

## **SELF-DETERMINATION FRAMEWORK FOR PEOPLE WITH PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES<sup>†</sup>**

### **Brief Definition**

Self-determination refers to the right of individuals to have full power over their own lives, regardless of presence of illness or disability. It encompasses concepts such as free will, civil and human rights, freedom of choice, independence, personal agency, self-direction, and individual responsibility. Self-determination in the mental health system refers to individuals' rights to direct their own services, to make the decisions concerning their health and well-being (with help from others of their choice, if desired), to be free from involuntary treatment, and to have meaningful leadership roles in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services and supports.

### **Taxonomy**

Given the brief definition, a taxonomy or classification of self-determination includes the following elements, categorized into three, interrelated levels: 1) individual or internal self-determination/recovery; 2) mental health programming, services, and supports that foster self-determination; and 3) collective, social, or shared self-determination.

### **Level One: Individual or Internal Self-Determination/Recovery**

This level highlights the importance of individual empowerment to fulfill one's own inner capacity for self-determination and recovery. Self-determination is achieved at this level when people have maximal independence and educational opportunities to make meaningful decisions about their own lives, control their own money, and live and work where they choose. This level focuses on capacities such as:

- Personal resolve and belief in oneself and one's ability to be a fully self-determining individual
- Development and achievement of personally meaningful life goals
- Learning and demonstrating leadership abilities
- Self-management of disability that promotes self-respect and self-advocacy
- Achievement of economic independence and prosperity, through means of one's own choice that serve to enhance personal values and needs (via such things as training for decent jobs at decent pay, running one's own business, or becoming a home owner)
- The ability to overcome internalized stigma/discrimination, to demand the best treatment or treatment alternatives possible, to advocate for one's rights, and to live in communities of choice, free from fear, loneliness, and impoverished conditions, in order to achieve one's life dreams

### **Level Two: Mental Health Services, Supports, and Policies that Foster Self-Determination**

This level pertains to innovations within public and private service systems, as well as among informal caregivers and peers, that foster self-determination. These systems include those that address mental and physical health, vocational rehabilitation/training, housing, income support, and education. At this level, self-determination is achieved when individuals make decisions regarding their own

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medical and mental health treatment (with the help of others of their choice, if desired), are free from involuntary treatment, and have leadership roles in the design, delivery, and evaluation of services, supports, and policies. This level focuses on promoting practices that foster self-determination, including:

- Recovery-oriented services/supports that respect client choice of service providers and treatment options
- The right to confidentiality and access to all records/documents about one's self or treatment
- Services/supports that honor clients' cultural experiences, norms, beliefs, and values, as well as their gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation
- Alternatives to traditional treatment, including those that are led by individuals who seek, use, or have used mental health services (including self-help and peer support)
- Traditional mental health programs staffed by people who seek, use, or have used services
- Housing alternatives and choices that are independent of treatment and the mental health system and that respect personal wishes and choice of supports/assistance, if desired
- Employing strategies to prevent coercive or forced treatment
- Psychiatric advance directives and other mechanisms for voluntarily determining acceptable treatments and supports
- Learning/resource centers (with access to print and audio/visual materials, as well as information technologies) to help people become experts on their own needs and lives
- Meaningful involvement of people with psychiatric disabilities from various backgrounds in local, state, and national policymaking to ensure focus on issues of most concern to them
- Systems change and community organizing activities to ensure civil and human rights in service systems and society at large

### **Level Three: Collective, Social, or Shared Self-Determination**

This level focuses on the political, economic, cultural, and social context in which people live, work, participate in community activities, raise families, socialize, and otherwise relate to each other casually or intimately, individually or in groups. At this level, self-determination is achieved when individuals are full participants in community life, and are empowered to organize for social justice for themselves and their peers. It acknowledges that no one is free until all are free. It focuses on promoting principles, values, and actions that advance global self-determination, including:

- The importance of social connectedness in achieving self-determination (i.e., we all exist in relation to others – our decisions have consequences for ourselves and others)
- Collective, grassroots, cross-disability organizing to build alliances, increase strength and power, and unite in common concerns to take action. Such coalitions work to ensure basic civil and human rights, to fight societal discrimination and oppression (including based on disability, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, age, religion, and sexual orientation), and to overcome service and societal barriers
- The value of networking and community/collective organizing (in person, in groups, or via information and communication technologies) to share history, strength, resources, and hope in order to combat isolation, discrimination, and other life challenges
- Mutual respect for differences in beliefs, viewpoints, lifestyles, needs, and morals, in order for self-determination to be truly realized