

Office of Community Voices and Empowerment

New name established 2024

Background

The Office of Community Voices and Empowerment (previously known as Office of Consumer Affairs) is part of the original Mental Health Offices of Consumer Affairs (OCA) established nationally by the State Mental Health Authorities, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1995, the Center for Mental Health Services within the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), established an Office of Consumer Affairs (OCA) to promote and facilitate meaningful peer participation in all aspects of federal programs.

In 1993 with the assistance of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), directors of OCAs founded The National Association of Consumer/Survivor Mental Health Administrators (NAC/SMHA).

In 2019, members of the NAC/SMHA reorganized to become NASMHPD Division of Recovery Support Services (DRSS). NASMHPD's need for expertise and guidance from those with lived-experience remains the same. Through this new division, NASMHPD will be able to enhance and continue its long history of ensuring that the voices of those with lived-experience are promoted, heard, and considered in policy, planning and practice development.

Since that time many individual state's work has shifted significantly to focus primarily on Peer Support and Recovery Services. As such, Washington state's Health Care Authority established the Office of Community Voices and Empowerment (OCVE). This office works closely with members of the community who have lived and living experience with behavioral health challenges and provides a platform for these voices to drive innovation and change, with guiding principles of hope and resiliency.

Washington State's office remains dedicated to a broader representation of behavioral health lived and living experience communities.

Source: [Division of Recovery Support Services-NASMHPD](#)

Source: [Washington State Health Care Authority-Office of Community Voices and Empowerment](#)

Advocacy

The Office of Community Voices and Empowerment supports the following advocacy opportunities:

- Peer Advocacy and Engagement Trainings, Events and Resources
- Substance use disorder (SUD) focused advocacy and community capacity building
- Lived Expertise Community Capacity Building and Advocacy Training
- WA SPEAKS lived experience speakers' program

Leadership

The Office of Community Voices and Empowerment supports the following leadership opportunities:

- Lived and living experience community leadership summits
- Lived and living experience transformational leadership cohort
- Statewide Substance Use Disorder (SUD) community leadership retreat
- Office of Community Voices and Empowerment Advisory Committee

Programs, training and support

The Office of Community Voices and Empowerment supports the following programs, trainings and support:

- Racialized Communities Behavioral Health Accessibility Survey
- Substance Use Disorder (SUD)/Mental Health (MH)/Co Occurring (COD) Integration Survey
- Cultural Inclusion in Peer Support: Compassion in Action
- Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) trainings centered in underrepresented communities
- Small business and community based organizations support and mentoring
- Office of Behavioral Health and Advocacy (OBHA) support and guidance

Agency focused

The Office of Community Voices and Empowerment supports the following agency activities:

- Agency Menti survey on recovery and wellness
- Agency employee resource group (ERG) Recovery SynERGY meetings open to all staff
- Agency lived experience community building meeting (specific to staff with lived experience)
- Agency lived expertise community engagement support and mentorship for sibling agencies
- Agency Health Equity Liaison
- Agency Diversity Equity Inclusion and Belonging policy workgroups
- Agency Pro Equity Anti Racists policy workgroups
- Agency Behavioral Health Workforce Development workgroups
- Agency Co-Chair Statewide Say It Out Loud (SIOL) Conference (2S+LGBTQIA)

Future projects

The Office of Community Voices and Empowerment supports the following future projects:

- 2S+LGBTQIA Behavioral Health Accessibility Survey
- English as an additional language (EAAL) Wellness and Recovery Resource and Awareness events
- Wellness coach training project
- eCPR (emotional CPR) training pilot project
- Peer sibling support project
- Agency inclusion policy for persons with lived/living expertise
- Community engagement for Behavioral Health toolkit
- Statewide expansion-OCVE regional engagement liaisons