

# SALINAS, MANN INTRODUCE BIPARTISAN BILL TO PROMOTE PEER-TO-PEER BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES

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Washington, DC –Today, U.S. Representatives Andrea Salinas (OR-06) and Tracey Mann (KS-01) introduced the bipartisan *Providing Empathetic and Effective Recovery (PEER) Support Act*, legislation that will expand access to peer-to-peer support services for those struggling with mental health and substance use disorders. U.S. Senators Tim Kaine (D-Va.) and Mike Braun (R-Ind.) introduced companion legislation in the Senate, and U.S. Rep. Tony Cárdenas (CA-29) is an original cosponsor of the House bill.

"Mental health and substance use disorders can be very isolating. That is why peer support specialists are so important. These are experts with lived experience, allowing them to build authentic connections with those who are struggling right now," said Rep. Salinas. "Our bill would break down barriers to entry in the profession and better support folks who are already practicing. The road to recovery is long and difficult—and this legislation would make that process a little easier by providing support from those who have already been through it."

"Addressing mental health and substance abuse across the country is crucial to revitalizing communities and restoring families," said Rep. Mann. "Peer-to-peer support enables those with shared experiences to work towards recovery. Training additional peer support specialists will meet an increased need in our communities and offer more lifesaving resources for individuals seeking recovery."

Research shows that peer-to-peer support services can significantly decrease rates of substance abuse and reduce re-hospitalization for individuals with mental illnesses. Peer support specialists are qualified experts with lived experience of mental illness or substance use who are trained to help others with their recovery. However, while peer support specialists have become an important part of treatment and recovery teams, peer support specialists face significant barriers to entering or staying in the profession. The *PEER Support Act* would help break down those barriers and make it easier for people to work as peer support specialists.

Specifically, the *PEER Support Act* would:

- Direct the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to revise the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system to create a distinct classification for peer support specialists to ensure accurate data reporting on the peer support specialist profession.
- Codify the Office of Recovery in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to:
  - Provide leadership in the identification of new and emerging issues related to recovery support services;
  - Research and publish best practice recommendations to States and entities that employ peer specialists for training, certification, and supervision of peer support specialists;
  - Support ongoing professional development of peer support specialists;
  - Issue recommendations on the creation of career pathways for peer support specialists.
- Instruct the Department of Health and Human Services, in partnership with the Department of Justice, to research states' criminal background screening processes that may pose barriers to the certification or practice of peer support specialists, and to provide evidence-based recommendations for overcoming those barriers.

In addition to Reps. Salinas and Mann, the legislation is endorsed by the following organizations: Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) Action, Mental Health America (MHA), National Association of Peer Supporters, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), NAMI Oregon, National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, American Psychiatric Association, Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness, National Federation of Families, Oregon Council for Behavioral Health, Anxiety and Depression Association of America, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, National Council for Mental Wellbeing, American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work, Psychotherapy Action Network, American Association on Health and Disability, SMART Recovery, National Behavioral Health Association of Providers, Faces and Voices of Recovery, Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance, Overdose Prevention Initiative, New Narrative, Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance, Willamette Health Council, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD), Lakeshore Foundation, RI International, Trust for America's Health, Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health, Ballard Health, International Certification & Reciprocity Consortium.

"Fifty-two million adults in the U.S.—or 1 in 5 adults—have a mental health condition and we lack the workforce to help provide much needed services. The Bipartisan Policy Center has recommended policies advancing peer support specialists and boosting recovery services and we believe the introduction of the *PEER Support Act* is a critical step toward addressing the shortage of behavioral health workers in this country," said Michele Stockwell, President, BPC Action.

"Mental Health America (MHA) applauds Congresswoman Andrea Salinas, Congresswoman Tracey Mann, and Congressman Tony Cardenas for introducing the *PEER Support Act*, a bipartisan, bicameral bill that would recognize and elevate the importance of lived experience and the peer support workforce," said Mary Giliberti, Chief Public Policy Officer, Mental Health America (MHA). "As our nation grapples with workforce shortages and challenges accessing care for mental health and substance use conditions, this bill moves us forward by providing funding for peer support services and authorizing a federal office to provide technical assistance and support recovery. MHA urges Congress to include this bill as part of a final Support Act package."

"Peer support specialists are a critical part of the mental health and substance use workforce and should be leveraged to address widespread workforce shortages, yet there are many barriers that impact the peer support profession," said **Hannah Wesolowski, Chief Advocacy Officer, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**. "Representatives Salinas' and Mann's *PEER Support Act* would help address these issues by providing professional development and resources to peer support specialists and removing entrance barriers to the profession. NAMI is proud to endorse the *PEER Support Act*."

"Peer support specialists provide important encouragement to people who are searching for recovery, and their lived and living experiences are critical in the fight to end the overdose crisis in the United States. We're proud to endorse the *PEER Support Act* and are grateful to Congresswoman Salinas and co-lead for championing peer support in Congress," said **Libby Jones, Program Director, Overdose Prevention Initiative at the Global Health Advocacy Incubator**.

To read the full text of this legislation, click [here](#).

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