

September 5th, 2023

RE: Amendment Requested for the SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act

Dear Ranking Member Cassidy,

The undersigned organizations thank you for your commitment to improving access and coverage of mental health and substance use disorders. We would like to provide the following feedback on the [SUPPORT for Patients and Communities Reauthorization Act](#):

Section 114. Peer Support Technical Assistant Center Reauthorizes the National Peer-Run Training and Technical Assistance Center for Addiction Recovery Support, which supports recovery community organizations and peer support networks that provide substance use disorder peer support services.

Response: The undersigned organizations strongly urge you to modify this section to expand the Training and Technical Assistance Center to include mental health.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) initially cited the efficacy of peer support programs in 2007, defining peer services as “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.”¹ In addition to the CMS, peer support has been nationally recognized by other federal agencies such as SAMHSA and HRSA and endorsed by organizations like Mental Health America.

Peer support services have been shown to improve mental health outcomes across private and public health systems by:

- Reducing symptoms and recurrent hospitalizations
- Improving self-efficacy, self-esteem, and social engagement
- Increasing social support and lasting recoveries²

¹ <https://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/smdl/downloads/smd081507a.pdf>

²<https://www.mhanational.org/peer-services>

Additionally, the White House announced its dedication to [expanding access to peer support](#) during Mental Health Awareness Month by releasing the National Model Standards for Peer Support Certification to improve consistency across peer support certifications and support the rapidly growing field of certified peer support specialists.

Lastly, it is important to note the co-occurrence of mental illness and substance use. The 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) found that 50.2% of adults with severe mental illness used illicit drugs in 2021, compared to 17.7% of adults with no mental illness.³ The long-term recovery from this co-occurrence is dependent on the availability of both mental health and SUD recovery services.

There is confusion among the mental health peer support community on what resources are available for technical assistance. Expanding the scope of the Training & Technical Assistance Center will eliminate this confusion and help the mental health peer workforce expand the employment of peers. We appreciate your consideration.

Please do not hesitate to contact Sarah Johaneck with questions or clarifications at Sarah.Johaneck@policycentermmh.org.

Sincerely,
American Association of Health and Disability
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
Lakeshore Foundation
Mental Health America
National Association of Peer Supporters
National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors
Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health
Schizophrenia & Psychosis Action Alliance

³ <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/2022-12/2021NSDUHFFRHighlights092722.pdf>