

Expanding the reach of allied mental health professionals



HEALTHY MINDS
POLICY INITIATIVE

Allied mental health professionals, like peers and behavioral health case managers, **play an important role in Oklahoma's broader behavioral health workforce**. These workers, sometimes called paraprofessionals, extend the reach of licensed clinicians and often work directly with patients to support their treatment or recovery.

Currently, Oklahoma's certified peer recovery specialists and behavioral health case managers may only keep their certification through employment by the state, an organization contracting with the state, a tribal organization, or the department of Veterans Affairs.

HB 4275 would allow peers and case managers to work for municipalities, counties, and organizations certified by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services while still maintaining their certification, **allowing them to serve in important roles in fire departments, courts, and other settings**.

Allied health professionals in municipal and county settings

- Fire departments, courts, and other city and county employers have interest in hiring behavioral health case managers and peer recovery support specialists, but they would have to forgo certification to take these jobs
- As fire departments increasingly play larger roles in behavioral health crisis response, peers can be valuable members of mobile response teams, supporting people in recovery from mental illness or substance use conditions while sharing their own lived experience
- Similarly, the courts system can be difficult to navigate, particularly when people need mental health treatment or recovery support. When case managers work in these settings, they provide support by making connections and referrals to support services
- If their certification was not tied to work for specific employers, **peers and case managers could serve more people in their communities in roles like these**



Peers and case managers working for municipalities and county settings like fire departments and courts is now widely **seen as a best practice**

Scope of peer and case manager roles

- **Case managers** provide case management services, including making appropriate linkages and referrals to services inside and outside of clinical settings. They advocate for, monitor progress of, and provide support for individuals with behavioral health conditions
- **Peer recovery support specialists** support the recovery of individuals living with mental illness and/or substance use conditions while sharing their own lived experience inside and outside of clinical settings

Benefits of peers and case managers

- When allied mental health professionals can work at their full potential – when their responsibilities reflect what they are uniquely trained to do – they play a role in improving patients' outcomes and make it possible for licensed clinicians to work more effectively too
- Case managers' work has been shown to improve patients' engagement in services and can reduce hospital use
- Evidence shows peer support offers benefits for patients' recovery and can improve clinical outcomes as a cost-effective complement to behavioral health care provided by a licensed clinician