



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

May 15, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Senate Appropriations Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Committee
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tammy Baldwin
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
141 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education, and
Related Agencies
172 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Ranking Member Collins, Chair Baldwin, and Ranking Member Capito,

The below-signed organizations are writing to express our strong support for providing \$13 million in federal funding as part of the fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations process for a newly authorized program created under Section 1151 (Peer-Supported Mental Health Services) of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. This critically important program will expand access to virtual peer support services and training of peer specialists.

The organizations supporting this request represent individuals with lived experience, families, mental health providers, advocates, and other stakeholders committed to strengthening access to high-quality mental health care. This newly authorized program, administered by the Substance and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), will provide grants to consumer-run nonprofit organizations, Tribes and Tribal organizations, Urban Indian organizations, and Tribal consortia to provide peer-supported mental health services. The grants will enable local, tribal, and national peer-led organizations currently offering mental health peer support services to expand online behavioral health services and increase the reach of peer support programs to meet the heightened need in a post-pandemic environment. Specifically, the grants can be used to train additional peer specialists, expand access to virtual peer support groups, and enhance telecommunications infrastructure to meet the needs of people in larger geographic areas.

Federal data and academic research show an unmet need for behavioral health services across the United States even before the pandemic.^{1,2} According to SAMHSA, shortages in the behavioral health workforce are a key reason individuals with mental illness do not receive needed treatment. In recent years, there has been an increased focus on using peer support specialists— state-certified individuals who use their own recovery experience and training—to help address workforce shortages.³

Research has shown that evidence-based peer support services improve outcomes, including:

- Reducing recurrent psychiatric hospitalization for patients at risk of readmission,
- Improving individuals' relationship with their healthcare provider,
- Reducing outpatient visits, and
- Better engaging individuals in their course of treatment.⁴

In the early days of the pandemic, organizations that hosted virtual peer support groups saw registrations double and wait lists grow by 166%.⁵ While organizations attempted to meet the increased need, more support is needed. Post-pandemic, virtual support groups still experience long wait lists, and outreach to high-risk populations, including veterans, seniors, and individuals who experienced sexual trauma, is limited. Providing full funding for Section 1151 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 will deliver critical support to reach at-risk communities.

Thank you for your commitment to making access to virtual peer support possible for all Americans. We look forward to working with you to ensure full funding for this important program.

¹ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2017.0584>

² <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/press-releases/new-study-reveals-lack-of-access-as-root-cause-for-mental-health-crisis-in-america/>

³ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/695435.pdf>

⁴ https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/brss_tac/brss_tac_value-of-peers-2017

⁵ [DBSA Depression and Bipolar Alliance Experience](#)

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American Association on Health and Disability
American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
Lakeshore Foundation
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Peer Supporters
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
National Council for Mental Wellbeing
National Family Support Technical Assistance Center
National Federation of Families
Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health
SMART Recovery