

# January 6, 2026 Committee on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion in Behavioral Health Zoom Meeting

## Meeting summary

### Quick recap

The meeting focused on discussing a potential name change for the DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) workgroup, with members debating whether to maintain the current name or adopt a new one due to federal funding concerns. The group reviewed approximately 15 proposed name options, including "CLAS Intervention and Development," while considering how a name change might impact their mission and work. A significant portion of the meeting was dedicated to presenting a PowerPoint on community health workers (CHWs) and peer support specialists, including their roles, certification requirements, and potential for Medicaid reimbursement in Connecticut. The discussion highlighted the need to ensure that any name change would not compromise the group's focus on equity and inclusion, with members expressing concern about how changing language might affect their work and funding.

### Next steps

- [Co-Chairs Alice Forrester and Brenetta Henry: Review the list of proposed agenda items/topics from last year, update as needed, and consider including current topics for voting/feedback when sending out the name change questionnaire.](#)
- [Alice: Send out the community health worker/peer support PowerPoint to the group for review and feedback before presenting to the Executive Committee.](#)
- [All group members: Review the PowerPoint and provide feedback or suggest additions \(e.g., information on peer support to CHW certification pathways\) before the next meeting.](#)
- [Alice: Get and provide an answer to Carlos regarding the process/possibility for peer support workers to become certified community health workers, including any grandfathering or training requirements.](#)
- [Alice \(and/or relevant work group members\): Request Karen Siegel, and other CHW work group members to provide an update on the status of the state plan amendment \(SPA\) for CHW Medicaid reimbursement.](#)
- [Alice: Bring the finalized community health worker/peer support recommendation \(after group feedback\) to the Executive Committee of the Behavioral Health Oversight Council in February.](#)
- [Kim Haugabook: Consider inviting a representative from the Commission on Racial Equity and Public Health \(e.g., Health Equity Solutions Executive Director\) to present to the group.](#)

## **Summary**

### **DEI Name Change Discussion**

The group discussed concerns about changing the name of their organization from DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) to a new name, with Co-Chair Brenetta Henry raising questions about the necessity of the change given that it wasn't affecting funding. Several members, including Amy Soto from DPH and Yohanna Cifuentes from Clifford Beers, shared experiences of having to remove DEI language from grant reports due to federal requirements, while others expressed concern about losing the accountability provided by the DEI name. The group agreed to include the option of keeping the DEI name in their upcoming questionnaire with 15-16 different name options, while maintaining their commitment to addressing equity and racism issues.

### **Committee Name Change Discussion**

The committee discussed whether to change its name, with Yohanna explaining that their grant prohibits using funding for DEI activities, though participating in meetings might not have negative effects. Dr. Stephanie Springer (DCF) clarified that changing the name would not affect the committee's work or partnerships, but would make it less of a target, particularly given that meetings tend to be on CT-N. Brenetta raised concerns about the lack of voice for state taxpayers at the national level, questioning why their comments and concerns don't matter, and emphasized the need for true partnership from the system.

### **Group Name Change Discussion**

The committee discussed concerns about changing the name of their group, with Brenetta and Carlos Blanco expressing worry that a name change could lead to changes in the program's demographics and dynamics, based on past experiences. Carlos shared insights from a DEI presentation at the American Translator Association, where he noticed that providers were more engaged than interpreters and discussed how DEI discussions have affected hiring practices. The group agreed to consider finding an inclusive name that would maintain their current focus on consumer services, rather than opposing the system.

### **Program Name Change Impact Discussion**

The committee discussed the potential impact of changing program names, with some members expressing concerns about system changes and their effects on providers and members. Kim Haugabook and Bonni Hopkins agreed with the points raised, emphasizing the importance of considering the broader implications of name changes. Kim, a new committee member, suggested incorporating class standards as a framework for system changes, referencing their existence since 2000. The group also discussed the possibility of aligning their efforts with Connecticut's Commission on Racial Equity and Public Health.

## **Committee Agenda and Priorities Discussion**

The group discussed potential name changes and alignment with existing initiatives, with Kim suggesting contacting Lisa Palazzo for class standards information. Carlos emphasized the importance of maintaining focus on their own agenda without getting lost in others' priorities. Alice and Bonni highlighted the need to communicate the committee's agenda and topics clearly, with Alice mentioning a list of agenda items to review. The group agreed to put a top on the community health worker conversation before the February session and aim to make a recommendation to the Behavioral Health Oversight Council.

## **CHWs and Medicaid Reimbursement Discussion**

The meeting focused on community health workers (CHWs) and peer support workers in behavioral health care. Alice presented on CHWs, highlighting their role in navigating healthcare systems and their potential for Medicaid reimbursement, which Connecticut has not yet implemented. Brenetta emphasized the importance of including peer support workers alongside CHWs, noting their unique ability to provide support based on lived experience. The group discussed the differences between CHWs and peer support workers, with CHWs being eligible for Medicaid reimbursement and peer support workers being certified but not currently seeking reimbursement. The conversation ended with a call for support of CHWs and adequate Medicaid reimbursement for certified CHWs, referencing legislation from 2020 (PA 23186) that needs continued implementation.

## **CHW Integration in Behavioral Health**

The group discussed the role of community health workers (CHWs) in behavioral health, with Rob Haswell (DMHAs) explaining how CHWs and peer support specialists could be integrated into Connecticut's Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) model. Alice presented a PowerPoint on CHW access and reimbursement through a state plan amendment, which the group agreed to review and provide feedback on before submitting to the Behavioral Health Oversight Council's Executive Committee. The discussion also touched on the need for clarity regarding the certification process for peer support specialists transitioning to CHW roles, with Alice committing to follow up on this question.



CHW Legislative  
support from BHPO