



**Senate Finance Committee
February 23, 2022**

**Senate Bill 637
Health and Health Insurance - Behavioral Health Services – Expansion
Behavioral Health System Modernization Act**

Support

The Maryland Affiliate of the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD-Maryland) supports Senate Bill 637, a bill to make our public behavioral health system better meet the needs of Marylanders.

This piece of legislation includes a variety of reforms and enhancements designed to meet the increasing demand for high quality mental health and substance use care. NCADD-Maryland is especially interested in increasing resources for peer support services. Peers work in treatment programs, recovery residences, recovery and wellness centers, and with outreach teams. They provide a variety of support to people in treatment for and in recovery from mental health and substance use disorders. Services can include helping people look for housing and employment opportunities, find transportation and child care, and engage in supportive conversation about a person's struggles in recovery. Peers by definition have lived experience and are sometimes better able to connect with people with behavioral health problems.

Because peers work in a variety of settings, both components of the bill that impact resources for peers are necessary. Not all services provided by peers should be reimbursed by Medicaid and not all programs that employ peers should have to bill Medicaid. Grant funding is needed to ensure wellness and recovery centers, as well as recovery residences can hire and retain staff. These are non-clinical settings where peers provide support based on an individual's needs.

Medicaid reimbursement for peer services is something that most states currently do. Maryland is behind the times, and only last month, announced it has communicated with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services that it intends to move forward on this. NCADD-Maryland is eager to work with Maryland Medicaid to ensure peer reimbursement happens in an effective way, and takes place with peers and programs that serve people with substance use disorders and/or mental health disorders. Commercial insurance carriers should also examine how they can incorporate reimbursement for these services as a person's insurance coverage type should not limit the services they have access to.

As the demand for substance use and mental health treatment is at an all-time high, we need to make sure Maryland's public behavioral health system is able to meet people's needs in an efficient and cost-effective manner. The proposals in SB 637 will help move Maryland in that direction. We urge a favorable report on SB 637.