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**OWR WORKING GROUP RELEASES FRAMEWORK TO STRENGTHEN
PEER SUPPORT SERVICES STATEWIDE**

*New Framework Aims to Bolster Peer Support Workforce and
Expand Services in State Systems*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HONOLULU – The state of Hawai'i Office of Wellness and Resilience today announced the completion of the Peer Support Specialist Working Group and released a comprehensive framework report to guide the development, implementation and sustainability of peer support services throughout the state.

The framework, developed over 10 months by a diverse working group established under Act 88 (2024), creates a roadmap for formalizing peer support services, which are defined as assistance provided by individuals with lived experience and expertise with mental health challenges, substance use disorders, housing instability and/or justice system involvement.

“Peer support offers a powerful approach to healing, recovery and systems navigation that cannot be replicated through clinical services alone,” said Governor Josh Green.

The framework addresses critical elements needed to build a robust peer support system in Hawai‘i:

- **Clear Role Descriptions and Definitions:** Establishes definitions for Adult Peer Support Specialists, Youth Peer Support Specialists, Caregiver or Family Peer Support Specialists, and Parent Partner Peer Support Specialists
- **Career Pathways:** Creates a three-tiered advancement structure from Peer Mentors to Certified Specialists to Peer Supervisors with corresponding compensation recommendations
- **Training and Certification Standards:** Outlines 40 to 60-hour core training requirements based on the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) National Model Standards, plus specialized tracks for different peer roles
- **Trauma-Informed Supervision:** Identifies best practices for supporting peer specialists through reflective supervision, professional development and wellness-focused approaches
- **State Employment Opportunities:** Recommends expanding peer support positions across multiple state departments including the Departments of Health, Human Services, Corrections and Rehabilitation, Education and the Judiciary
- **Sustainable Implementation and Funding:** Explores Medicaid billing options, state and federal funding streams and strategies for long-term operational sustainability

“This framework honors the contributions of those with lived experience in our systems and builds on what has been accomplished, to recommend ways we can create real workforce pathways for peer support specialists that are valued and sustainable,” said Tia L. Roberts Hartsock, chair of the working group and director of the Office of Wellness and Resilience.

Research demonstrates that peer support services improve relationships with providers, allow for higher empowerment and hope and reduce inpatient utilization,^{1, 2} offering a

¹ Chinman, M., George, P., Dougherty, R. H., Daniels, A. S., Ghose, S. S., Swift, A., & Delphin-Rittmon, M. E. (2014). Peer support services for individuals with serious mental illnesses: Assessing the evidence. *Psychiatric Services*, 65(4), 429-441. <https://psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.201300244>

² Chinman, M., Oberman, R. S., Hanusa, B. H., Cohen, A. N., Salyers, M. P., Twamley, E. W., & Young, A. S. (2015). A cluster randomized trial of adding peer specialists to intensive case management teams in the Veterans Health Administration. *Journal of Behavioral Health Services Research*, 42, 109-121.

valuable complement to clinical care. They are especially effective at engaging people into needed services and guide their own recovery. Evidence suggests that peer supports can:

- Engage patients in caring relationships, and increase their engagement in non-acute and less costly care, including self-care
- Decrease substance use, unmet needs and demoralization
- Increase hope, empowerment, social functioning and quality of and satisfaction with life³

The Peer Support Specialists Working Group included individuals with lived experience and expertise who have worked as peer support specialists for the state, as well as representatives from state departments and community organizations. Members participated in regular meetings beginning in September 2024 and worked on specific topics, including certification standards, supervision models and inventories of existing peer support services.

“I am honored to see peer voices being recognized and elevated across our state. It is deeply meaningful to witness collaborative leadership and a shared commitment to supporting individuals and families living in the aftermath of trauma with dignity and care,” said Kim Nabarro, peer support specialist and co-facilitator of the Peer Support Working Group. “This work reflects Hawai‘i’s continued investment in peer support as an essential part of our systems of care, helping to restore hope and build pathways toward healing and long-term stability.”

The group conducted surveys of current peer support specialists and collected input from dozens of community organizations serving various populations across the islands, to compile into the framework report. The framework emphasizes the importance of cultural responsiveness, particularly incorporating Native Hawaiian values and practices.

The Office of Wellness and Resilience will continue to provide leadership and coordination for implementation of the framework in partnership with state agencies, community partners and peer specialists. Immediate priorities include establishing a peer support hub to coordinate training, certification and technical assistance, developing a detailed implementation plan and expanding engagement with diverse stakeholders to ensure alignment with the framework’s vision.

The framework builds on the longtime efforts by the Department of Health’s Adult Mental Health Division (AMHD), which has maintained a Hawai‘i Certified Peer Specialist program since 2012, as well as by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division (CAMHD) Youth Partners program.

³ Davidson, L., Bellamy, C., Chinman, M., Farkas, M., Ostrow, L., Cook, J. A., Jonikas, J. A., Rosenthal, H., Bergeson, S., Daniels, A. S., & Salzer, M. S. (2018). Revisiting the rationale and evidence for peer support. *Psychiatric Times*, 35(6), 1-3. <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/revisiting-rationale-andevidence-peer-support>

“The Office of Wellness and Resilience is committed to advancing peer support as a key principle of trauma-informed care,” said Director Roberts Hartsock. “It plays a critical role in our journey toward becoming a trauma-informed state and we look forward to working alongside the peer support specialist community to strengthen and celebrate this essential work in the years ahead.”

The full report and working group materials are available at:
<https://owr.hawaii.gov/peersupport/>.

About the Office of Wellness and Resilience: The kuleana (responsibility; privilege) of the Office of Wellness and Resilience is to strengthen our state service systems, using hope-centered principles as strategies to make Hawai'i a trauma-informed state. We break down barriers that impact the well-being of Hawai'i's people – from keiki to kūpuna.

The Office of Wellness and Resilience is housed in the Office of the Governor and administratively attached to the Department of Human Services. To learn more, visit owr.hawaii.gov.

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