



House Bill 544

Relating to creating a voluntary certification for recovery housing

One essential resource that enables individuals to achieve and maintain a life in recovery is recovery housing. Recovery housing refers to a range of housing models that should be considered part of the larger continuum of care for individuals seeking and in recovery from substance use conditions. Identified by the Texas Statewide Behavioral Health Strategic Plan as a major gap (Gap #12) in our public mental health system, access to housing is a critical issue across the state, but more so for those with substance use conditions.

Texans in recovery from substance use and co-occurring mental health diagnoses not only need access to recovery housing, but deserve access to *quality* recovery housing. This can be promoted by implementing and incentivizing voluntary recovery housing certification linked to nationally recognized standards. Individuals living in recovery housing have a greater chance of achieving long-term recovery than those who do not live in recovery-oriented environments.¹ Living in quality recovery housing has been associated with positive outcomes, including decreased substance use, reduced probability of relapse/reoccurrence, and lower rates of incarceration.²

HB 544 adopts a common definition of recovery housing and establishes a voluntary recovery housing certification program based on national standards. HB 544 directs HHSC to adopt standards that are consistent with nationally recognized standards. Since 2011, the National Alliance on Recovery Residences (NARR) has been developing and maintaining a national standard for all levels of recovery housing. Currently, 36 states use or reference the NARR Standards as their template for recovery residence credentialing and/or are developing credentialing boards utilizing NARR standards. It's also important to note that of the states that require credentialing of recovery residences, most require certification to obtain public funds, or to obtain referrals from state licensed SUD treatment programs.

HB 544 protects vulnerable populations and promotes cost-effective outcomes for individuals in recovery from substance use disorder using market incentives and education to promote the use of ethical and best practices. Certification not only empowers consumer choice, but provides reliable information for referrals and a means of reporting concerns. State and local governments are restricted from regulating recovery housing due to the fair housing rights of residents, which is why the National Council on Behavioral Health and Model State Drug Laws recommend voluntary recovery housing certification as the solution.

While concerns around the requirements of becoming certified may exist, it should be noted that there are different levels with varying standards. At the minimum, Level I certification does not have paid staff or clinical services, but is democratically operated. Further, Level I certification mainly focuses on the development and requirement of policies and procedures to: ensure the home operates with integrity, uses best business practices, ensure residents' rights, involves residents in the governance, provides an alcohol- and drug-free environment, responds to neighbor concerns, plans for emergencies like an overdose, and that the home is safe and habitable. Information on the different level requirements can be found at https://narronline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NARR_Standard_V.3.0_release_11-2018.pdf

Well operated recovery housing is a proven and cost-effective means of promoting recovery from substance use issues and cost savings. However, there has been rise in "bad players" given the current marketplace. Fraudulent business practices, patient brokering, kickbacks, and misleading marketing cause unethical referrals, financial exploitation, and inadequate support. HB 544 provides an opportunity to support recovery housing operators and improve the availability of quality recovery housing.

For more information, please contact:

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¹ National Council for Behavioral Health. (May 2017). Recovery Housing Issue Brief: Information for State Policymakers. Retrieved from https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Recovery-Housing-Issue-Brief_May-2017.pdf

² Ibid.