

‘We would never want our house managers to play therapist’

A qualitative study on managing role drift in recovery housing

WHAT WE DID



In-depth interviews with 45 recovery residence staff members at Level II and III recovery homes, including house operators, house managers, and recovery support peer specialists

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

Recovery residence staff reported two overarching strategies to combat role drift:



1. Recovery homes screened potential residents to ensure the applicants' needs matched the intensity of services provided in the home. Individuals who needed more support or who exhibited psychological distress while living in the home were connected to appropriate local resources.



2. Staff worked to establish clear expectations and boundaries about the types of support they could offer.



Staff also identified factors that exacerbated role drift, including gaps in available mental health services and cohabiting with the residents they serve.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Similar to many peer-to-peer roles, recovery housing staff often experience situations that create the potential for role drift. Organizational processes and adherence to peer support ethics can help staff manage these pressures in ways that protect themselves and the residents they serve.

REFERENCE

Stewart, H. L. N., Thomas, I. M., Gallardo, K. R., Lewis, J., Kirzner, S. J., Wilkerson, J. M., ... McCurdy, S. A. (2025). 'We would never want our house managers to play therapist': a qualitative study on managing role drift in recovery housing. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 1–9.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2025.2609631>

