

May 10, 2024

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Johnson
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Hakeem Jeffries
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Re: Markup and passage of S.3498/H.R.6748, the PEERS in Medicare Act

Dear Leader Schumer and Leader McConnell, Speaker Johnson, and Leader Jeffries:

We write on behalf of the undersigned national organizations representing consumers, families, mental health and addiction providers, law enforcement, and advocates, many of which are members of the Peer Support Workgroup of the Mental Health Liaison Group. We write to strongly support markup and passage of the Promoting Effective and Empowering Recovery Services (PEERS) in Medicare Act, S.3498/ H.R. 6748, bipartisan legislation which would provide Medicare coverage of peer support services when delivered by community health centers and other peer services providers.

Certified peer support specialists use their lived experience with mental health and / or substance use challenges 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 save 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 for decades 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 support services as a non-opioid form of pain management.

The PEERS in Medicare Act, introduced by Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and Bill Cassidy in the Senate and by Congresswoman Judy Chu and Congressman Adrian Smith in the House of Representatives, would have the following positive impacts:

Expand the types of organizations that can provide Medicare-covered peer support.

The bill would increase the organization types that would be able to provide peer support services covered by Medicare to include federally qualified health centers, rural health clinics, community mental health centers, and certified community behavioral health clinics.

Provide a clear definition of peer support specialist and peer support services.

The bill would define peer support services to mean emotional, informational, instrumental, and affiliational services that are designed to assist individuals in achieving recovery, integration in the community, self-empowerment, and self-determination. A peer support specialist would be defined as an individual who is recovering from a mental health or substance use condition and is certified as qualified to furnish peer support services under a certification process consistent with the National Practice Guidelines for Peer Supporters and inclusive of the SAMHSA Core Competencies for Peer Workers in Behavioral Health Settings.

We strongly believe that the passage of the PEERS in Medicare Act is crucial at a time when behavioral health care needs are at historic highs. The expansion of available peer support services will play an important role in addressing the current behavioral health crisis especially in rural and underserved areas and this bill will do just that.

If you or your staff have any questions, they can contact Caren Howard, Senior Director of Policy and Advocacy at Mental Health America at choward@mhanational.org or Tim Saubers, Executive Director at National Association of Peer Supporters at tim@peersupportworks.org. Thank you for your consideration of this legislation.

Sincerely,

Mental Health America

National Association of Peer Supporters

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

National Council for Mental Wellbeing

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Alliance for Rights and Recovery (formerly NYAPRS)

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

American Association for Psychoanalysis in Clinical Social Work

American Association of Psychiatric Pharmacists

American Association on Health and Disability

American Counseling Association

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

American Psychiatric Association

American Psychological Association

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

Association for Ambulatory Behavioral Healthcare (AABH)

Children and Adult with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder

Community Catalyst

Faces and Voices of Recovery

Families USA

Inseparable

International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC)

Lakeshore Foundation

Legal Action Center

Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners

National Association for Rural Mental Health

National Behavioral Health Association of Providers

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Federation of Families

National Health Council

National League for Nursing

NHMH - No Health without Mental Health

Police, Treatment, and Community Collaborative (PTACC)

Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health

Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association

Psychotherapy Action Network

Recovery Innovations, Inc.

The Carter Center

The Kennedy Forum

Youth Villages