



Florida Peer Network, Inc.

An independent organization of and for people who are recovering from a psychiatric disability

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Position Statement Regarding Florida Agency for Health Care Administration's Proposed Medicaid Waiver Application September 29, 2005

The Florida Peer Network is a statewide organization of Florida citizens living with psychiatric disabilities and mental illness, including persons with co-occurring disorders. Our mission is to promote recovery, quality of life, advocacy, education, mutual support, peer directed services and participation in mental health policy design.

The Florida Peer Network has reviewed the Medicaid Waiver application prepared by the Agency for Health Care Administration, and is compelled to express our grave concerns regarding this proposal. We share these concerns with other stakeholders, including the Florida Council, the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, and NAMI FL. The concerns of these providers and advocates have been carefully developed, with thorough references to data and projections included in the application.

Our position is simple; the impact of the proposed Medicaid Waiver will be catastrophic for people living with psychiatric disabilities. This is especially true for those individuals dependent on Medicaid for payment of vital medical and rehabilitative services and supports, including peer supports. Science has shown that recovery from psychiatric disabilities and mental illness is possible. Consider this excerpt from the Executive Summary of the President's New Freedom Commission Report on Mental Health: Achieving the Promise

"After a year of study, and after reviewing research and testimony, the Commission finds that recovery from mental illness is now a real possibility. The promise of the New Freedom Initiative—a life in the community for everyone—can be realized. Yet, for too many Americans with mental illnesses, the mental health services and supports they need remain fragmented, disconnected and often inadequate, frustrating the opportunity for recovery.

Clearly, these findings underscore the need for improvement and enhancement of services and supports, not limitations, exclusions, and reductions. AHCA's waiver proposal prioritizes fiscal policy over the health care needs of those Florida citizens most marginalized and vulnerable.

The Florida Peer Network is particularly concerned in the following areas.

1. There are no guarantees regarding access to those optional services and supports for people with psychiatric disabilities. This array of services is the cornerstone of community-based mental health care, and includes those evidence-based and best practice models proven to support and promote recovery.
2. Specialty plans proposed for persons with developmental disabilities and chronically ill children also need to be developed for persons with psychiatric disabilities.

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3. Individually adjusted benefits limitations discriminate against those persons with the most severe psychiatric disabilities. This strategy is a further reflection of fiscal policy overriding vital health care services and supports. The New Freedom Commission established recovery as the goal of mental health services. This must be the driving force behind any policy decision affecting those of us who live with psychiatric disabilities and mental illness.
4. Recipients of mental health services were not meaningfully involved in meetings and discussions regarding the waiver request application. In the words of our advocacy community, "Nothing about us without us!" The Florida Peer Network was organized specifically to participate in policy decisions, in addition to our other stated goals. It is not acceptable that those persons who will be most affected by this proposed waiver were not invited to participate as stakeholders.

Florida recently submitted an application to SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services for one of eight State Incentive Grants. These awards are intended to support and accelerate the work of transforming the nation's mental health care system to one grounded in the principles of recovery, self-determination, and choice. This application was signed by Governor Bush, certainly a clear indication of his hopes for Florida being a leader in national transformation efforts.

The New Freedom Commission said this about our current mental health system:

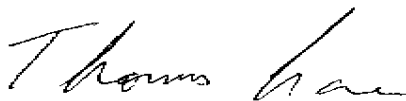
"Today's mental health care system is a patchwork relic—the result of disjointed reforms and policies. Instead of ready access to quality care, the system presents barriers that all too often add to the burden of mental illnesses for individuals, their families, and our communities."

The Florida Peer Network urges AHCA, our legislators and other policy makers to reconsider the current waiver application. Include recipients of mental health services and supports at all phases and levels of discussions and decision-making. Be mindful of the findings of President Bush's New Freedom Commission; that recovery should be the goal of the mental health system.

The Florida Peer Network stands ready to assist in these efforts. Our members are educated, informed, and very capable of contributing significantly to transforming Florida's mental health system in keeping with the New Freedom Commission recommendations. Lastly, our members are people who have experienced the reality of recovery from psychiatric disabilities and who live successfully in our communities.

Please feel free to contact me for additional information at (772) 380-2258 or call Gayle Bluebird, interim director, at our Peer Network office (877)352-7337/(877) FLA-PEER.

On behalf of the Florida Peer Network, respectfully,



Thomas Lane, President

Board of Directors:

Clint Rayner
Patrick Hendry
Bill Schneider
Jana Spalding

Gayle Bluebird, Interim Director.