



## *PIER Research and Innovation: FOR THE FUTURE OF MAINE'S YOUTH*

*Research shows that in the emergence of major mental illness there is a small window of opportunity during which intervention and team-based care can fundamentally improve the course of a young person's life.*

Every year approximately 100,000 adolescents and young adults in the U.S. experience their first episode of psychosis — when thoughts, perceptions, or mental processing are disrupted and they lose touch with reality. During a period of psychosis, a person may suffer from delusions and hallucinations which can significantly impact their daily lives and the lives of their family and friends too.

Delays in detecting mental illness in teens and young adults can increase the risk of suicide, substance abuse, homelessness, incarceration, or long-term physical and mental health issues. Too often a person's mood or behaviors may be mistakenly attributed to adolescent development or current conditions instead of warning signs of psychosis.

*"Having seen the experience from the outside watching our son go through it, I don't think anyone should have to go through that if it is possible to avoid it."*

– PIER Parent

If recognized early, psychosis can be treated and individuals can live fulfilling and productive lives. For this reason, Maine Medical Center is working hard to provide early intervention to teens and young adults with psychotic-spectrum concerns: identifying, engaging, and treating them during a critical period of brain development and before the window of opportunity starts to close.

### **What Is the PIER Program?**

As the only early psychosis program in the entire state, Maine Medical Center's Portland Identification and Early Referral (PIER) Program is a leader in community education, research, and family-focused treatment.



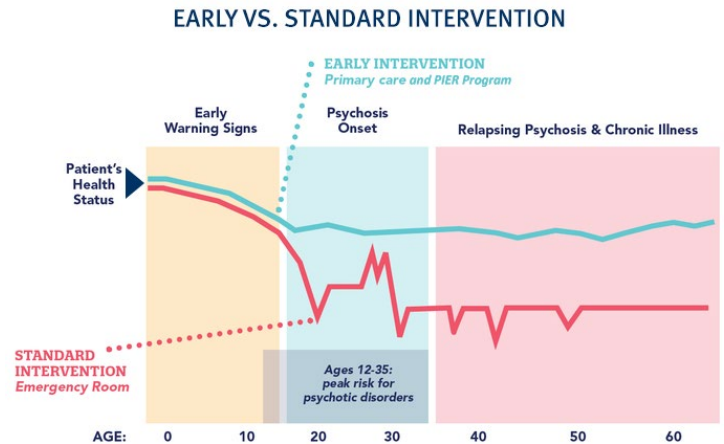
Since 2000, the PIER Program has been providing and testing treatments for people between the ages of 14 to 26 at imminent risk for and within one year of onset of psychosis. Utilizing Coordinated Specialty Care (CSC) — an evidence-based treatment model — our team of specialists create a personalized treatment plan with each participant through shared decision-making. Our young participants have access to these specially-trained professionals who offer: individual therapy, family therapy, group therapy, medication management, care management, education/employment support, and peer support.

## The Impact of Educating, Innovating, and Caring

The PIER Program is unique in that our team works together every day to provide participants *and their families* with the most cohesive care. We know that early prevention and treatment can halt or reduce symptoms and we believe that everyone deserves access to high-quality care, no matter where they live in Maine.

We have conducted hundreds of community presentations to raise awareness about early psychosis — reaching more than 3,000 Maine mental health professionals, primary care providers, high school and college staff and students, police officers, juvenile justice professionals, mobile crisis personnel, and others. A graduate from our program shares their personal story at *every* event.

Our research team is also pursuing new knowledge to improve early detection and care. The graph at right (adapted from [psychosisscreening.org](http://psychosisscreening.org)) shows the effects of early identification and intervention.



*“The PIER Program has allowed me to move forward and have this normal functioning life that I honestly don't think I would have had if it weren't for PIER. The treatment and the team allowed me to stay in school and find a career that's incredibly fulfilling. The program saved my life”.*

– PIER Participant

## The PIER Research & Innovation Fund

The PIER Research & Innovation fund was established by a grateful family upon completion of the PIER program to support initiatives dedicated to innovative delivery of services, research, and broader access to care for families throughout Maine.

At present — with heightened mental health needs and inadequate reimbursement from private or public insurance — funding is more crucial than ever to create the infrastructure and strengthen our ability to:

### Raise Awareness

Early intervention depends on early detection; and early detection requires regular community outreach and active and collaborative relationships with primary care, schools, mental health providers, public health, and programs working with underserved youth. Together we can save lives, developing and disseminating important resource materials for community providers and young people and their families about the warning signs and treatment options for psychosis.

Peer and family partners with lived experience of psychosis are central to this effort. We want to bring their voices into *all* aspects of programming, strengthening our advisory council, and creating a structure for input into research development and program evaluation. Peers and family partners are uniquely equipped with knowledge to help others. We hope to empower them by developing the guidelines and curricula to give them the necessary leadership and advocacy skills.

### Improve Access to Care

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a rapid expansion of our telehealth capacity. To reach people in the more remote areas of our state, we must continue expanding. Funding will help us to increase our staff and secure consultation with national experts to develop a model of rural coordinated specialized care integrating telehealth with local provider services.

We must also address barriers to treatment — such as cost, stigma, cultural norms, distance, or misinformation. Through innovative strategies such as our SEE-ME Maine project, PIER clinical and research staff are working closely with primary care practices on recognizing the signs of psychotic-spectrum experiences, increased screening, and improved assessment and engagement of identified youth. With additional funding, this could become a state-wide model: enhancing earlier detection and improving access to care for both urban and rural residents during the brief window of opportunity.

### Research Opportunities

Establishing a research infrastructure will allow us to pursue federal, state, and foundation funding for other innovative ideas as well. These include studies to better understand the psychosocial and biological contributors to risk and resilience, to better identify personalized treatment targets, and to test strategies for reducing the health disparities for individuals impacted by psychosis. Funding could support investment in one of the digital platforms now available for monitoring individual and program outcomes.

Funding is a decisive factor in the PIER Program’s ability to serve hundreds of families when the timing is most critical. Generous donations can also be leveraged to act as a catalyst for more comprehensive research, statewide/national training opportunities, and expanded clinical excellence.



### **Together with your help, PIER can continue to reach teens, young adults, and their families before the window of opportunity closes**

As mental health referrals increase, with many components of the model still not billable, we rely on philanthropic support from our community. Your gift will ensure that the PIER Program can continue offering essential aspects of care, expanding PIER’s reach through innovation, and assuring those who most need our care that they will not have to delay or forgo it. Join us in our efforts to improve the course of a young person’s life today.

**If you would like to support this and other initiatives at MMC, please contact the Philanthropy Department at (207) 662-2669 or visit [www.mmc.org/pierfund](http://www.mmc.org/pierfund).**