

Reps. Chu, Smith Introduce Bipartisan PEERS in Medicare Act to Bolster Mental Health Care

December 14, 2023 [Press Release](#)

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Today, Reps. Judy Chu (CA-28) and Adrian Smith (NE-03) introduced the **PEERS In Medicare (PEERS) Act** to provide for Medicare coverage of peer support services when delivered by federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, community mental health centers, and certified community behavioral health clinics. Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (NV) and Bill Cassidy, M.D. (LA) are introducing companion legislation in the U.S. Senate.

A peer support specialist is a person with “lived experience” who has been trained to support those who struggle with mental health, psychological trauma, or substance use. Peer support specialists do not take the place of mental health practitioners like physicians, psychologists, or social workers. Instead, they supplement these professionals as part of a larger care team to help someone struggling with substance abuse or mental health disorders on the road to recovery. Peer support services help reduce hospitalizations and behavioral crises, improve management of co-occurring physical conditions, help restore relationships and social connection, and ultimately save lives.

“Since my first job out of college with the Asian American Drug Abuse Program, I’ve fought for approaches to mental health and substance abuse that not only include prevention and treatment but recovery as well,” **said Rep. Chu**. “That is why I am leading this bill with Rep. Smith once again, because we want to help bolster the recovery care workforce in our country and expand peer support for Medicare recipients—to offer acceptance, understanding, and validation not found in many other professional relationships. By sharing their own lived experience and practical guidance, peer support workers help people to develop their own goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives for themselves.”

“One of the greatest mental health care challenges in our state and across rural regions of the United States is the shortage of professional mental health providers,” **said Rep. Smith**. “This bill would address this shortage by increasing access to trained and certified peer support specialists with a related or comparable diagnosis. Increasing access to peer support specialists has proven to be a low-cost, high-impact mental health care treatment option, especially in areas with limited or no access to traditional providers. I am glad to co-lead this bipartisan legislation, I thank Rep. Chu for her cooperation and will continue working on bettering mental health in our country.”

This legislation expands on a provision led by Reps. Chu and Smith that was included in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 that recognizes peer support specialists in Medicare as part of interdisciplinary integrated care teams and mobile crisis teams.

The bill is endorsed by: Mental Health America (MHA), the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), the National Association of Peer Supporters (NAPS), and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing (NCMW).

Click [here](#) for bill text.

Issues: [Health Care](#)

THURSDAY DECEMBER 14TH, 2023

CORTEZ MASTO, CASSIDY INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION TO EXPAND PEER COUNSELING SERVICES FOR SENIORS

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) and Bill Cassidy (R-La.) introduced bipartisan legislation to expand access to peer counseling services for Nevada seniors. Companion legislation is being introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Representatives Judy Chu (D-Calif.-28) and Adrian Smith (R-Neb.-03).

“Peer counseling is a proven, effective service that provides thousands of Nevadans with mental and behavioral health support each year,” **said Senator Cortez Masto.** “My bipartisan legislation make it easier for Nevada seniors across the state to access these essential programs.”

“Mental health is a critical part of a patient’s wellbeing,” **said Dr. Cassidy.** “Peer support should be another tool a senior has for mental health support. There is no silver bullet to fix our mental health crisis, but it’s part of a silver buckshot strategy.”

The *PEERS in Medicare Act of 2023* would enhance mental health care available to Nevada seniors by requiring Medicare to cover peer support services provided at rural health clinics, federally qualified health centers, community mental health centers, and certified community behavioral health clinics. This bill builds upon the success of legislation Cortez Masto passed last year to ensure primary care physicians could bill Medicare for peer support specialist services.

“Peer support services are lifesaving person-centered recovery services that have been used for decades to instill hope and assist a person in obtaining life goals and positive outcomes” **said Mary Giliberti, Mental Health America’s Chief Public Policy Officer.** “Allowing these services to be offered in community mental health centers and other community settings will be an important step toward advancing behavioral health prevention in the Medicare program by ensuring individuals with mental health and substance use conditions are able to take advantage of opportunities to live a full life and avoid crisis.”

“Peer support specialists are a critical part of the mental health and substance use care workforce. Their ability to provide recovery-oriented, person-centered care – often drawing from lived experience – is vital to ensuring people have crucial access to the full continuum of behavioral health care,” **said Chuck Ingoglia, President & CEO, National Council for Mental Wellbeing.** “By allowing peer support services to be reimbursed by Medicare in certain settings, this bill will not only expand access to life-saving care for Medicare beneficiaries but also help grow the mental health and substance use care workforce.”

Senator Cortez Masto has been a leader in the Senate on mental health issues. She helped fund and implement the 988 Suicide & Crisis lifeline, and passed bipartisan legislation to expand behavioral health crisis support services. She successfully fought



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Leading mental health organizations applaud introduction of Peers in Medicare Act in Congress

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2023

Act would allow reimbursement of peer support services

Washington, D.C. – Mental Health America (MHA), the National Association of Peer Supporters (NAPS), the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA), the Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW), and the National Council for Mental Wellbeing (NCMW) issued the following statement today:

“We are pleased to see the introduction in Congress of the Peers in Medicare Act, bipartisan legislation to provide for Medicare coverage of peer support services when delivered by community health centers and other peer services providers.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-LA), Congresswoman Judy Chu (D-CA), and Congressman Adrian Smith (R-NE) are again paving a way for individuals with mental health conditions and substance use disorders to access a full continuum of services that are person-centered and recovery oriented. This bill builds on top of their work in the 117th Congress recognizing peer support specialists in Medicare as part of interdisciplinary integrated care teams and mobile crisis teams. It does so by expanding

the ability to provide peer support services in community mental health centers, federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, and certified community behavioral health clinics.

Peer support specialists use their lived experience with a mental health condition and/or substance use disorder along with specialized training to complement and enhance another individual's recovery through the delivery of peer support services. Peer support services help reduce hospitalizations and behavioral crises, improve management of co-occurring physical conditions, help restore relationships and social connection, and ultimately saves lives.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) recognizes peer support as an effective, evidence-based practice and most recently released national model standards for certification of peer support specialists. The Veterans Health Administration has offered peer support services and continues to expand the number of peer support specialists it hires because of their ability to help veterans stay healthy. Additionally, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services issued 2007 guidance recognizing peer support services as a reimbursable service through Medicaid and 2019 guidance to Medicare Advantage plans encouraging the use of peer services as a non-opioid form of pain management.

As our nation responds to the growing mental and substance use needs, MHA, NAPS, NASMHPD, DBSA, ABHW, and NCMW strongly support this measure providing Medicare coverage for peer support services, and we urge swift passage of this important legislation."

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About Mental Health America

Mental Health America is the nation's leading community-driven nonprofit dedicated to promoting mental health and well-being, resilience, recovery, and closing the mental health equity gap. Mental Health America's work is driven by its commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of whole-person health, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention for those at risk; and integrated care, services and supports for those who need them. Learn more at [MHAnational.org](https://mhanational.org) (<https://mhanational.org/>).

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