

Resolution of the Behavioral Health Commission Urging Immediate Implementation of Medical Billing for Peer Specialists in Accordance with California State Law (SB 803)

WHEREAS, the California State Legislature enacted Senate Bill 803 in 2020, mandating that counties establish a process for certifying peer support specialists to ensure Medi-Cal reimbursement for peer support services; and

WHEREAS, peer support specialists are trained professionals with lived experience in mental health and substance use recovery, bridging gaps in care through culturally appropriate, compassionate, and effective engagement with diverse communities; and

WHEREAS, currently, only two counties in California, including our own, have yet to implement medical billing for peer specialists under Medi-Cal, placing us out of compliance with state mandates and limiting access to essential services; and

WHEREAS, a delay in implementing medical billing for peer specialists until next year would further hinder the delivery of critical mental health services, including culturally and linguistically appropriate resources and supports for vulnerable populations especially people experiencing homelessness; and

WHEREAS, peer specialists are specifically trained in 17 core competencies established by Medi-Cal, which include multicultural sensitivity, client advocacy, and skills for navigating complex behavioral health systems; and

WHEREAS, peer specialists play a vital role in bridging multicultural and linguistic barriers, enabling warm handoffs to necessary services, supporting clients in maintaining appointments, and empowering individuals to exercise agency in their healthcare decisions; and

WHEREAS, peer specialists help to reduce barriers related to reading literacy, language, and cultural understanding, thereby fostering a more inclusive and accessible mental health system for clients of all backgrounds; and

WHEREAS, immediate implementation of medical billing for peer specialists will also support nonprofit organizations, peer-based programs, hospitals, institutions, and wellness centers in providing reimbursable peer-based services to Medi-Cal clients, improving service availability and continuity;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Behavioral Health Commission urges the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor to expedite the implementation of medical billing for peer specialists, in accordance with California SB 803, to ensure timely access to Medi-Cal reimbursable peer support services; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Commission advocates for continuous training and support for peer specialists to uphold the 17 Medi-Cal core competencies, making them an integral and billable part of our county's mental health system; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Commission calls for the prioritization of multicultural and disability-aware services, including resources tailored to the needs of clients across age groups, languages, and abilities, ensuring our mental health system is accessible, culturally sensitive, and legally compliant.

Presented to: Board of Supervisors and the Office of the Mayor

Dated: [Date]

Cited Sources: MHSF APPT SB803 Presentation 