

Civil Society Delivers: Strengthening Community-Based Prevention and Recovery Systems



What Is Civil Society:¹



Civil Society includes community-based organizations, nonprofits, faith-based groups, and volunteers working at the local level to **advocate**, **educate**, and **serve** their communities. They are...

- Located in the **heart of the communities**.
- More **adaptable** to local needs and cultures.

Unlike large institutions, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) operate where people live, work, and recover. This proximity builds trust, reduces stigma, and increases sustained engagement.

Key Benefits of Community-Based Initiatives:^{1,2,3,4}



Improved Engagement in Services

- Targeted outreach increases participation, especially among underserved and high-risk groups.



Increased Social Connectedness

- Local initiatives promote social cohesion and a sense of belonging, which protects against relapse.



Strengthened Recovery Capital

- Strengthens the personal, social, and environmental resources people need to begin and sustain recovery.



Enhanced Long-Term Health and Social Outcomes

- Community driven approaches reduce substance use, improve mental health, and build healthier communities.

Why Civil Societies Matter and How Civil Society Strengthens Systems of Care:^{1,3,4}

Civil Society Organizations are uniquely positioned to reach families, youth, and individuals in recovery, which are often difficult for governments to consistently engage.

- Encourages culturally responsive programming.
- Expands access to underserved populations.
- Enhances accountability at the community level.
- Supports recovery oriented systems of care.
- Improves coordination between prevention, treatment, and recovery.

Evidence-based Successes:^{5,6}

- Individuals who participated in peer-led recovery groups experienced a 35% reduction in relapse risk compared to those receiving other types of treatment.
- Non-profit treatment centers were more likely than for-profit facilities to provide integrated primary care, communicable disease screening, mental health assessments, suicide prevention services, tobacco cessation support, and multilingual services.

Policy Implications for Strengthening Civil Society's Role:⁷

- Governments and policymakers should meaningfully include civil society and affected communities when creating and implementing health policies.
- Instead of consulting CSOs occasionally, governments should build permanent structures for engagement (examples include advisory councils, participatory policy forums).
- Policymakers should encourage feedback loops between government and civil society so policies can be adjusted based on real-world experience.
- Short-term project funding limits civil society's ability to sustain reform efforts. Policymakers should consider longer-term or core funding mechanisms.

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