

HB 886 – Certified Peer Recovery Specialists – Coverage Under the Maryland Medical Assistance Program and Health Insurance and Workgroup on Certification

House Health Committee

February 19, 2026

Position: FAVORABLE

Mental Health Association of Maryland (MHAMD) is a nonprofit education and advocacy organization that brings together consumers, families, clinicians, advocates and concerned citizens for unified action in all aspects of mental health and substance use disorders (collectively referred to as behavioral health). We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in support of HB 886.

HB 886 will require Maryland Medicaid and certain commercial health insurance carriers to provide coverage for services provided by Certified Peer Recovery Specialists. In addition, it requires the Maryland Department of Health to convene a workgroup to study the certification process of peers.

Peer support for behavioral health is a well-established evidence-based practice. Multiple studies over many years have found that peer support produces tremendous benefits. Peer support:

- Improves quality of life
- Promotes engagement in services and supports and satisfaction with services and supports
- Improves overall health
- Decreases hospitalizations and inpatient days
- Supplements the ever-shrinking workforce of behavioral health professionals
- Reduces overall cost of care.¹

Recognizing the efficacy and cost-savings achieved by peer support services, most states have made certified peer support a Medicaid reimbursable service. As of 2024, 48 states provide Medicaid reimbursement for Certified Peer Recovery Specialists, and of those states, 41 reimburse for **both** substance use and mental health peers.²

It is not only state Medicaid agencies that have realized the many benefits of peer support. Several commercial health insurance carriers have begun to provide reimbursement for

¹ Sung-Nam Lee. Effectiveness of Peer Support Programs for Serious Mental Illness: A Systemic Review and Meta-Analysis. Healthcare (2024). <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38921293/>

² Certified Peer Support. Policy Center for Maternal Mental Health (2024). <https://policycentermmh.org/certified-peer-support/>

Certified Peer Recovery Specialists, including Aetna, Cigna, and BlueCross/BlueShield of Minnesota.³

Maryland lags far behind other states. Maryland Medicaid only began providing reimbursement for Certified Peer Recovery Specialists in March 2023, and then only for substance use peers in certain settings – opioid treatment programs; outpatient substance use programs; and substance use partial hospitalization programs. Other peers are reimbursed with grant dollars from state general funds.

Maryland could improve the lives of people with behavioral health conditions and realize significant savings by requiring Medicaid reimbursement for Certified Peer Recovery Specialists. In addition, requiring certain commercial health insurance carriers to also provide coverage for certified peers would further enhance recovery for Marylanders with mental health and substance use disorders.

Since certification of peers is relatively new in Maryland, the peer workforce would benefit greatly from a study of the state’s current certification process and ways to make the process more efficient and less cumbersome.

For these reasons, MHAMD supports HB 886 and urges a favorable report.

³ SAMHSA. Financing Peer Recovery Supports – Opportunities to enhance the Substance Use Peer Workforce (2024). <https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/financing-peer-recovery-report-pep23-06-07-003.pdf>