

NEWS RELEASE | **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** | August 19, 2019

Peer support is a growing opportunity in North Dakota

BISMARCK, N.D. – Individuals are taking part in a five-day peer support specialist training this week, Aug. 19-23 at the Quality Inn in Bismarck. Attendees are learning the core competencies, roles and tools for providing peer support services at the training, which is sponsored by the North Dakota Department of Human Services.

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. 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.

“In the last 18 months, more than 260 individuals across the state have been trained as peer support specialists, and 80 percent of those specialists reside in a rural community,” said department Behavioral Health Division Director Pamela Sagness.

During the 2019 legislative session, North Dakota lawmakers passed several policies supporting the provision of peer support services.

- The division was authorized to establish and implement a certification program for peer support specialists.
- The current Free Through Recovery program was continued.
- The division was also authorized to expand the implementation of the Free Through Recovery program outside the criminal justice system, of which peer support is a key component.
- The department will develop a Medicaid state plan amendment to include peer support as a covered service for individuals of all ages with a significant mental illness, an addiction or a brain injury.

“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 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.

This work supports the recommendation from the [North Dakota Behavioral Health System Study](#) published April 2018 by the Human Services Research Institute.

The department's 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.

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CONTACT:

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

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