



SENATOR JIM BEALL

SB 803 Peer Support Specialist Certification Act of 2020

Principal Co-author Assemblymember Marie Waldron

Co-authors Senators Mitchell, Wiener, and Wilk

Assemblymembers Aguiar-Curry, Arambula, Cristina Garcia, Grayson, Ramos, Reyes, Weber, 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 COVID-19 pandemic and economic downturn pose a serious threat to the mental health of Californians. Calls to suicide prevention lines from California were up 40 percent in March. Calls to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's disaster distress hotline increased 891 percent from March 2019 to March 2020. 891 percent. The need for mental health response will continue to grow even as the state of emergency subsides. The sharp rise in mental health disorders triggered by COVID-19 is likely to linger long after the end of the pandemic itself. For some people, it will create enduring mental health issues.

THE ROLE OF PEER SUPPORT

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. That's why 48 other states have adopted peer certification programs. They have established clear, basic standards for peer training and they get a federal match for the services. California is behind and needs to catch up.

The pandemic is revealing racial and economic disparities that have long existed. The peer workforce tends to be more diverse than the existing behavioral health workforce. Peers play a unique role that no other provider type can. They are trusted community members who have been through crisis and can guide others. They can serve the most pressing needs, such as supporting individuals who are homeless or struggling with navigating care systems, because they have been there.

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.

Federal agencies such as CMS and SAMSHA, and prestigious organizations like the Institute of Medicine have identified services offered through a certified peer specialists as being valuable and effective. While increasing consumer wellness, the use of peer specialists decreases costs. Data shows a clear return on investment when peers are part of the mental health system.

STATEWIDE CERTIFICATION

Statewide certification would ensure quality, standardization, and effectiveness of peer support services across California's 58 counties, and allow federal dollars to be drawn down. 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.

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

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

SUPPORT

Alameda County District Attorney
Alum Rock Counseling Center
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)
American Nurses Association/California
Association of California Healthcare Districts
BestNow, Alameda County Network of Mental Health Clients
California Alliance of Children and Family Services
California Association of Healthcare Districts
California Association of Local Behavioral Health Boards & Commissions (CALBHB/C)
California Association of Public Hospitals & Health Systems
California Association of Veteran Service Agencies
California Behavioral Health Planning Council
California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals
California Council of Community Behavioral Health Agencies (CBHA)
California Pan-Ethnic Health Network
California Psychiatric Association
California Psychological Association
California School Nurses Association
Children Now
County Behavioral Health Directors Association
County of Santa Clara
County of Ventura
Crestwood Behavioral Health
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Disability Rights California
Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office
Mental Health America of Los Angeles
National Association of Social Workers, California
Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
California State Council of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU California)
Solano County Mental Health Advisory Board
Western Center on Law & Poverty, Inc.

