



American Association on Health & Disability

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AAHD - Dedicated to better health for people with disabilities through health promotion and wellness



LAKESHORE

September 21, 2017

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate
706 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roy Blunt
United States Senate
260 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Blumenthal and Senator Blunt:

RE: Veteran Partners' Efforts to Enhance Reintegration Act (Veteran PEER ACT)

On behalf of the **American Association on Health and Disability and the Lakeshore Foundation**, it is with great pleasure that we endorse The Veteran Partners' Efforts to Enhance Reintegration Act (Veteran PEER Act).

The American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD) (www.aahd.us) is a national non-profit organization of public health professionals, both practitioners and academics, with a primary concern for persons with disabilities. The AAHD mission is to advance health promotion and wellness initiatives for persons with disabilities.

The Lakeshore Foundation (www.lakeshore.org) mission is to enable people with physical disability and chronic health conditions to lead healthy, active, and independent lifestyles through physical activity, sport, recreation and research. Lakeshore is a U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Site; the UAB/Lakeshore Research Collaborative is a world-class research program in physical activity, health promotion and disability linking Lakeshore's programs with the University of Alabama, Birmingham's research expertise.

This bill would ensure veterans who seek care at a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical/primary care center can connect seamlessly with a mental health or substance use provider through the engagement of a peer specialist. We applaud your efforts to introduce legislation that improves the continuity of care for our nation's veterans.

For too many years the stigma associated with mental health and substance use conditions has prevented veterans from seeking treatment. Yet, we know that many veterans are receiving care for physical health conditions at VA medical/primary care centers. By authorizing the VA to utilize peer specialists in VA medical/primary care centers as part of patient aligned care teams, the PEER Act would improve the link between primary and behavioral health care providers and increase patient engagement in their own care. The VA has seen this happen first-hand through its utilization of peer specialists in its behavioral health centers. The authorization created by the PEER Act would allow for widespread geographic implementation of the policy by authorizing 50 locations from across the nation, including rural and underserved areas. Additionally, reporting requirements would guarantee the VA is held responsible for implementation and Congress receives data detailing the benefits of peer specialists to veterans and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. If you have any questions please contact Clarke Ross at clarkeross10@comcast.net.

Sincerely,



E. Clarke Ross, D.P.A.

Public Policy Director

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Member, National Quality Forum (NQF) workgroup on persons dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid (July 2012-July 2017) and NQF population health task force (2013-2014) (<http://www.qualityforum.org/>) and NQF representative of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Task Force on Long Term Services and Supports (<http://www.c-c-d.org/>). 2017 member, NQF MAP workgroup on Medicaid adult measures. 2016-2017 NQF duals workgroup liaison to the NQF clinician workgroup. 2015-2016 and 2014-2015 NQF duals

workgroup liaison to the NQF PAC/LTC workgroup. Member, ONC (Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology) Health IT Policy Committee, Consumer Workgroup, March 2013-November 2015; Consumer Task Force, November 2015-April 2016. (<http://www.healthit.gov/policy-researchers-implementers/federal-advisory-committees-facas/consumer-empowerment-workgroup>). Member, SAMHSA Wellness Campaign National Steering Committee – January 2011-September 2014. (<http://promoteacceptance.samhsa.gov/10by10/>).

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