



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
INSURANCE AND REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 9, 2021**

HB 6588, An Act Concerning Mental Health Care And Substance Abuse Services

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 6588, An Act Concerning Mental Health Care And Substance Abuse Services**. CHA supports the establishment of a task force to study health insurance coverage for peer support services.

Since early 2020, Connecticut's hospitals and health systems have been at the center of the state's response to the current global public health emergency. Hospitals expanded critical care capacity, staffed to meet unprecedented patient need, deployed community COVID-19 testing locations, and are now playing a key role in the administration of vaccines. Through it all, hospitals and health systems have continued to provide high-quality care for everyone, regardless of ability to pay.

HB 6588 provides for the appointment of a representative of CHA to serve on the task force to study health insurance coverage for peer support services. We appreciate and welcome the opportunity to engage in this work.

Overdose deaths from opioids have risen in Connecticut as the COVID-19 pandemic has compounded social stressors and increased isolation. According to the Department of Public Health (DPH), from January through December 2020, there were 1,359 confirmed drug overdose deaths and 78 pending cases waiting for toxicology confirmation. DPH noted that there was a 13.3 percent increase in drug overdose deaths by December 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. The drug overdose epidemic continues to endanger the lives of our citizens.

Connecticut hospitals and health systems have been engaged for years in efforts to reduce inappropriate opioid use while ensuring patients have appropriate pain medication. We are also working with the state and other care providers to connect patients suffering from opioid, alcohol, and other substance use disorders to necessary services following their discharge from the hospital. Peer support services are an effective means to assist individuals in improving their health and wellness, living self-directed lives, and building sustainable lives in recovery.¹

¹ Recovery and Recovery Support: samhsa.gov, 2020. <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/recovery>.

Peer support is rooted in the idea that people who share similar experiences can offer help, empathy, validation, information, and hope for another person pursuing recovery.² Peers are skilled professionals who can engage patients and family members carrying a message of recovery and hope, and connect patients with resources to enable them to move from crisis to recovery. Peer support recovery is a vital link between substance use disorder treatment in hospital settings and the communities where patients will seek to achieve and sustain lives in recovery.

Through peer support services, hospitals and other healthcare and social service providers can integrate the delivery of services to patients, connect them with necessary care and services, support them in their recovery, and improve their health.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.

² Keris Myrick and Paolo del Vecchio, Peer Support Services In The Behavioral Healthcare Workforce: State Of The Field, *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 39, no. 3 (2016): 197.