

April 8, 2026 BHPOC Zoom Meeting

Meeting summary

Quick recap

The Behavioral Health Partnership Oversight Council meeting focused on a comprehensive presentation by Dr. Chyrell Bellamy (Yale University) and Elsa Ward from DMHAS about peer support services, including their history, definitions, and the new Certified Peer Support and Recovery Professional (CPSRP) credential. The presenters discussed the evolution of peer support from the 1790s to the current Connecticut certification process, covering SAMHSA's 12 core competencies and the integration of recovery support specialists and recovery coaches under a single credential. They explained that over 900 people have received the new credential since October, with training organizations projected to begin using updated curriculums starting June 1st. Following the presentation, council members discussed various operational updates from state agencies including DDS, DSS, DMHAS, DCF, CSSD and CSDE, with particular attention to new crisis stabilization centers, Medicaid rate increases, and behavioral health initiatives. The conversation ended with committee reports from the Child Adolescent Quality Access and Policy Committee, Adult Quality Access and Policy Committee, Operations Committee, and CLAS Committee, covering topics such as reentry services for at-risk youth, 988 implementation, and upcoming community meetings.

Next steps

- [Bryan Klimkiewicz \(CSDE\): Provide information to Alice Forrester regarding the community school grants that the governor was replacing when the feds cut them off and send the information directly to Alice via email.](#)
- [Elsa Ward: Share slides from the peer support presentation with the group so they can share with their constituencies.](#)
- [Elsa Ward: Continue to spread the word to eligible staff about the grandparenting application process for the new peer support credential and direct them to the CCB Connecticut Certification Board website.](#)
- [Alice Forrester: Share email in the chat for Brian \(CSDE\) to send community school grants information.](#)
- [Alice/CLAS Committee: Consider inviting Cable \(Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement\) to present to the full Behavioral Health Oversight Council regarding CIT training and mental health crisis response.](#)
- [Bryan \(CSDE\): Post the competitive grant application for school districts serving students with IEPs and trauma backgrounds once forms review is complete \(expected this month\).](#)

Summary

Meeting Leadership Transition Update

Interim Co-Chair Janine Sullivan-Wiley announced that Terry DiPietro is doing better but will not be returning as chair and mentioned that Representative Mike Demicco is preparing a commendation from the legislature for Terry's service. The meeting included Spanish translation services provided by Carlos Blanco, with a request for presentations to be shared in advance for better translation. The meeting was being broadcast live on CT-N with 49 attendees present, and Janine confirmed she would continue chairing meetings for the next several months.

Peer Support Certification Overview

Dr. Chyrell Bellamy presented an overview of the history and definitions of peer support services and the new certification process. She traced the origins of peer support back to the 1790s and highlighted its evolution through various movements and reforms in mental health care. Dr. Bellamy discussed the importance of peer support in improving outcomes for individuals with mental illness, including reducing readmissions and increasing hope and well-being. She also introduced the 12 core competencies for peer support developed by SAMHSA and announced the new Connecticut Peer Support Recovery Professional (CPSRP) credential, which aims to strengthen the peer workforce and improve the consistency and quality of peer services in the state.

Peer Support Services Development Update

Chyrell discussed mental health terminology and peer support services, clarifying that different communities may use varying terms to describe mental health conditions. She explained that Connecticut now has four organizations providing peer support training, including CCAR, Hartford HealthCare, Advocacy Unlimited, and New Life 2. Chyrell also addressed the development of national core competencies for peer support, noting that a committee of national recovery leaders established 12 core competencies, and she and Megan Evans recently submitted a grant to study the fidelity of these competencies. When asked about Medicaid billing for peer specialist services in Connecticut, Chyrell acknowledged that Connecticut cannot currently bill for these services but expressed confidence that the state would be prepared to implement Medicaid funding if it were to become available, thanks to the existing documentation and learning from other states' experiences.

Medicaid Peer Support Expansion Discussion

The group discussed expanding Medicaid coverage for peer support services in Connecticut. Chyrell addressed concerns about medicalization, explaining that 48 states now offer these services and emphasizing the importance of proper documentation and training to maintain role clarity between peer support specialists and other providers. Heather highlighted the critical role peer support specialists play in service delivery, particularly in engaging hard-to-reach individuals. Alice suggested forming a work group to streamline Medicaid billing processes for various support roles,

including care coordinators, community health workers, and peer support specialists. Chyrell agreed on the value of collaboration between different types of support providers.

Peer Support Certification Process Update

Elsa Ward, Director of the Office of Recovery Community Affairs at DMHAS, presented the new Certified Peer Support and Recovery Professional certification process. She explained the differences between peer support workers and community health workers and outlined how the certification aims to integrate recovery support specialists and recovery coaches under one credential while maintaining alignment with SAMHSA's national standards. As of October, over 900 people have received credentials through the grandparenting process, with the new training curriculum projected to begin on June 1st and the new credential activation scheduled for June 15th.

CHW vs Peer Support Disclosure

The group discussed the differences between Community Health Workers (CHWs) and peer support specialists regarding lived experience disclosure. Kelly raised concerns about semantics around CHWs with lived experience, noting that professional requirements might restrict their ability to disclose personal recovery experiences. Elsa and Chyrell clarified that while CHWs often come from the same communities they serve, they are not trained to disclose personal mental health or substance use experiences in the same way peer support specialists are. Heather Gates emphasized the importance of having individuals with lived experience working in the field to help destigmatize mental health and substance use challenges within the system.

Peer Support Services Program Discussion

Elsa explained that the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services currently offers peer support services for women in treatment, particularly those with children, focusing on both recovery and parenting skills. She noted that while the existing program works with parents navigating the child welfare system, there are no immediate plans to create additional credentials beyond the current integrated peer support specialist program, which aims to address co-occurring mental health and substance use issues. Elsa mentioned potential future specialties, including work with the criminal justice system and young adults, but indicated these are not currently prioritized. Maureen O'Neil Davis suggested the possibility of developing a Family Advocate certification through a different department like DCF, referencing the Advocates for Families Act in Congress.

Recovery Support and Family Programs

The meeting featured a presentation by Dr. Bellamy and Elsa Ward on recovery support and family peer support models, with Chyrell highlighting Shelly Nolan's work supporting parents through Project REACH. Elsa explained that trained recovery support specialists and recovery coaches can obtain credentials through Hartford HealthCare, Advocacy Unlimited, or CCAR, with over 900 credentials already issued. Following the presentation, Tammy from DDS provided updates on their

initiatives, including the awarding of an RFP for a children's step-up/step-down unit expected to open in the first quarter of the next fiscal year, and the release of RFPs for community clinical response teams and community recreation programs for children with intellectual disabilities.

Department Updates and Program Progress

The meeting covered updates from several departments. Alexis Mohammed from DSS reported no updates for the month. Rob Haswell from DMHAS shared that interim monitoring for the residential SUD program was completed and an RFP for rural 23-hour crisis stabilization centers was released. Dr. Stephney Springer from DCF announced that COLA amendments had been sent to providers and a 3-year procurement plan would be available by June 1st. The ribbon cutting ceremony for CHR's crisis stabilization program was scheduled for May 12th. Brian Delude from CSSD announced he might be transitioning out of his current role, though the replacement had not been determined yet.

Behavioral Health Oversight Council Updates

The Behavioral Health Oversight Council meeting covered updates on professional learning opportunities, including leadership institutes, community of practice sessions, and training for school counselors. Bryan Klimkiewicz announced a new \$500,000 competitive grant for school districts serving students with IEPs and trauma (see below). Committee chairs provided updates on their respective areas: the Child Adolescent Quality, Access & Policy Committee discussed updates on Medicaid protections for at-risk youth and the justice-involved waiver, while the Adult Quality, Access & Policy committee reported on rural health transformation initiatives and Medicaid rate increases. The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, now renamed to CLAS presented on the state's implementation of 988 and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for police officers.

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CareerReadinessSh
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School Counselors' System of Success.

This virtual series highlights innovative approaches for Career Readiness and Workforce Development. Based on the Connecticut Comprehensive School Counseling Framework's career development domain, the series examines how to unite educators, administrators, and community partners to share the effective systems developed by

school counselors that prepare students for college, careers, and life. This series is intended for K-12 school counselors at any stage of their careers. We will discuss best practices for creating career pathways, enhancing industry partnerships, and building a sustainable system that ensures every student can succeed in Connecticut's changing workforce.

The design is to encourage counselors to think beyond 4- and 2-year colleges and consider credentialing, CTE, and other options for student success.

Additional Training Sessions that I mentioned:

Beyond Behavior: Strategies for Supporting Emotional Regulation in School
(4/24)

Youth Suicide Prevention: Recognizing and Responding to Students at Risk
(5/21)

The registration page for the series is [Student Support Series Tickets, Thursday, Mar 19 at 9 am to Thursday, May 21 at 10:30 am EDT | Eventbrite](#)



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