



SENATOR JIM BEALL

SB 803 Peer Support Specialist Certification Act of 2020

Principal Co-author Assemblymember Marie Waldron

Co-authors Senator Wiener and Senator Wilk

Assemblymembers Aguiar-Curry, Arambula Aguiar-Curry, Grayson, Ramos and Wicks

BACKGROUND

A peer is a person who draws on lived experience with mental illness and/or substance use disorder and recovery, bolstered by specialized training, to deliver valuable support services in a mental health and/or substance use setting. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and 48 states have a certification process in place or in development for mental health peer support specialists. Demand for peer services is growing, but there is no statewide scope of practice, training standards, supervision standards, or certification in California.

STATEWIDE CERTIFICATION

Statewide certification would ensure quality, standardization, and effectiveness of peer support services across California's 58 counties.

The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid released guidance in 2007 for establishing a certification program for peers to enable the use of federal Medicaid (Medi-Cal in California) financial participation with a 50% match. Yet California lags behind the nation in implementing a peer support specialist certification program.

THE VALUE OF PEER SUPPORT SERVICES

Studies demonstrate that use of peer support specialists in a comprehensive mental health or substance disorder treatment program helps reduce client hospitalizations, improve client functioning, increase client satisfaction, alleviate depression and other symptoms, and diversify the mental health workforce. Often, peers serve as the first and sustained point of contact for people living with mental illness and assist them with the treatment they need at the earliest moment.

Peer support can divert people from emergency services and ensure patients receive a continuum of care, saving substantial costs of treatment and improving health

outcomes. Research shows that peers contribute to the ability of people with mental illness and substance abuse to obtain education and employment, contributing to the California economy rather than depending on social safety nets alone.

Prestigious organizations such as CMS, SAMSHA, and the Institute of Medicine among many others have identified peer delivered services offered through a certified peer specialists as being valuable services. While increasing consumer wellness, the use of peer specialists is decreasing costs. Data shows a clear return on investment when peers are part of the mental health system.

THIS BILL

SB 803 establishes a statewide certification program for peer support specialists and provides the structure needed to maximize the federal match for peer services under Medi-Cal. The program defines the range of responsibilities and practice guidelines for peer support specialists, specifies required training and continuing education requirements, determines clinical supervision requirements, and establishes a code of ethics and processes for revocation of certification.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Carrie Holmes
Office of Senator Jim Beall
(916) 651-4015
Carrie.Holmes@sen.ca.gov

SPONSORS

California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations (CAMHPRO)
County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California (CBHDA)
County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors
Steinberg Institute