

## SB 906 (Beall & Anderson)

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Peer Provider Certification

Fact Sheet

### BACKGROUND

A peer provider 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. Across the nation, peer support programs have emerged as an evidence-based practice with proven benefits to both peers and the clients they assist. Peers can include people who have lived experience as clients, family members, or caretakers of individuals living with mental illness.

As noted by the California Mental Health Planning Council, California lags behind the nation in implementing a peer support specialist certification program.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and approximately 40 states have a certification process in place for mental health peer support specialists. Thirteen states have a certification process for SUD peer recovery coaches. 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 has not acted.

The Working Well Together Statewide Technical Assistance Center, a collaborative of peer and client-oriented organizations, has done substantive work on this issue in California, culminating in a final report and recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

Research is also clear that the use of a formal certification program to train peer supporters offers enormous benefits, including:

- Allowing providers to make use of the federal Medi-Cal match.
- Allowing for standardization of the peer support practice, to ensure the highest quality care.
- Establishing core competencies that allow certified peers to transfer skills across county lines.

Although the Department of Health Care Services anticipates there will be substantial growth in the demand for peer support specialists, there is no statewide scope of practice, training standards, supervision standards, or certification.<sup>4</sup>

### THIS BILL

SB 906, the Peer Provider Certification Act of 2018 has two primary goals:

First, it requires the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS) to establish a certification program. Among other things, 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.

The program provides discretion for DHCS to obtain technical assistance for development of the certification program, and authorizes DHCS to utilize Mental Health Services Act funding and Workforce Employment and Training Program resources to establish the program.

Secondly, SB 906 authorizes DHCS to amend the State's Medicaid Plan to add peer support providers as a provider type within the Medi-Cal program, and to seek federal waivers or state plan amendments as necessary.

The bill expresses the intent of the Legislature that the program will provide increased family support, a fuller continuum of wraparound services, and an individualized focus on clients to promote recovery and self-sufficiency.

### SUPPORT

Steinberg Institute (Sponsor)  
California Youth Empowerment Network  
Mental Health America of California  
Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC)

<sup>4</sup> UCSSF, Medi-Cal 1115 Waiver Renewal Workforce Work Group paper, December 31, 2014.

<sup>1</sup> February, 2015, Peer Certification: What Are We Waiting For?

<sup>2</sup> Final Report: Recommendations from the Statewide Summit on Certification of Peer Providers, Working Well Together, 2013

<sup>3</sup> Chinman et al, Peer Services for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness: Assessing the Evidence, Psychiatric Services 65: 429-441, 2014.

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