

SB 614 (Leno)

As Introduced February 27, 2015

Peer Support Specialist Certification

FACT SHEET

SUMMARY

SB 614 establishes a Peer and Family Support Specialist Certification Program to be administered by the Department of Health Care Services (DHCS).

A peer is a person with lived experience in mental illness and recovery. Behavioral health includes mental health and drug and alcohol use disorders. This program will offer training and certification for peers to deliver services in behavioral health settings and would enable California to receive federal funds for this purpose. This bill would also amend California's Medi-Cal State Plan to include peers as a provider category.

Certification of peers serves several purposes:

- Establishes a standard of practice;
- Legitimizes the role by establishing recognized standards of practice and a code of ethics;
- Provides peer support employees with a professional voice;
- Qualifies services for federal financial participation of at least 50%; and
- Allows for portability from one county to another.

BACKGROUND

A peer provider is a person who uses his or her lived experience with mental illness and recovery, plus skills learned in formal training, to deliver services in a behavioral health setting to promote mind-body recovery and resiliency. Peers can include persons with lived experience as clients, family members, or caretakers of individuals living with mental illness.

As noted by the California Mental Health Planning Council, California is lagging behind in implementing a peer support specialist certification program.¹ The U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs and more than 30 states have already established programs for the certification of peers. 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.

Substantive work in California has been conducted by the Working Well Together Statewide Technical Assistance Center, a collaborative of peer and client-oriented organizations which culminated into a final report of recommendations.²

Studies demonstrate that peer support specialists reduce hospitalizations and

¹ February, 2015, Peer Certification: What Are We Waiting For?

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

hospital days, improve client functioning, increase client satisfaction, reduce family concerns, alleviate depression and other symptoms, and enhance client self-advocacy.³

California is embarking on its second year of the Medi-Cal coverage expansion which includes 12 million enrollees, many of whom are new to health care coverage and have mental health challenges. Peer support certification offers enormous benefits as coverage expands:

- Peers can be used as health-care navigators to facilitate access to needed services;
- Peer assistance improves treatment outcomes, and service treatment efficiency;
- Peers can facilitate integration and coordination of services across mental health and health care sectors; and
- Peers offer a strong ability to diversify and extend the mental health workforce.

Although the Department of Health Care Services anticipates that 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.⁴

SOLUTION

SB 614, The Peer and Family Support Specialist Certification Program of 2015, 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

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

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

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

Secondly, SB 614 authorizes DHCS to amend the State's Medicaid Plan to add peer support providers as a provider type within the Medi-Cal Program, and seek any 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

County Behavioral Health Directors Association (Sponsor)

- California Association of Mental Health Peer-Run Organizations (CAMHPRO)
- California Council of Community Mental Health Agencies
- Disability Rights California
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) California
- Steinberg Institute

CONTACT

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Version: April 6, 2015