



# California Behavioral Health Planning Council

ADVOCACY • EVALUATION • INCLUSION

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April 14, 2025

The Honorable Sharon Quirk-Silva

California State Assembly

1021 O Street, Room #4210

Sacramento, CA 95814

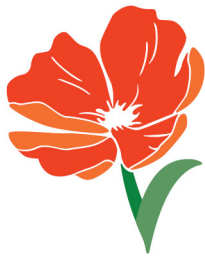
RE: **Support** for ACR 23

Dear Assemblymember Quirk-Silva,

The California Behavioral Health Planning Council (Council) is proud to support Assembly Concurrent Resolution 23, a resolution that would recognize the third week of May 2025 (Mental Health Awareness Month) as Mental Health Peer Appreciation Week. Pursuant to state law, the Council serves as an advisory body to the Legislature and Administration on the policies and priorities that this state should be pursuing in developing its behavioral health system. Our membership includes persons with lived experience of serious mental illness and substance use disorder, family members, professionals, providers, and representatives from state departments whose populations touch the behavioral health system. Their perspectives are essential to our view on the challenges and successes of behavioral health services and best practices in California.

As the behavioral health needs of Californians continue to rise, the inclusivity and participation of persons with lived experience of Serious Mental Illness (SMI) and Substance Use Disorder (SUD), or Peers, is more crucial than ever to the advancements of California's public behavioral health system. Peer voices are essential to assist local and statewide policy leaders in developing and advocating for policies that can effectively address the needs of beneficiaries, ensuring that the experiences of those who are most impacted are taken into consideration.

The invaluable lived experience of Peers' enables them to be assets in the behavioral health workforce and lends to their credibility in their communities as Medi-Cal Certified Peer Support Specialists. Peers can



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provide support to other persons with a Serious Mental Illness or Substance Use Disorder with navigating and accessing services through the public behavioral health system, and connecting individuals with community supports to help address other needs.

Furthermore, the integration and recognition of Peers within the behavioral health system supports the efforts to reduce stigma and discrimination of individuals with a Serious Mental Illness or Substance Use Disorder. As California leaders continue to engage in discussions for improving access and effective delivery of behavioral health services to all Californians, it is vital that the voice of Peers are prioritized and remain central in the ongoing dialogue.

For these reasons, the Council proudly supports ACR 23. If you have any questions, please contact Jenny Bayardo, Executive Officer, at (916) 750-3778 or by e-mail at [Jenny.Bayardo@cbhpc.dhcs.ca.gov](mailto:Jenny.Bayardo@cbhpc.dhcs.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

Tony Vartan  
Chairperson

cc: Dawn Adler, Legislative Director  
Heidi Strunk, Mental Health America of California