



STRENGTHENING THE VOICES  
OF CASA STATEWIDE

## HB 1413 & SB 662: PEER SUPPORT SERVICES FOR TRANSITION-AGED YOUTH

### BACKGROUND

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines peer support as “mutual support— including the sharing of experiential knowledge, and skills, and social learning,” which plays an important and invaluable role in helping others recover from mental health or substance abuse issues. Peer support providers must be trained, certified and hired within certain service settings in order to provide services. They are cost-effective, evidence-based, relationship-focused, voluntary and trauma-informed. Texas has authorized these services for adults, defined as individuals ages 21+, but adolescent youth are currently excluded.

Youth in foster care are at high risk for various mental and behavioral health issues, and substance abuse is a common challenge for adolescent youth in foster care.<sup>1</sup> In fact, prevalence rates for alcohol abuse, drug abuse and drug dependency are two to five times higher for youth in foster care than their peers who are not in foster care.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, youth who entered the foster care system due to parental mental illness or substance abuse have an even higher risk of developing a disorder. In order for youth to access behavioral health services, they must meet eligibility criteria for services, which often include a mental health or substance use diagnosis. Expanding mental health peer support services to adolescent youth enrolled in Medicaid will provide a broader range of available services to treat these issues and help build a robust treatment plan that is cost-effective.

A number of states have approved peer support services for youth as a Medicaid-covered service, including Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Oklahoma and Oregon.<sup>3</sup> Peer support providers offer a sense of community, which can play an essential role in the recovery process for youth, particularly young adults who have recently aged out of foster care. In addition, peer support services can offer a unique opportunity to support young adults in transition to adulthood because peer support providers collaborate across child and adult systems and can serve as a bridge, while providing improved treatment outcomes.

### HB 1413 WOULD:

- ✕ Direct the Health and Human Services Commission to allow youth ages 14-21 access to peer support services under Medicaid.

### Questions?

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<sup>1</sup> Aarons, G. A., Monn, A. R., Hazen, A. L., Connelly, C. D., Leslie, L. K., Landsverk, J. A., et al. (2008). Substance involvement among youths in child welfare: The role of common and unique risk factors. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78, 340–349.

<sup>2</sup> Kim, H. K., Buchanan, R., & Price, J. M. (2017). Pathways to preventing substance use among youth in foster care. *Prevention Science*, 18(5), 567-576. doi:<http://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2126/10.1007/s11121-017-0800-6>

<sup>3</sup> Simmons, D., Hendricks, T., Lippper, J., Bergan, J., Masselli, B. (2016). Providing youth and young adult peer support through Medicaid. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 12-30.