

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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N.D. Dept. of Human Services receives federal funding to establish peer support program

BISMARCK – The federal government has awarded North Dakota and nine other states funding to improve the capacity and effectiveness of mental health systems that promote recovery. The North Dakota Department of Human Services intends to use the one-year \$105,000 award to implement a certified peer support program statewide.

“Three years ago, the department started conversations with consumers, advocates and other stakeholders about mental health recovery, and the services and supports needed to achieve and maintain recovery. Peer support is the next step in that effort,” said JoAnne Hoesel, director of the department’s Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division.

Hoesel said funds will be used to support stakeholder meetings, curriculum development, and training, and to develop a framework for providing peer support services statewide. Once implemented, trained individuals who are recovering from mental illness will serve as role models and provide guidance to others in earlier stages of recovery until those individuals can also take control of major decisions in their lives and participate more fully in society.

According to federal Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) officials, people who have achieved and sustained recovery can be a positive influence for others in recovery. Peers can help individuals identify services and supports and build community connections, which improve quality of life.

Western Sunrise, Inc., a consumer-run, nonprofit organization in Williston, N.D., is an example of a successful consumer-directed peer support model currently operating in North Dakota. Individuals further along in recovery serve as role models or mentors offering guidance to peers in earlier stages of recovery. Members also take a lead in advocacy efforts on behalf of consumers of the mental health system.

A North Dakota Peer Support Workgroup is being formed to help guide implementation. Members will include individuals in recovery, Mental Health Planning Council members, representatives from the N.D. Protection and Advocacy Project, Mental Health America, NAMI, psychosocial rehabilitation centers, and the Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Division and other divisions within the N.D. Department of Human Services.

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