs) are a unique near-age youth peer support workforce designed to meet the needs of 14-20 year olds enrolled in Massachusetts community mental health service settings. YAPMs are between 18 & 30 years of age. YAPMs use their expertise based on sharing one's lived experience of mental health challenges with purpose and intent to inspire hope and motivation in another young person who is struggling with similar concerns.

YAPMs were first introduced through a SAMHSA System of Care Project that began in 2016. The YAPM role and core practices were developed in partnership with young people with lived and living experience with mental health diagnoses and treatment. YAPM practice is rooted in 6 core elements. See diagram below, and [here](#) for more info.

YAPMs complete several trainings, including: G.I.F.T., CORE elements, and Certified Peer Specialist trainings.

YAPM CORE Elements



I. Practicing Cultural Responsiveness



IV. Role Modeling



II. Building Relationships & Collaboration



V. Promoting Self-care



III. Supporting Young Adult Vision & Goals



VI. Demonstrating Safe, Professional & Ethical Behavior

YAPM WORKFORCE IN MASSACHUSETTS

21 current or former YAPMs completed the online survey. YAPMs were between 18 to 34 years old, with an average age of 25.3 (SD=4.2 years). Approximately 14% had a high school diploma, 23% some college, 33% associates or bachelors degree, and 28% working towards a masters degree or had a masters degree. Additional demographics & role experiences are summarized below.

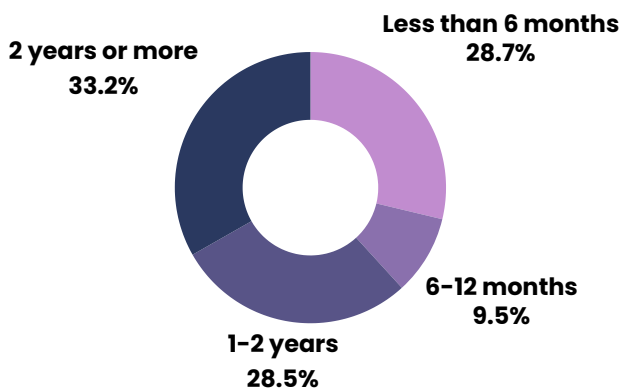
Gender

Female	38%
Male	28%
Non-binary	14.4%
GNC	4.8%
Trans	4.8%

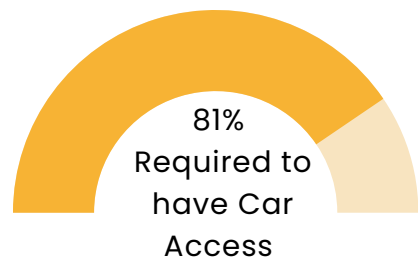
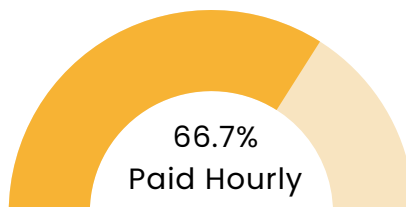
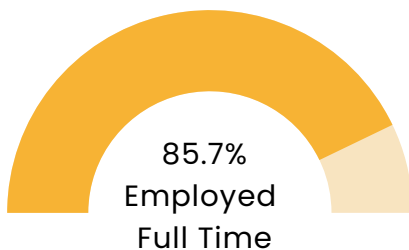
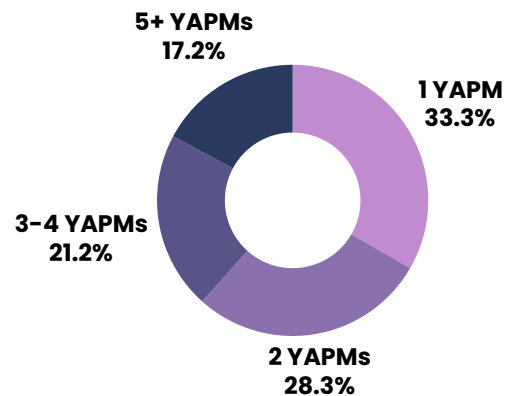
Race & Ethnicity

White	47.6%
Black/African American	19%
Black/African American & Hispanic	9.5%
White & Hispanic	19%
Unknown	4.8%

Length in YAPM Role

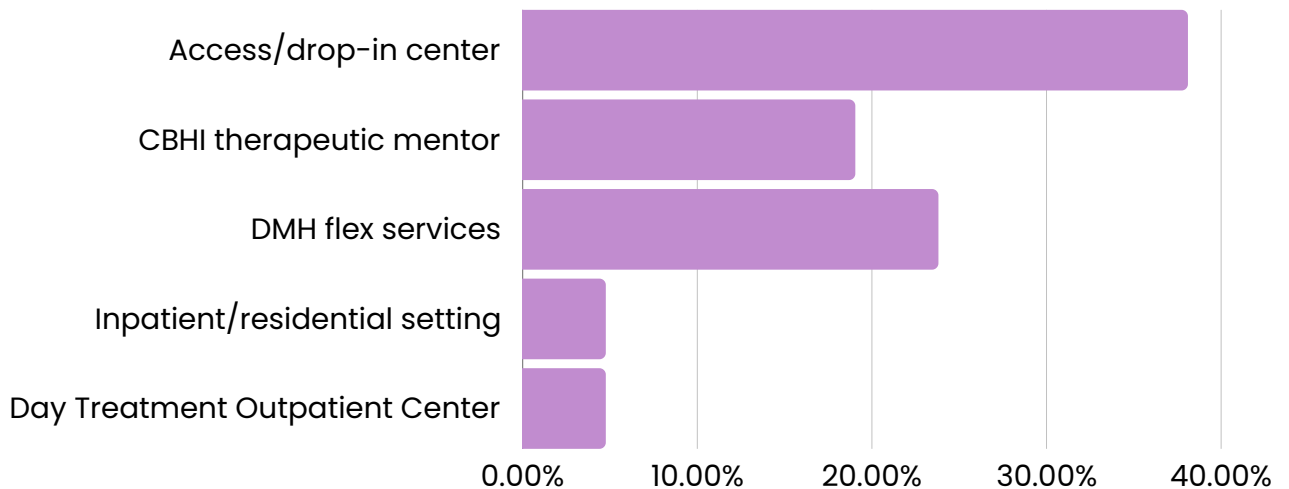


Total Number of YAPMs at Site

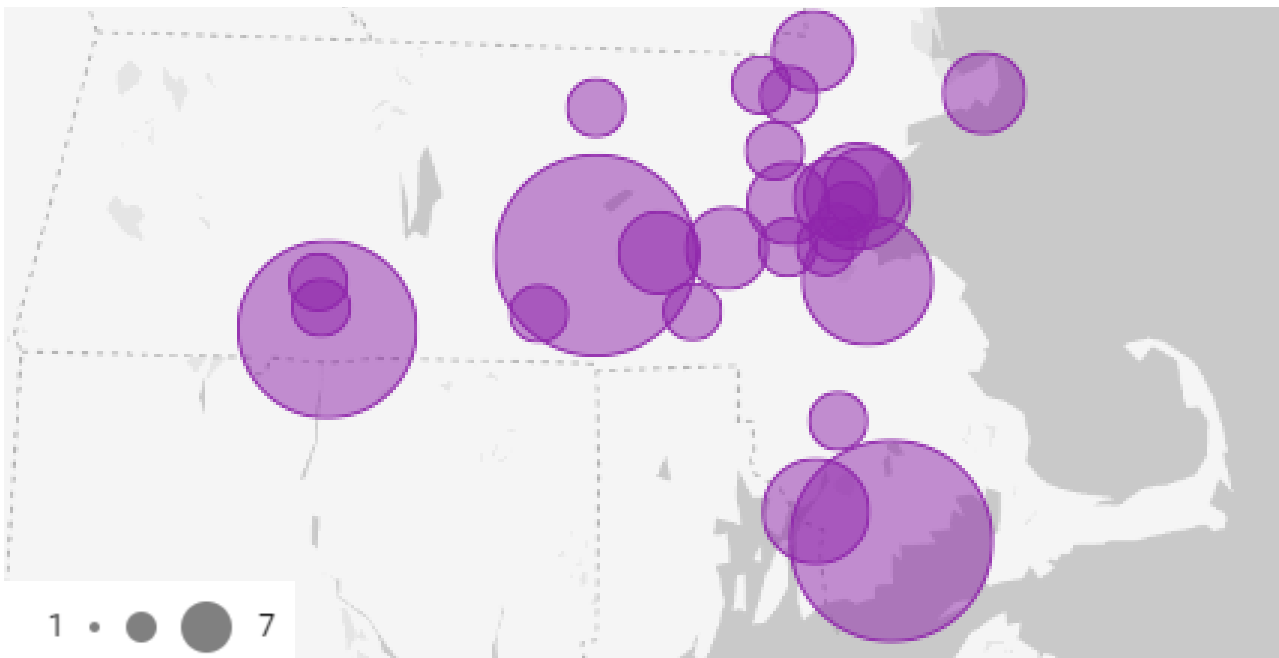


YAPM WORKFORCE IN MASSACHUSETTS

What settings are YAPMs in?



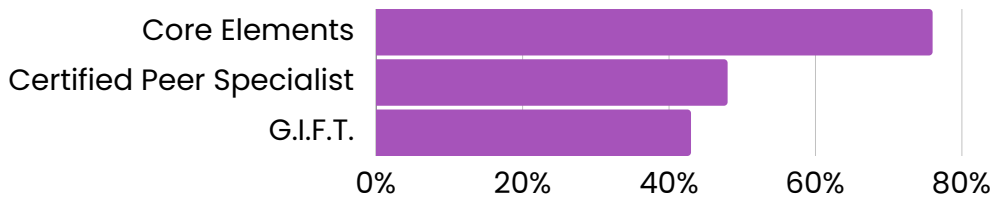
Where are YAPMs located?



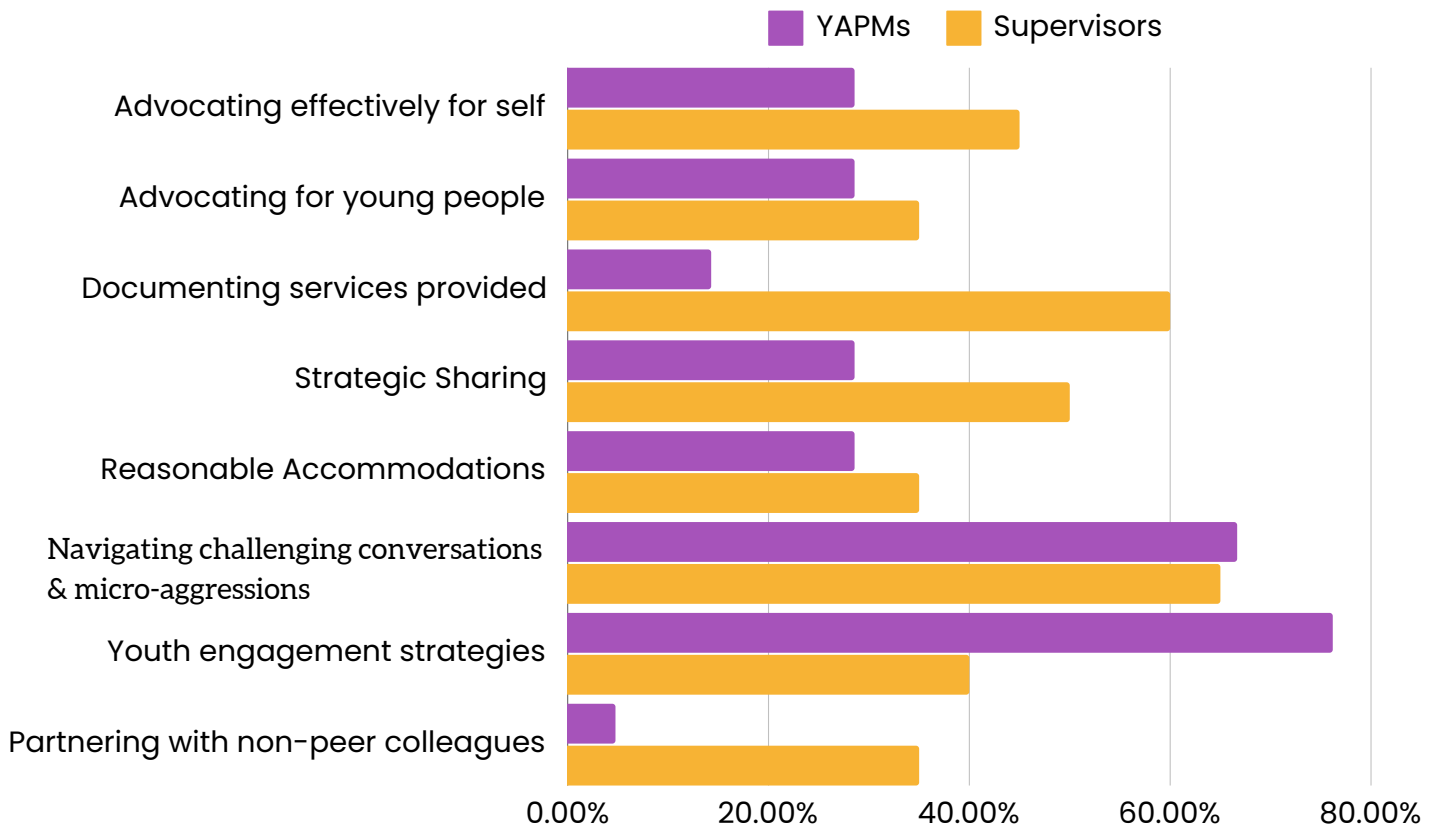
As of Summer 2022, YAPMs were employed in 6 Districts in Massachusetts including: Central, Metro Boston, Northeast, Southeast, Southern, & Western.

YAPM TRAINING & SUPPORT NEEDS

Current and former YAPMs (n=21) reported on their training completion. Most had completed the CORE Elements training - a 3-day workshop covering YAPM practice basics; 45% had completed the adult community mental health peer support CPS (Certified Peer Specialist) training, and 42% had completed G.I.F.T. (Gathering & Inspiring Future Talent) training. See pg. __ for where to access more info about these and other peer trainings.



Current and former YAPMs (n=21) and YAPM supervisors (n=20) identified areas for YAPM additional training & support. YAPM priorities were: engagement strategies and navigating challenging conversations and micro-aggressions. Supervisor priorities were: navigating challenging conversations & micro-aggressions, documenting services, and strategic sharing.



SUPERVISOR PERSPECTIVE

Supervisor open-ended responses to survey questions are summarized below regards to what they find rewarding in supervising YAPMs, areas for their growth as supervisors, & need for additional training and supervisor-to-supervisor peer support.



What's Rewarding

65% Observing YAPMs personal and professional growth.

59% Witnessing peer support in action in regards to YAPMs engaging, instilling hope, and positively impacting young people.



Areas for Growth

50% Supporting YAPM's mental health and self-care on the job.

39% Inability to provide effective constructive feedback to YAPMs

28% Navigating YAPM's struggling with relational boundaries with clients



Supervisors Need Support

53% Need increased connections to other YAPM supervisors, YAPM supervisor consultation groups and/or learning collaboratives

47% Need for more practical, skill-based supervisor training and professional opportunities.

YAPM INTERVIEW FINDINGS

10 current or previously employed YAPMs completed interviews about their on-the-job experiences. YAPM currently or previously worked in child outpatient settings, Access Centers, peer run community & crisis services, and inpatient/residential care. YAPMs identified on-the-job supports, and also challenges they face in their roles.

Key YAPM On-the-Job Supports

YAPMs identified specific trainings, supervisor quality, and peer-to-peer group supervision and learning collaboratives as critical for on-the-job success.

G.I.F.T., CORE elements, & CPS Trainings are beneficial.

- “ The G.I.F.T training, it's more about like getting to know yourself. You do write a *Comeback Story* in that training, which is very helpful good practice. But, I think it also gave me- I developed a sense of self and kind of not just a sense of self, but I took ownership of my experiences after the G.I.F.T. training. After reading my story, I was like this is, this is my story, and this is important to me, and I felt a lot less like ashamed of it, and I think if I hadn't taken the G.I.F.T. training first, I don't know if I would have gone on to the other trainings. I don't know if I would have been prepared.
- “ I did the CORE elements training for peer mentors, which was good about learning like how much lived experience to share, when to share it, why to share it - that kind of thing.
- “ [To be successful as a YAPM It's...] knowing how to share my story without being triggered. And that was through like the Certified Peer Specialist training that like they taught you how to share your story- in like snippets, and how to not get triggered; how to share with purpose; and the ethical aspects of the role; and how to do person-centered care.

YAPM Supervisor Quality is important.

- “ So I'm lucky to have a phenomenal supervisor. I don't even know how long she's been in the field, but you know, a whole long time. So I can just text her or call her whenever and sometimes I do because sometimes we'll have legit questions, and sometimes will just be you know stupid questions that can probably wait until tomorrow. So outside of supervision she's always reachable like text call to provide insight and advice. She's great.
- “ [To be success as a YAPM...] supervision, ideally a young adult peer mentor supervisor, who has been through that role, and actually is like excited to experience what it is...My perspective and my work that I did, I would say, someone who is understanding and non-judgmental...My supervisor, I felt supported because she was literally excited about the role taking it head on & wanted to do great things. But, the agency, it was kind of on and off because I felt like as the only mentor I was put up on the back burner, with no voice.

YAPMs appreciate opportunities to connect with other YAPMs.

“I think like knowing, like others [YAPMs] - **getting to speak with other peers from across other programs.** Like right now we have these monthly Access Center network meetings which are fun, but I almost **wish that we could like talk more or meet in-person, more to just kind of talk about the work that we're doing and comparing you know different approaches and sharing ideas.**

“...In the mental health field, **you're in like such a high stress job all the time.** Essentially you generally kind of no matter what you do in the mental health field there's always going to be stress there, and I think like doing that kind of work, you really need to **be able to just have those like fellow relationships and like friendships [with other YAPMs] to be able to like sustain the stress of it** and, like to know that, like yeah. **This is stressful, you know it's stressful for me, too, and like I understand where you're coming from....**I think it's important just to have those relationships, you know and like be able to rely on one another and knowing that like.

Common YAPM Challenges

Common challenges included challenges (1) navigating relational boundaries, (2) navigating listening vs. sharing vs. relating vs. advocating, (3) managing expectations & resilience on job.

Navigating Relational Boundaries

“Boundaries can be really difficult there's a lot of gray area, especially when you're like sharing your own experiences. **So I think what has really like kind of helped me with that is having a supervisor who's like really understanding and knowing like you know, sometimes you get into the gray area and, like it's hard to figure out what to do next, or where the boundary should be set.** But once you figure it out and, and get that experience it gets a little bit easier, but yeah sometimes I struggle with like do I share this to validate the young adult or am I sharing this because I just want to share and relate? **So, making sure that I like I'm staying focused on boundaries for not just my benefit, but for the person I'm working with for their benefit.**

“I would definitely say, while working [as a YAPM] is **putting up boundaries.** Um, I know that young adults are going to need support, but like, **I had one youth who would text me non-stop, like over and over right before our meeting.** And, then she'll start calling and I'm like, “we have a scheduled time. I'm sorry, I'm doing documentation at the moment, we can chat on our scheduled time.” Because at first, I was answering, but then **I'm like wait a minute, this is a pattern, let me, let me put those boundaries of because it's nice to continue happening. So I was able to start putting boundaries in.** And, that helps a lot.

Navigating Listening vs. Relating vs. Sharing vs. Advocating

“To be a peer mentor I mean **it's not all about just like sharing your story and sharing your personal experiences I definitely thought I was going to be doing a lot more of that.** But it's I'm not sharing it as much as I'm like using it to guide how I work with young adults.

- “One of the most difficult aspects I could say, maybe like, **if you haven't really been in that situation that the youth has been in- you can't really relate as much with the youth.** But, you can still you know support them and comfort them...**I do bring up like another story that I've heard from a similar situation, maybe from a friend or a family member that... that person can relate to,** so but otherwise I just try to give them more comfort words and you know just try to go deep into it, just so like you know they can talk more about it, and we feel more comfortable to talk about it later on in their lives, too... **I've had like multiple clients kind of like break down me in front of me. I'm like, how can I navigate that? It's more like just give them time to settle, but then I give them more like words, more words... unless they need to silence, you know?**
- “Just trying to keep that in mind, you know **if I hear someone say something that's like not super strength-based about a person that we work with. I tried to like,** depending on the situation, you know, you got to kind of feel it out. I'll usually try to say something like, **"Hey, what if we tried saying this instead?"**

Managing Expectations & Resilience on Job

- “Oh it's it's a really important role and like know what you're doing is like really impactful work, and it does matter and even if maybe your young adults not connecting with you, for some reason **it's still important what you're doing and it's still hopefully I'm sure it's making some sort of impact on them, they just don't know it.**
- “You know, I was working in a peer role, yet **it was still expected of me to never have any mental health issues,** you know and **that's a little frustrating, there wasn't like really understanding of that.** You know **an aspect of being appear means you do have mental health,** you know problems come up then and there. But yeah so just I mainly like thinking of like issues with management, and like not really being fully supported there.

YAPM perspective not heard, not valued, nor respected at times.

- “But it wasn't until like I actually like spoke up, and said what it [YAPM role] is, and then we would do a lot of activities where **I would speak up and say, like now you guys are minimizing the peer mentors.** And then, working with like outside collateral outside like the little agency of ours. It was okay, sometimes they didn't understand the role, because they would want us to kind of, like the way they pitched it to families, is like a babysitter is not where we are. So, yeah I had to sit in on **a lot of like an agency wide meetings to actually speak about what it [YAPM role] is and what we do, and there is kind of a guideline that I had typed up that goes through what we do and what we don't do. And, I have shared it with those collateral at the time, so I was pretty frustrated because I kept having to explain what my role was.**
- “Another challenging aspect from an employment role is how it feels in when you're working in a setting where there's young adult peer mentors, um **there's usually a chain that goes up -** so it's like the young adult peer mentor, the therapeutic mentor, and family partner, the clinician and then or whatever the supervisor clinician. **It tends to feel sometimes that we're like at the bottom...And, it's not that our opinion doesn't matter, it's sometimes brushed aside...when we're the ones with the young adults most of the time.**

“It really isn't any like any other role- I'm not obviously I'm not a kid I would say it sometimes hinders me, but I'm also I don't think necessarily falling into always into that clinical role because of my ability to share my lived experience. **Other people in my job were told not tell people about your life, do not tell the kids about your life, do not tell them anything about them. I'm the only one that can do that, especially when it comes about, like my mental health struggles so. And I had to explain it it's that like I support you, with my lived experience in my past to better kind of their future in their living conditions.**

“And don't be angry if I give you [Non-Peer Staff] feedback because honestly, the only thing I'm doing is is letting you know information, you need to know and it's not because you're a **bad person** and you don't know what to do. It's because you're a new person or you just don't know it.

“It was hard in the beginning, especially because I feel like **the Peer Mentor role and the Family Partner role were a little bit oppositional.** So like I'm here to really advocate for the client and they're there to really advocate for the parent, and a lot of the times the client and the parent **are not on the same terms.** But they're both roles, where you really get like so invested, because you come in with that I know what this feels like, so I **think that was a big challenge in the beginning was really figuring out how to work effectively with the family partner.**

“One of the **bigger challenges is like educating other people...on what we do and like, you know that we're more than just people telling our stories are people who are listening or hanging out with young adults playing board games -like we're we do a lot more than that,** but it's a very sometimes it's hard to show that, so it depends, I think that's probably the hardest part like getting other people to understand, this is the role and these are my responsibilities and I **deserve same amount of respect as another provider would.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Increase non-peer mental health professional familiarity & collaboration with peer role.

Decrease responsibility of YAPMs to explain their role to colleagues & collaborators.

Increase program manager & supervisor responsibility & competency in educating non-peer staff.

Require Non-Peer Training in YAPM role & responsibilities + how to best partner with YAPMs.

2 Increase & improve peer-to-peer support for YAPMs & YAPM supervisors.

Provide regular professional opportunities for YAPM supervisors to connect with each other.

Provide regular opportunities for YAPMs to connect, swap ideas, validate & brainstorm.

Host spaces for more natural connecting, e.g., conference space with activities/food.

3 Support YAPMs in navigating advocacy & strategic sharing at work.

YAPM Implementation plan with regular check-ins about experiences to provide orientation & support.

Require resilience plans for all staff, including supervisors & program managers.

4 Continue to provide YAPM & YAPM Supervisor trainings.

Provide CORE Elements training to YAPMs. Consider adding follow-up trainings.

Train Supervisors in CORE Elements. Offer additional YAPM Supervisor Training to increase confidence and competence in advocating with YAPMs for organizational change, and effectively addressing microaggressions, abuse and discrimination in realtime.

RESOURCES

1 Learn more about YAPM best-practices (i.e., CORE elements).



Visit the CBH Knowledge Center's Website [here](#). This has all 6 of the CORE elements practice profiles and associated YAPM self-assessment tools.

2 Learn more about YAPM Supervision best-practices.



Visit the CBH Knowledge Center's Supervision tools webpage [here](#). This has toolkits, including a supervisor self-guided workbook to increase supervisor competency with YAPM supervision.

3 Share brief YAPM Role e-learnings with non-peer colleagues.



Visit the CBH Center's media e-learning webpage [here](#). This is a 4-part self-guided e-learning for non-peer colleagues to learn about YAPM role. It's great for onboarding new staff.

4 Use this YAPM Integration organizational readiness tool.



Visit the CBH Knowledge Center's YAPM organization YAPM integration webpage [here](#). This tool will help you to identify where to target improvement efforts to better support YAPM success in your context.