

# Effectiveness and associated factors of peer support for substance use reduction in adults with Serious Mental Illness: A systematic literature review

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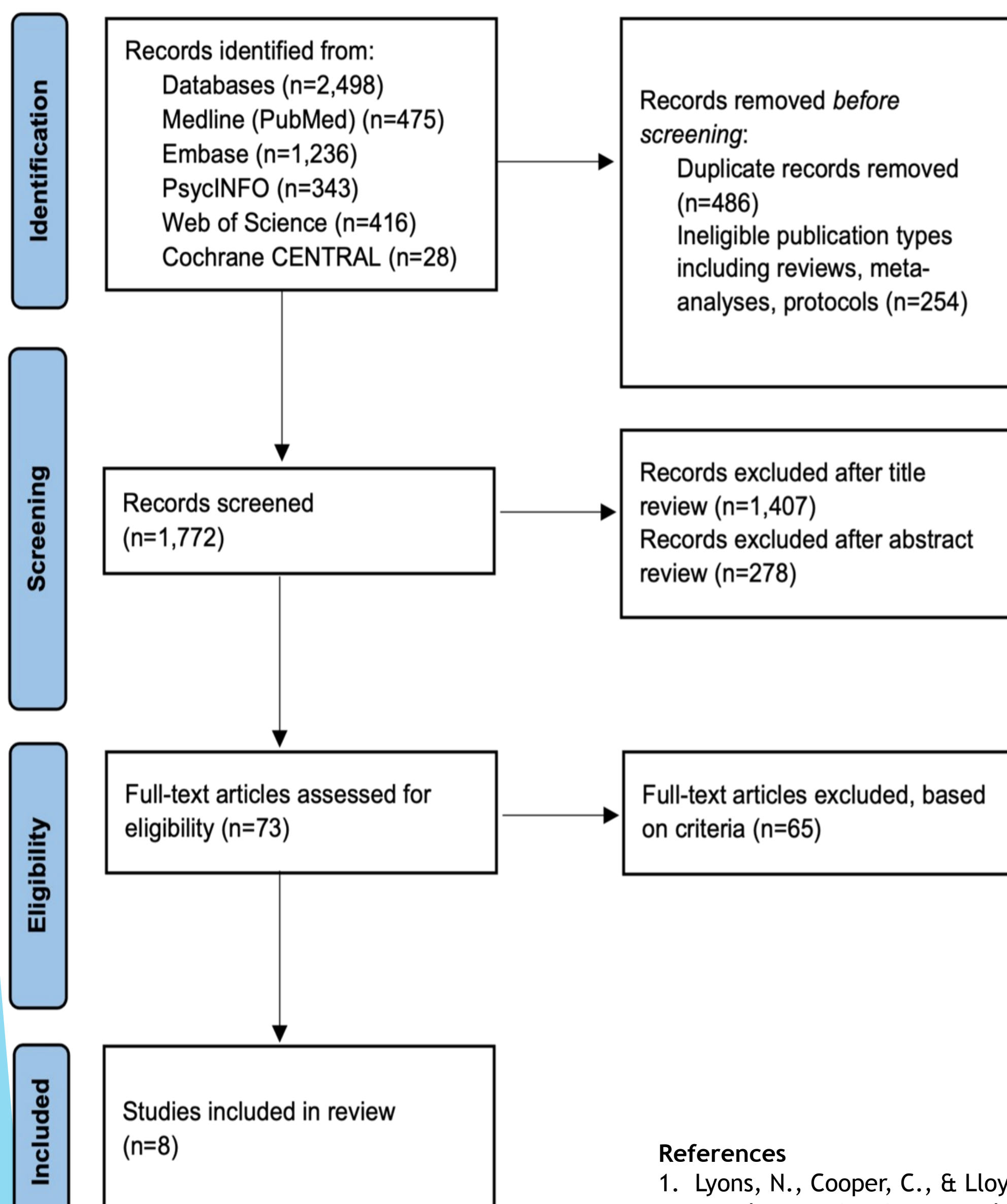
## Introduction

For over a decade, the World Health Organization (WHO) and national health systems have endorsed the integration of peer support as an intervention into mental health services due to its characteristically recovery-oriented approach.<sup>1</sup> Because peer support is widely available and can utilise volunteers or paid staff that are not clinically trained, the intervention poses a cost-effective complementary or task-shifting strategy to address the unmet mental health needs of communities.

There is a gap in literature that comprehensively reviews the effectiveness of peer support to reduce substance use and promote overall recovery in adults with Serious Mental Illness (SMI), a population that is disproportionately impacted by substance use disorder (SUD).

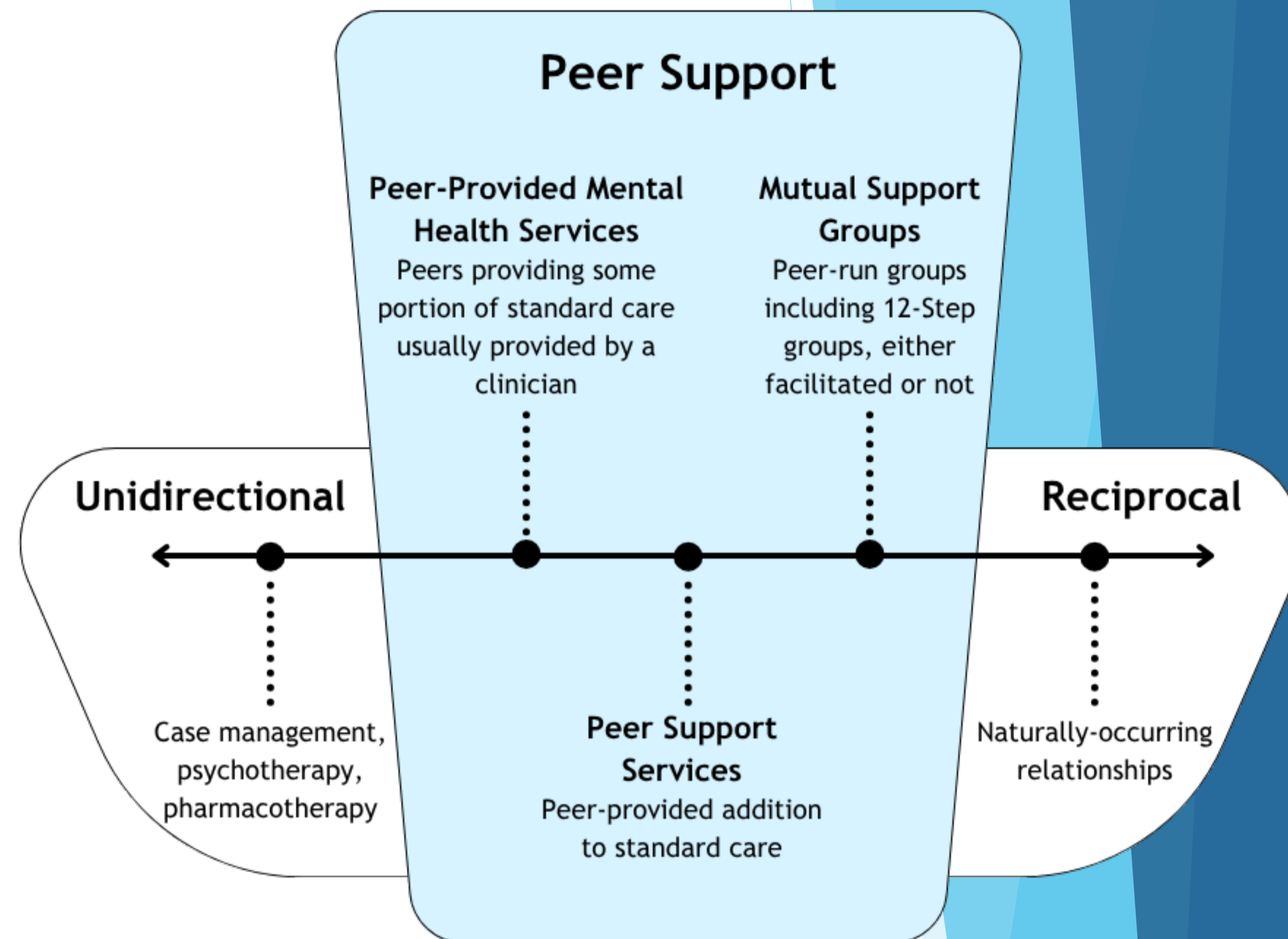
## Methods

A systematic literature review of five databases was conducted using terms grouped by population (individuals with SMI), main outcome of interest (substance use), and intervention (peer support, including one-on-one peer-provided mental health services, one-on-one peer support services, and mutual support groups). A quality appraisal was conducted to assess the methodological rigor of results. A descriptive analysis of main outcome and secondary outcome findings was conducted.



## References

- Lyons, N., Cooper, C., & Lloyd-Evans, B. (2021). A systematic review and meta-analysis of group peer support interventions for people experiencing mental health conditions. *BMC Psychiatry*, 21(1), 315. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-021-03321-z>
- Lloyd-Evans, B., Mayo-Wilson, E., Harrison, B., Istead, H., Brown, E., Pilling, S., Johnson, S., Kendall, T. (2014). A systematic review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials of peer support for people with severe mental illness. *BMC Psychiatry*, 14, 39. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-244X-14-39>



## Results

Eight studies examining substance use-related outcomes of peer support interventions were identified for inclusion: two studies on one-on-one peer support services, five on mutual support groups, and one on peer support services combined with mutual support groups. Seven studies found a significant association between peer support and improvement in substance use, and one study showed peer support to have minimal detrimental effect. All studies found significant associations between interventions and improvement of a range of secondary outcomes related to functioning and healthy behaviours.

## Conclusion

The literature shows promising evidence of peer support's effectiveness in not only reducing substance use but also improving overall patient wellbeing and recovery, attesting to its recovery-oriented advantage for the dually diagnosed population. These findings provide a more favourable perspective on peer support when compared with previous systematic reviews and meta-analyses of a variety of peer support types in mentally ill populations, which showed peer support to modestly improve recovery but have little or no impact on clinical outcomes.<sup>1-2</sup>

However, the application and generalisability of findings are limited by the number of resulting studies, their geographic restriction to the US, and their varied quality. Further research should evaluate the efficacy of peer support on outcomes related to substance use and overall recovery and compare the effect on outcomes from key program factors, such as type of peer support, focus of peer support (dual-focus versus SUD or SMI only), and whether staff or volunteers are themselves in recovery or treatment.