Cognitive Health in the Coordinated Specialty Care Context

Alice Saperstein, PhD

Associate Professor of Medical Psychology, Department of Psychiatry, Columbia University Vagelos College of Physicians and Surgeons, New York State Psychiatric Institute, and New York-Presbyterian; Licensed Psychologist, New York State Office of Mental Health

April 15, 2025

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Housekeeping Notes

- This presentation will be recorded.
- During the presentation, submit questions and feedback in the chat.
- You will receive the presentation slides via email.

Webinar Overview

I. Opening Remarks

II. Overview of Cognitive Health in the Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) Context

III. The Three Pillars of Cognitive Health Services

IV. Q & A

V. Closing Remarks

ESMI TTA CENTER
SAMHSA's National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Early Serious Mental Illness

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Learning Objectives

- Describe how cognitive health intersects with early psychosis
- Identify strategies for integrating cognitive health services into coordinated specialty care (CSC) programs
- List the three pillars of cognitive health services, including:
    - Asking about cognitive health to gain a mutual understanding of the role it plays in an individual's wellness and recovery
    - Assessing cognitive strengths and areas of need
    - Addressing cognitive health needs to support learning and engagement in the recovery process

Coordinated Specialty Care

Source: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2023

Evidence-based, recovery-oriented team approach to treating early psychosis that promotes easy access to care and shared decision making among specialists, the person experiencing psychosis, and family members

Source: National Institute on Mental Health, 2022

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Treatment Priorities

First-person perspectives solicited through program evaluation and research highlight the value of addressing cognitive health concerns

- Thinking skills are rated as highly as school and social relationships when it comes to treatment priorities
- Participants identify the value of better memory, attention, and critical thinking skills

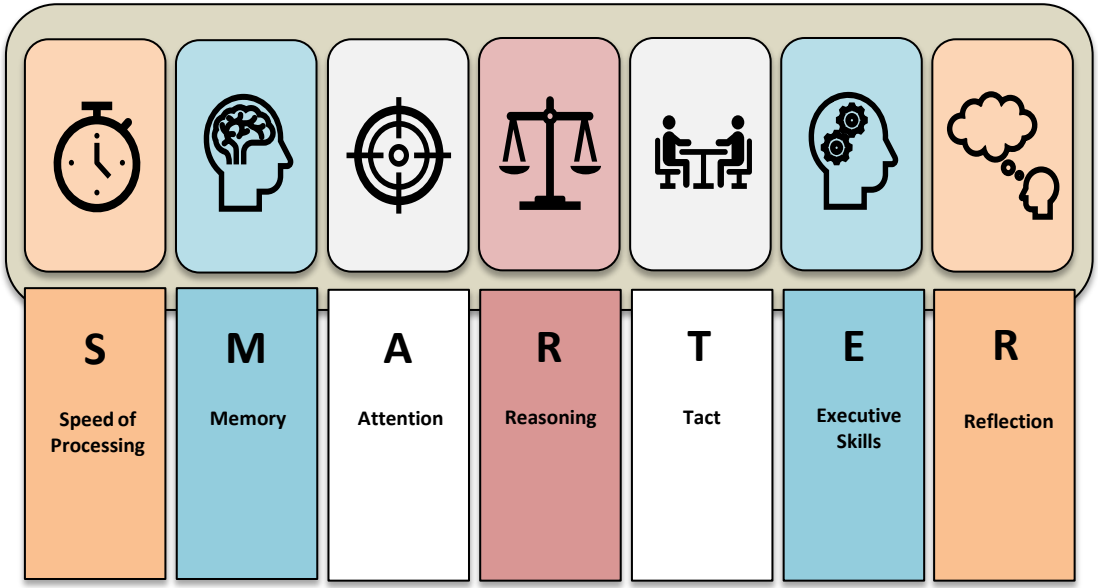
Sources: Bryce et al., 2025 & Medalia et al., 2025

Cognitive Impairment Appears Early

- Cognitive, motor, and social impairment may manifest in childhood or adolescence
- Cognitive performance impairments can appear in people with early psychosis who are unmedicated
- Impairments can be present in people at clinical high risk who later develop psychosis

Sources: Fatouros-Bergman et al., 2014; Howes & Murray, 2014; Lam et al., 2018

Cognitive Health



Source: OnTrackNY, 2023

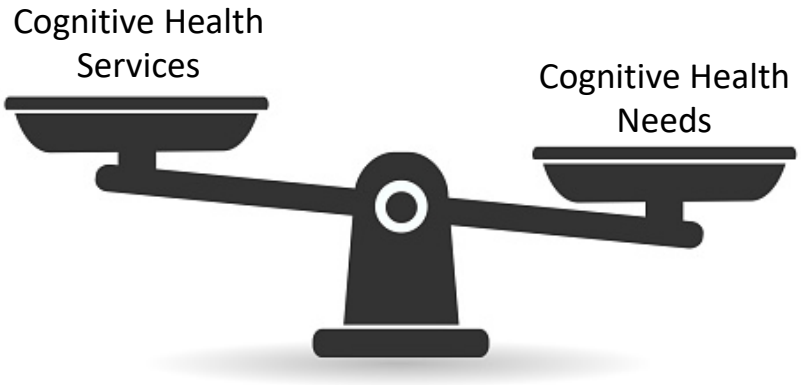
The brain's ability to support thinking, learning, remembering, and the other cognitive skills needed to perceive, acquire, understand, and respond to information

Consequences of Cognitive Health Challenges




- Vocational struggles
- Social isolation
- Educational difficulty
- Daily living struggles
- Poor wellness management
- Self-criticism
- Low expectation for success
- Difficulty bridging intentions to action

An Unmet Need



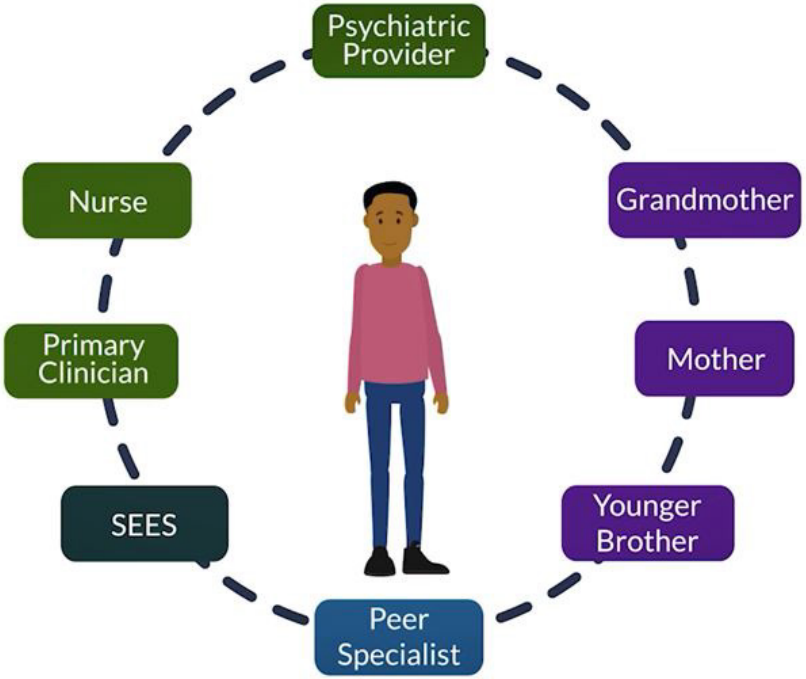
SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Cognitive Health Framework

A cognitive health framework can support the integration of cognitive health services in CSC settings

- Implementation context that values the personal and practical relevance of cognitive assessment and treatment
- Integration of cognitive health into the vocabulary of wellness and recovery

What is your role?



Three Pillars of Cognitive Health Services

Ask

- Understand how good cognitive health supports wellness and recovery
  - How does cognitive health align with a participant's goals and values?

Assess

- Assessment of cognitive health needs
  - What would be helpful for the participant to improve?
  - How will improving memory, attention, and critical thinking skills be useful?

Address

- Integrate appropriate cognitive health services
  - Psychoeducation
  - Strategy coaching
  - Skills training

Use a Cognitive Lens

Case Example

- At age 8, Chris was diagnosed with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and grew up feeling as though he was always doing something wrong and was not as smart as other kids. He loved playing video games and became interested in coding in high school. Midway through college while studying computer science, Chris experienced a psychotic episode. Following hospitalization, Chris started working with an OnTrack CSC team.
- Now at age 22, Chris lives at home with his mom. He is back in school and says he is motivated to finish, with the goal of eventually working in information technology. However, he is falling behind and in danger of not completing a required class.
- Chris's mom works full-time. She is concerned because when she comes home from work, she finds he has not moved from the couch and has played video games for much of the day.

Case Example Question

Which of the following is most likely true of Chris?

A. He is lazy

B. He is confused about what he wants to do with his life

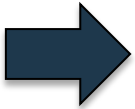
C. He is depressed

D. He is struggling with focus, prioritization, and motivation

Ask About Cognitive Health

- Would a focus on Chris's cognitive health help him follow through with his goals?
- Identify the value of good or better cognitive health

Assessing Cognitive Health Needs



Ask

- Understand how good cognitive health supports wellness and recovery
  - How does cognitive health align with a participant's goals and values?

Assess

- Assessment of cognitive health needs
  - What would be helpful for the participant to improve?
  - How will improving memory, attention, and critical thinking skills be useful?

Address

- Integrate appropriate cognitive health services
  - Psychoeducation
  - Strategy coaching
  - Skills training

Example of Assessing Cognitive Health Needs

Self-Assessment of Cognitive Functioning

1. Would it be helpful to you if you remembered better what you've read, heard, learned? Or about appointments, events, things to do?

No 0 Yes 1

2. Would it be helpful to you if you could concentrate better or stay focused over a longer period of time?

No 0 Yes 1

3. Do you think you could accomplish more if you could stay more organized, plan ahead, or manage your time better?

No 0 Yes 1

4. For any of those items you answered "yes", do you feel this is a change from an earlier time in your life?

No 0 Yes 1

4.a. When did you notice the change?

I did not notice a change	Over the last few months	Over the last year	Over the last few years
0	1	2	3

4.b. Do you have some ideas about why the change occurred (why remembering, paying attention, or being organized is harder now)?

Select those that apply:

- Mental health issues
- Sleep changes
- Started taking medications or medication changes
- Life stress
- Substance use
- Neurological illness or injury
- Don't know

5. Would you like to learn ways to address any of the issues described above?

No 0 Yes 1

Source: NYSP OnTrack Manual Template

- Use a positive frame
- Emphasize functional recovery over deficit
- Understand the time course of any difficulty, and identify factors that might affect cognitive health
- Understand how cognitive health is prioritized

Collateral Information

- Team member observations
- Family and friends
- Educational history
  - School records, teachers, guidance counselors, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
  - Previous assessment
  - Prior diagnoses (ADHD, learning disability)

Assessment and Shared Decision Making

- Determine next steps by using shared decision making with the participant
  - Are cognitive health challenges present that impact daily life and/or cause distress?
  - Can modifiable factors be addressed with a reasonable impact on daily cognitive functioning?
  - Would testing help to better understand cognitive strengths and areas of need for intervention planning?
  - Is cognitive health a current priority?
- Assessment is dynamic—evaluate participant preferences over time

Formal Assessment

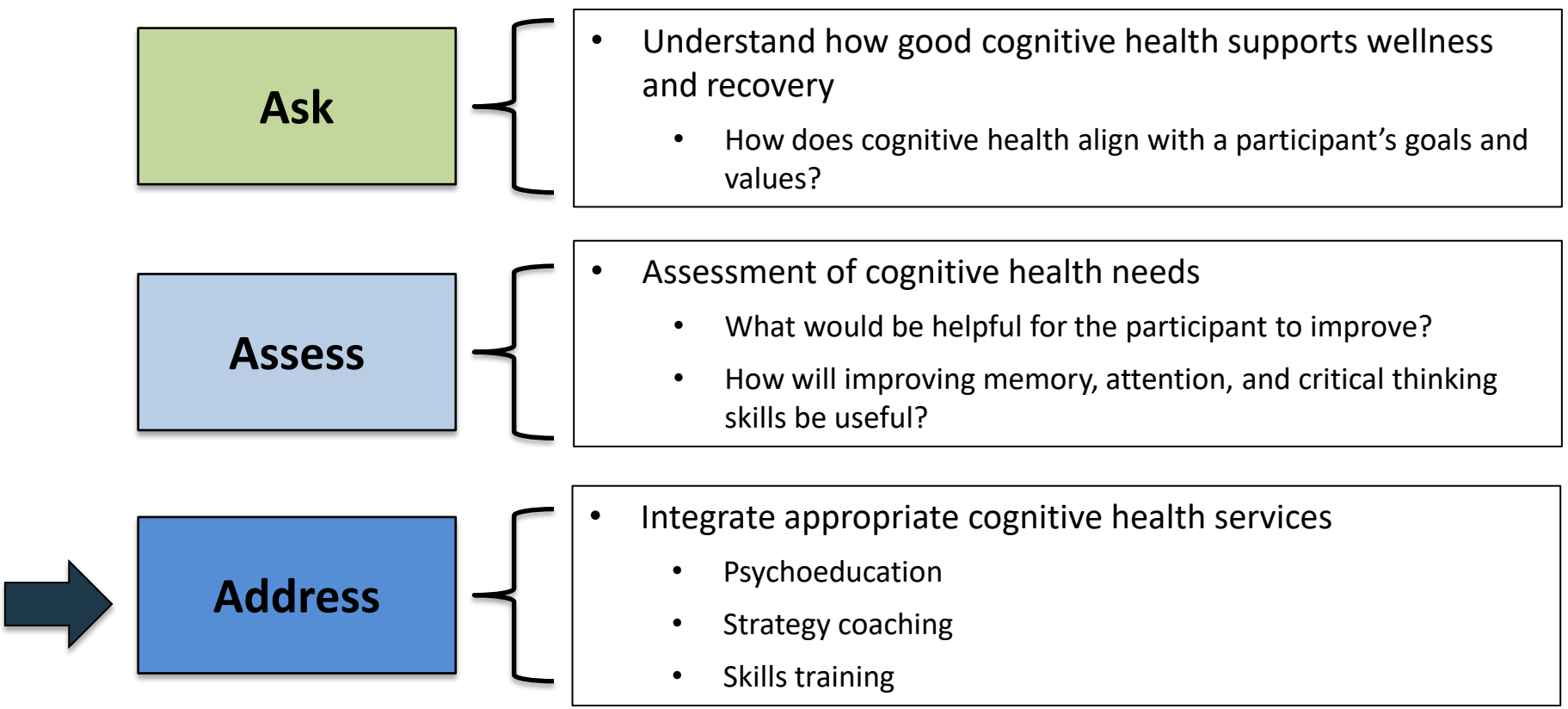
- Brief cognitive assessment
  - Brief Assessment of Cognition in Schizophrenia (BACS)
  - Screen for Cognitive Impairment in Psychiatry (SCIP)

- Comprehensive cognitive assessment
  - Complex diagnostic questions
  - Possible testing for academic accommodations
  - More nuanced treatment planning

Feedback and Discussion

Query	Clinical Objectives
You've identified that ____ is not an issue for you. How has having a strong ability to ____ been helpful to you?	• Highlight perceived strengths • Link cognitive health to functioning in everyday life
You've identified that ____ is an area in which you'd like to get better. Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. Can you provide an example of how this impacts you in your everyday life?	• Normalize the experience of cognitive challenges • Link cognitive health to functioning in everyday life
It's great that you feel that this is an area of strength. Do you ever feel that ____ could be even better than it already is? How do you think that might help you?	• Allow for the possibility of discussing cognitive intervention even if problems are not identified • Link cognitive health to everyday life and recovery goals

Address Cognitive Health Needs



Psychoeducation

- Define SMARTER skills
- Give examples of SMARTER skills in daily life
- Connect cognitive health to mental and physical health
- Express optimism and hope that cognitive health can be improved

SMARTER

Ways to

Stronger

Cognitive Health

Develop Cognitive Awareness

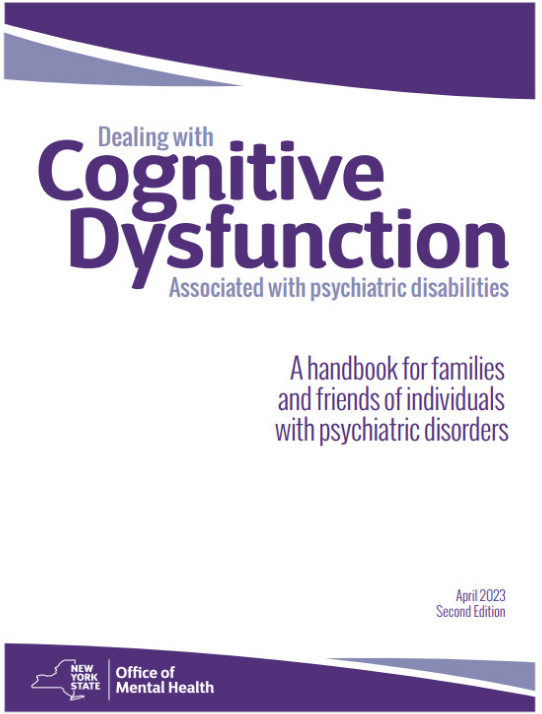
- What makes it easier or harder to use a cognitive skill in daily life?
  - Mood or symptoms
  - Motivation
  - Distractions in the environment
  - Support person(s)
  - Anxiety or stress

- It is understandable to experience difficulty with thinking skills in certain circumstances
  - Problem solve and plan to make allowances for these factors in daily life

Family Psychoeducation

- Handbook for families and friends
  - How do mental health conditions affect cognitive processes and functioning?
  - How can memory, attention, and critical thinking skills be supported by structuring the environment, using aides, and providing encouragement and emotional support?

- No-cost, easily accessible, and easy-to-use resource
  - Can be used independently or in combination with another method
  - Available in English and Spanish



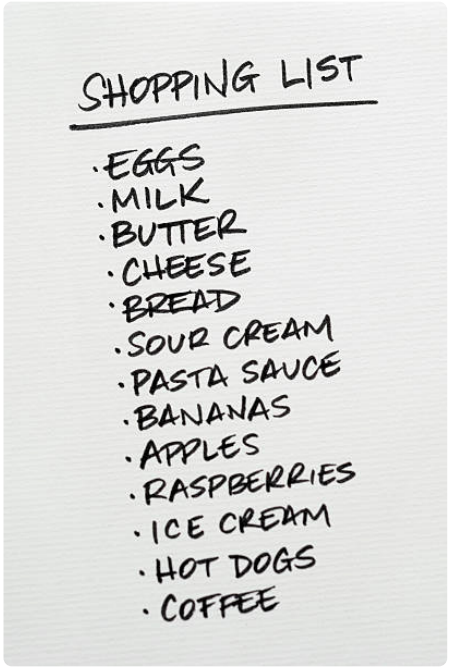
Source: Medalia & Revheim, 2023

Pharmacologic Optimization

Psychiatric care providers play a role

- Consider primary versus secondary causes of cognitive difficulties, including possibility of medication impact
  - Evaluate dose, medication type, or both
  - Change timing to alleviate impact of sedating effects
  - Reduce polypharmacy
  - Minimize anticholinergic burden
- When making any medication change, consider the potential impact on symptoms versus side effects

Strategy Coaching



Many people use strategies in daily life without realizing it, but **not all do**, and not all people choose strategies **effectively** or **consistently**

Strategy coaching involves generating and selecting useful, strategic approaches based on:

- Areas of strength
- Knowledge of what works
- Type of task

Memory Strategies

Strategy	What It Is
Verbalization/Self-talk	Say aloud or to yourself: cues, items on a list, or steps of a task
Rehearsal	Repeat information or steps of a task to gain mastery
Chunking	Divide a large amount of information into smaller groups to make the information easier to process and remember
Creating associations	Link words or concepts together that make sense

Information Processing Aids

- Facilitate more efficient and accurate information processing

Workarounds

- Offload the cognitive demand
  - Write things down
  - Create habits or routines
  - Use alarms
  - Use sticky notes

Attention Strategies

Strategy	What It Is
Self-talk	Say aloud or to yourself: cues, items on a list, or steps of a task
Information reduction	Cover up some information to reduce distraction
Multimodal presentation	Process information in multiple modalities (listen to information while reading it, take notes)

Information Processing Aids

- Facilitate more efficient and accurate information processing

Workarounds

- Reduce distractions
- Use a timer for a set period
- Take breaks
- Use a sensory tool (for example, fidget spinner, stress ball)

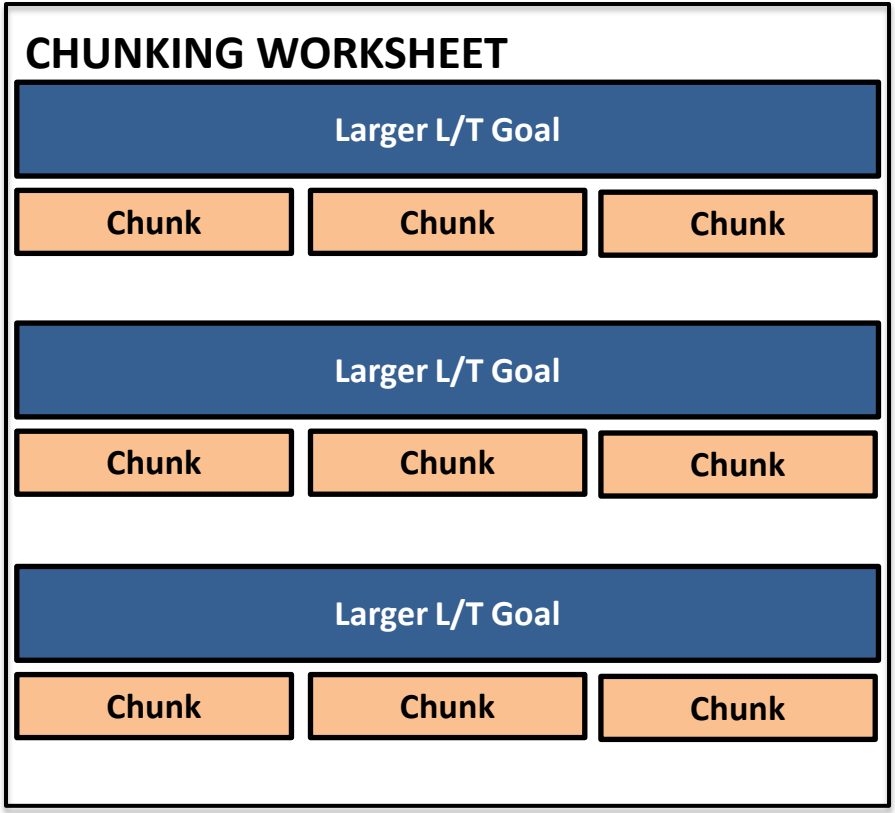
Planning and Organization

Task Organization

- Weekly goal setting
- Chunking by time versus task

Prioritization and Time Management

- Calendars and to-do lists
- Time estimation plus time padding



Source: Teach Recovery, 2023

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Compensatory Cognitive Training

CogSMART: Cognitive Symptom Management and Rehabilitation Therapy

- Evidence based
- Manualized
- Tools and strategies to accomplish cognitive tasks in everyday situations
  - Attention, learning and memory, and executive functioning
  - Weekly sessions held individually or in groups
  - Worksheets, in-session practice, and homework reinforce learning and transfer
  - No computers required
  - Translated into multiple languages

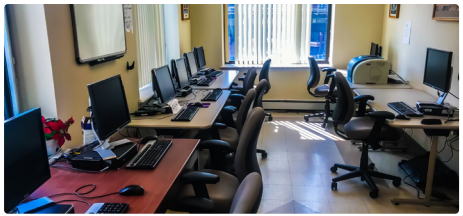
Cognitive Remediation

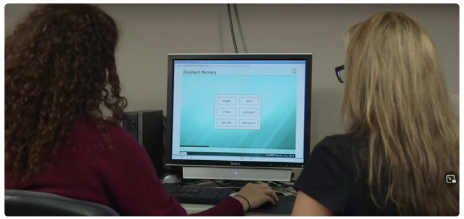
Select computer-based exercises to target and strengthen thinking skills while a trained therapist provides coaching and support.

- Cognitive targets range from basic sensory processes (auditory, visual) to fundamental processes (attention, memory) to complex skills (problem solving)
- Bridging techniques are used to link cognitive skill use to real-world functioning

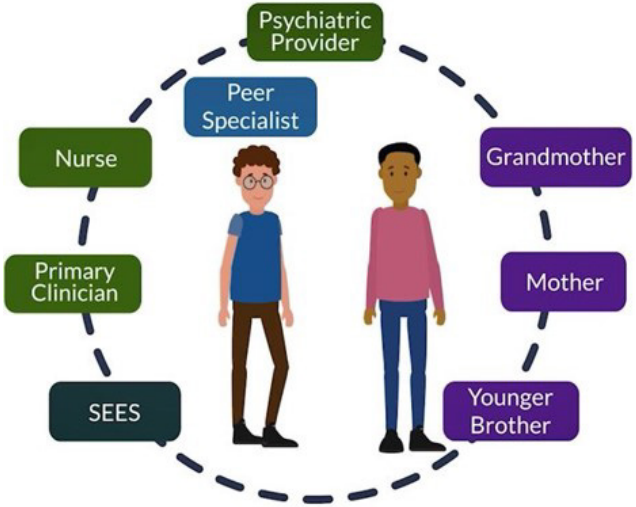
Identify and carefully evaluate resources for client and programmatic fit.

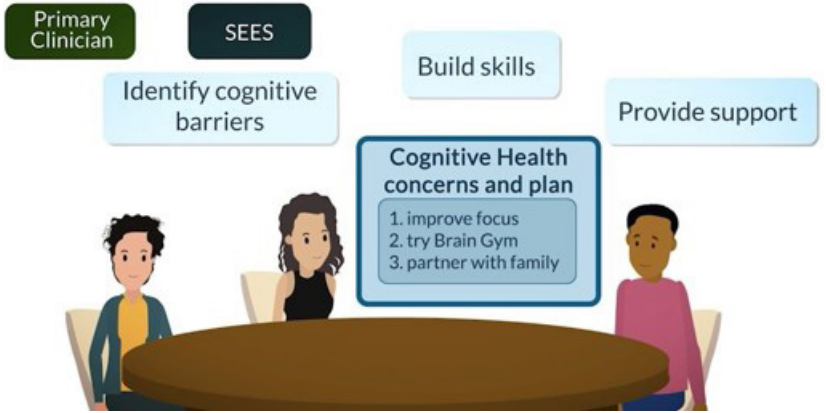
- Structured as a small group therapy
- Twice-weekly 1-hour sessions over 12–15 weeks





All Team Members Play a Role





SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Putting It All Together

Cognitive health services in the context of CSC require a model that:

- Integrates cognitive health care with personalized recovery-oriented services
- Values multiple perspectives and collaboration across team member roles
- Uses shared decision making
- Uses a workflow that incorporates the three pillars of cognitive health services and fits the implementation context
- Meets clients' needs and preferences

Webinar Feedback

tinyurl.com/esmi-coghealth

Your feedback on today's webinar is greatly appreciated!

Upcoming ESMI TTA Center Webinars

- **The Role of Peers in Early Serious Mental Illness Programs**

  Date and Time: May 13, 2025, 12 p.m. ET

- **Supporting Young Adults Experiencing Early Serious Mental Illness in the Shift from Child to Adult Mental Health Services**

  Date and Time: June 17, 2025, 12 p.m. ET

- **Findings from the First Cohort of SAMHSA's Clinical High Risk for Psychosis Grantee Program**

  Date and Time: July 15, 2025, 12 p.m. ET

Thank You

SAMHSA's mission is to lead public health and service delivery efforts that promote mental health, prevent substance misuse, and provide treatments and supports to foster recovery while ensuring equitable access and better outcomes.

ESMITACenter@westat.com

samhsa.gov/technical-assistance/esmi-tta

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) ● 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)