

Status of contracting to assist with recruiting behavioral health peers for black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5092; Section 215(53); Chapter 334; Laws of 2021
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Executive summary

The operating budget Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5092 was passed in April 2021 and signed into law by Governor Jay Inslee on May 18, 2021. The intent of Section 215 is to provide funding to identified strategies in overcoming identified gaps and barriers for people identified in need of recovery supports.

Section 215(53) provides funding on a one time basis solely for maintaining and increasing resources for peer support programs and for the authority to contract with an organization to assist with the recruitment of individuals to work as behavioral health peers with a specific focus on black, indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities.

“The authority must submit a preliminary report to the office of financial management and the appropriate committees of the legislature on the status of these efforts by December 1, 2021.”

Increasing culturally representative Behavioral health certified peer counselors

Background

Washington State began offering certified peer counselor training in 2005 and prides itself as one of the first 11 states to deliver peer services using Medicaid funding. Since 2005, the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) has trained and certified over 4700 certified peer counselors. Initially, peer support services were authorized for mental health treatment system of care only. In 2019, substance use disorder (SUD) peer support services were added to the Substance Use Disorder Medicaid state plan. The expansion of SUD peer support services has allowed for the training and certification of people with lived experience with SUD solely to become certified peer counselors.

Peer Counseling is a Medicaid service modality and agencies use peer support in a wide range of behavioral health programs, such as: mental health, substance use, youth, and family, supported housing, supportive employment, emergency rooms, and/or bridging programs. Peer supports are powerful services proven to be successful in promoting wellness and recovery.

Certified peer counselors (CPCs) work with their peers (adults and youth) and the parents of children receiving behavioral health services. CPCs draw upon their lived experiences to help peers find hope and support their recovery own recovery journey. The CPCs own lived experience uniquely equips them to provide support, encouragement, and resources to those with behavioral health challenges.

There was a significant need identified to increase the number of behavioral health certified peer counselors who will reflect the people they serve with a specific focus on BIPOC communities. This increase will allow for people to receive more culturally competent/appropriate peer services from certified peer counselors who are more representative of the communities they serve.

In addition to the efforts of this project to increase the recruitment of behavioral health peers with specific focus on BIPOC communities, the Health Care Authority (HCA) has been working in partnership with Kitara Johnson, a certified peer counselor and a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) expert, to create continuing education online modules for CPCs on DEI. This effort is being spearheaded through the Trueblood Settlement Agreement by the Enhanced Peer Services Program. This training is a supplement to "The Intersection of Behavioral Health and the Law," a training created for CPCs on how best to support people who are involved in the criminal court system.

Operationalizing the efforts

The HCA will be competitively soliciting through a request for proposal (RFP) to find an organization to assist with the recruitment of behavioral health certified peer counselors with a specific focus on BIPOC communities. Through this solicitation the HCA will request information on how the organization will specifically assist in increasing the number of culturally representative certified peer counselors and assist with the recruitment.

This procurement process began in October of 2021 and the anticipated execution date will be on or before March 1, 2022.

The remaining funds will be used to provide 35 seed grants to organizations who will be expanding their peer support program or who will add peer services to their book of business. Training will be provided to these agencies on operationalizing peer support services. These seed grants will be effective 7/1/22 through 6/30/2023.

Funding

The HCA was allocated on a one time basis \$1,762,000 in state dollars in the 2021-23 operating budget. HCA will be issuing the funds as shown below:

Item	Number	Each	total	Date
Contracting Organization (RFP)	1	\$712,000	\$712,000	Upon contract execution
Seed Grants	35	\$30,000	\$1,050,000	7/1/2021-6/30-2023
		Total	\$1,762,000	

Conclusion

The HCA competitively contract this body of work through a request for proposal (RFP) to find an organization to assist with increased recruitment of peer specialists who are from BIPOC communities. HCA is in process of stakeholdering with people with lived experience including youth peers, family peers, and adult peers to gain insight and receive input on their view as to what is needed to increase the number of peer specialist who will best represent the populations they serve.