



House Bill 705

Relating to the provision of recovery community organization peer-to-peer services under Medicaid.

Substance use and overdose death trends in Texas have evolved and steadily increased in recent years. From June 2019 through June 2020, over 3,500 Texans lost their lives to an overdose.¹ For the first time, Americans' odds of dying from an accidental opioid overdose are higher than from a motor vehicle crash.² There is mounting evidence pointing to a continued and exacerbated substance use and overdose epidemic as a result of COVID-19.

One strategy that helps individuals with substance use concerns enter into and maintain recovery is the use of Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs). RCOs are peer-run and peer-involved “nonprofit organizations governed by the local recovery community. RCOs mobilize resources to help individuals, families, and communities. Based on local recovery community input, an RCO will provide various types of recovery support. This could be a recovery community center, recovery housing, recovery high school, recovery coaching, support groups, awareness campaigns, educations, events and/or activities.”³

The sole mission of an RCO is to mobilize resources within and outside of the recovery community to increase the prevalence and quality of long-term recovery from alcohol and other drug addiction. Peer-based recovery support services assist RCOs in achieving that mission.⁴

According to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), peer support services are an evidence-based model of care.⁵ Peer services are provided by qualified peer support specialists with lived experience of mental illness or substance use who, as a result of their recovery, training, and certification, are uniquely able to assist other individuals with their own recovery. Peer support services for those in recovery from substance use is an incredibly valuable asset to an individual’s recovery, as well as communities. In Texas, one long-term study focusing on substance use disorder peer specialists (also called recovery coaches) demonstrated exciting results. In total, recovery coaching saved \$3,422,632 in healthcare costs, representing a 72 percent reduction in costs over 12 months. The study further showed:⁶

- Housing status improved, with 54 percent of long-term coaching participants owning or renting their own living quarters after 12 months, compared to 32 percent at enrollment;
- Overall employment increased to 58 percent after 12 months from 24 percent at enrollment;
- Average wages increased to \$879 per month after 12 months from \$252 at enrollment; and
- Healthcare utilization dropped after 12 months of recovery coaching:
 - Outpatient visits dropped to 815 visits from 4,118 at enrollment,
 - Inpatient care days dropped to 1,117 days from 9,082 at enrollment,
 - Emergency room visits dropped to 146 from 426 at enrollment.

During the 85th Texas legislative session, HB 1486 (Price/Schwertner) passed to make peer support services a Medicaid reimbursable state plan benefit. HB 705 would build on that legislation to include RCOs as a new Medicaid provider type for the provision of peer services. This would allow RCOs to be reimbursed for the peer support services they provide. Additionally, the bill would define RCOs in statute and require rules relating to: training, certification, supervision, the scope of services a peer specialist may provide at an RCO, and distinguishing peer services provided by an RCO from other services that a person must hold a license to provide.

Submitted by: Shannon Hoffman, MSW, LCDC, Policy Program Specialist | shannon.hoffman@austin.utexas.edu

¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, January 3). *Provisional drug overdose death counts*. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/drug-overdose-data.htm>

² National Safety Council. (2019). *Preventable deaths: Odds of dying*. Retrieved from <https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/all-injuries/preventable-death-overview/odds-of-dying/>

³ RecoveryPeople. (n.d.). *Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) directory*. Retrieved from <https://recoverypeople.org/directory/recovery-organizations/>

⁴ Association of Persons Affected by Addiction. (n.d.). *What is an RCO?* Retrieved from <https://apaarecovery.org/what-we-do/what-is-a-rco/>

⁵ Department of Health 7 Human Services Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (August 15, 2007). State Medicaid Director Letter #07-011.

⁶ Mangrum, L., Spence, Richard, et al. (August 2018). *Recovery Support Services Project, Fiscal Year 2018 Interim Process Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from <https://socialwork.utexas.edu/dl/ari/recovery-supportservices-report-2018.pdf>.