

August 8, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate HELP Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate HELP Committee
217 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

The Restoring Hope for Mental Health and Well-Being Act of 2022 (H.R. 7666) passed the U.S. House of Representatives with overwhelming bipartisan support (402-20). Section 151 of this bill includes a provision that amends Section 520H of the Public Health Services Act by establishing a grant program to enable organizations who currently offer behavioral health peer support services to expand mental health peer-delivered services, including much needed access to virtual peer support. As the country continues to face extreme demand for all forms of behavioral health support, particularly among our nation's youth, we urge you to incorporate this provision into the behavioral health package that the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee is drafting. Access to peer support continues to be critically important for those struggling with a behavioral health condition.

H.R. 7666 would authorize \$13 million each year for fiscal years 2023 through 2027 to provide grants to eligible local, tribal, and national organizations to develop, expand and enhance access to mental health peer-delivered services, including virtual peer-support services and infrastructure. The grants would be used to:

- carry out workforce development, recruitment and retention activities to train, recruit and retain peer-support providers;
- build connections between mental health treatment programs;
- expand and improve virtual peer mental health support services; and
- conduct research on issues relating to mental illness and the impact peer support has on resiliency.

The importance of peer support is well-established and supported by rigorous evaluation and has been shown to be particularly helpful for veterans. During the COVID pandemic, demand for peer support grew and virtual peer support led by peer specialists was shown to be instrumental in helping individuals, especially when they could not access in-person support networks.

Peer specialists are trained and certified individuals who have achieved significant recovery and support individuals living with a behavioral health condition by modeling recovery, teaching life skills and offering support to people on their recovery journey. They provide people living with behavioral conditions a place to build a community, share experiences, discuss coping skills, and offer hope to one another. Participation in these groups is generally part of an individual's recovery and wellness plan, and is not meant to supplant treatment, but work in tandem with counseling and other clinical services.

We thank you again for your commitment to making access to peer support possible for all Americans, including veterans and those who have come to rely on virtual peer support communities. We look forward to working with you to ensure this important policy and funding is included in the HELP Committee package.

2020 Mom

ACTNow for Mental Health

American Association on Health and Disability

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Coalition on Social Isolation and Loneliness

Center for Law and Social Policy

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Lakeshore Foundation

Mental Health America

National Alliance on Mental

National Association of Peer Supporters

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

RI International