



Senator Mark Leno
State Capitol Room 510
Sacramento CA 94814

July 7, 2015

Support – SB 614 (Leno) as amended July 6, 2015

Dear Senator Leno;

The California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations (CAMHPRO) is a nonprofit statewide organization consisting of local consumer-run organizations and programs. CAMHPRO's mission is to transform communities and the behavioral health care system throughout California to empower, support, and ensure the rights of consumers, eliminate stigma, and advance self-determination for all those affected by mental health issues by championing the work of consumer-run organizations.

CAMHPRO joins the strong tide of California organizations, counties and people advocating for growth in high quality peer support services and peer specialist career development in supporting SB 614, to bring peer certification to California. We support the July 6 amendments, as we believe they clarify and strengthen the bill.

In 2007, the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) sent a guidance letter to all State Medicaid Directors emphasizing, "peer support services are an evidence-based mental health model of care which consists of a qualified peer support provider who assists individuals with their recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders." CMS encouraged states to establish a state certification process for training, credentialing, supervision and care coordination. (CMS, SMDL #07-011) Thirty-four states have implemented State Peer Certifications. And most have tied State Peer Certification to the ability to bill Medicaid for Peer Specialist Services to enable leveraging of Medicaid funds. Until now California has been trailing in peer provider certification efforts.

Peer Support is a unique service. Peer Support is a relationship of mutual learning founded on the key principles of hope, equality, respect, personal responsibility and self-determination. The services provided are non hierarchical therapeutic interactions between people who have a shared lived experience of a behavioral health challenge.

Peer Support is provided to individuals or groups in a variety of settings, including but not limited to: peer operated centers and programs, community based organizations, County clinics, natural community settings including personal residences, community service agencies including schools, courts and primary care, and In-patient settings



Across California, peer services are already utilized in many of the above settings. However, as SB 614 states, there is no statewide scope of practice, standardized curriculum, training standards, supervision standards, or certification protocol. Very few of the Counties that do utilize peer support services even require training prior to hire. The benefits of Peer Certification for peer support are obvious. Peer certification

- Defines the service of peer support.
- Provides formal validation of the role of peer support.
- Standardizes the quality of services provided by Peer Support Specialists.
- Assures that practitioners receive standardized training and demonstrate competency.
- Provides a scope of practice that service recipients can benefit from.
- Can be utilized as a basis for the ability to bill Medi-Cal for services provided.
- Allows for portability of Certification to other counties in State

Numerous research studies support the efficacy and cost effectiveness of peer specialist services. Peer services over traditional services alone lead to less inpatient services, decreased symptoms, increased coping skills and life satisfaction, reduced overall ongoing need for mental health services, and decreased substance use.

Initially funded by Department of Mental Health and then OSHPD, California began an in depth and focused look at peer certification in 2011. Substantial work was done toward peer certification in the ensuing years, which includes researching peer certification across the country, holding five (5) Regional Stakeholder Forums, a statewide Summit, topic specific work groups, on-going monthly web calls, and culminating in seventeen (17) Recommendations for implementing peer certification in California. The momentum and growing support across the behavioral health field for peer certification has been building for the last four years.

California's time has come. Peer support is an evidence based practice, already used in many counties with expected growth in the future that needs to be legitimized by peer certification. In addition, SB 614 would enable California to receive federal funds for peer certification.

Do not hesitate to contact me for any reason at 510-681-6165 or szinman@camhpro.org

Sincerely,
Sally Zinman

Executive Director, California Association of Mental health Peer Run Organizations (CAMHPRO)

References

United States Department of Health & Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, Guidance Letter to State Medicaid Directors, SMDL #07-011, August 15, 2007. <http://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/SMDL/downloads/SMD081507A.pdf>

Cc: Assembly Member Ron Bonta, Chair, Health Committee
Assembly Health Committee Members