

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | May 8, 2019

Department of Human Services, in collaboration with ND Cares Coalition, hosts first Military Peer Support Training

BISMARCK, N.D. – Military service members, veterans, their family members and survivors are attending military peer support training May 6-10 at the Holiday Inn, 3903 State St., in Bismarck. Hosted by the North Dakota Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division, in partnership with the ND Cares coalition, the goal is to train individuals who have lived experience and are in recovery from mental illness and/or substance use disorder and are committed to helping others. Once trained, these new peer support specialists can bring hope to others by sharing their experiences and promoting a sense of belonging.

According to the division, peer support has existed in the behavioral health field for decades; however, its rapid growth in recent years is due to the increasing evidence supporting its effectiveness. A peer support specialist uses his or her lived experience of recovery, plus skills learned in formal training, to deliver services in behavioral health settings to promote mind-body recovery and resiliency.

"In just over a year, more than 220 individuals across the state have been trained as peer support specialists, and 80 percent of those specialists reside in a rural community," said Behavioral Health Division Director Pamela Sagness.

The division contracted with Appalachian Consulting Group for its peer specialist training, which is a person-centered, goals-oriented, strengths-based curriculum. It is based on the belief that setting a person-centered goal is the heart of recovery.

Sagness said recovery is the process of gaining and maintaining control over one's life – and the direction one wants that life to go – after experiencing a mental health diagnosis, substance use disorder and all the losses associated with those challenges. Training participants learn core competencies, roles and tools for conducting peer support specialist work in their communities.

During the 2019 legislative session, North Dakota lawmakers included language in Senate Bill 2012 authorizing the division to establish and implement a certification program for peer support specialists. This work supports the recommendation from the North Dakota Behavioral Health System Study published April 2018 by the Human Services Research Institute.

"Peer support services have the potential to significantly improve the behavioral health system by offering recovery support services in the community and producing cost savings from a reduction in rates of hospitalization and incarceration," Sagness said.

The Department of Human Services' Behavioral Health Division is responsible for reviewing and identifying service needs and activities in the state's behavioral health system to ensure health and safety and access to quality services. It also establishes quality assurance standards for the licensure of substance use disorder program services and facilities and provides policy leadership in partnership with public and private entities. For more information, visit www.behavioralhealth.nd.gov.

#

CONTACT:

Heather Steffl | 701-328-4933
hsteffl@nd.gov

LuWanna Lawrence | 701-328-1892
lklawrence@nd.gov