

### **Texas Peer Assistance Program for Nurses Advisory Committee**

This is an informational agenda item. The Texas Peer Assistance Program for Nurses, or TPAPN, Advisory Committee meeting was held virtually on Friday, September 3, 2021. Board staff personnel in attendance were Anthony L. Diggs, Director of Enforcement, Dusty Johnston, General Counsel, and Denise Benbow, Nursing Consultant for Enforcement.

#### *TPAPN Program*

The Advisory Committee was given an update on the TPAPN Program. The Program Director stated she provided quarterly reports to the Board of Nursing (BON) and the Texas Nurses Foundation. On June 25, TPAPN submitted their response to the request for proposal to provide peer assistance services and on July 29, TPAPN was notified of the approval. TPAPN started FY 22 on September 1, 2021, with a new contract. TPAPN also was audited resulting in demonstrating TPAPN was doing everything they needed to do.

The Program Director discussed the outreach TPAPN is doing, including mailing out self-care wallet cards, lunch and learn sessions, and various presentations by the Program Director. A group of the Alternative to Discipline programs of 11 states have meet and hope to have quarterly meetings. The TPAPN Program Director contrasted the person centered aspects of TPAPN versus the very rigid approaches the other ten states appear to take towards participants. An update was provided to the committee related to TPAPN staffing.

#### *Peer Support Partners*

TPAPN has 131 Peer Support Partners with 18 without assigned participants. There were 47 participants waiting for an assigned peer support partner; however, 12 were in the evaluation process (an early stage). A TPAPN staff member is working on making the assignments.

TPAPN continues to offer monthly informational sessions to provide information about the peer support partner role (with the next session scheduled for 11/16/2021). Additionally, TPAPN offers the Peer Support Partner Workshop for both the new peer support partners and to support the current peer support partners. The TPAPN overview, part of the peer support partner workshop and some outreach activities, is going through the process of approval to provide continuing nursing education for attendees.

The next Peer Support Partner Workshop is November 12, 2021. The Peer Support Partners receive additional opportunities to connect virtually through a communication board and through the monthly meetings of the Peer Support Partner Beyond the Workshop Educational Group.

### *Advisory Committee*

TPAPN has been experiencing a decline in participation. The Advisory Committee had group discussion related to TPAPN participation data including referrals, signed participation agreements, and discharges (closures and completions).

The committee discussed decreased referrals, signed participation agreements and the resulting decreased participation. The TPAPN program director discussed some of the financial aspects of TPAPN participation and the grant availability to a participant towards part of the cost of the initial evaluation. The committee discussed the role the pandemic might have. Some possibilities of decreased referral might relate to the incredible stresses the pandemic has created on the healthcare systems possibly pushing reporting to the back burner. Additionally, the stressors on individual health care providers might make it more difficult to differentiate from signs of a substance use/misuse or mental health issue.

The committee spent some time discussing closures and what that process might look like. The TPAPN Program Director discussed the various types of situations that might lead to a closure to the Board of Nursing (BON). Anthony Diggs, Director of Enforcement, with input from Dusty Johnston, General Counsel, discussed various possible outcomes of a TPAPN referral to the BON. The overall effect of decreased referrals with fewer signing participation agreements in combination with increased closures contribute to a lower number of participants in the TPAPN program.

There was discussion about resources TPAPN might provide to nurses in light of the stressors related to the pandemic, or after the pandemic. This led to discussions about employers terminating nurses with potential substance or mental health issues and the costs associated with services. There was also discussion about stigma and the challenges of overcoming stigma.

The TPAPN matrix tracks will be examined again. The TPAPN Program Director, BON Director of Enforcement, BON General Counsel and Dr. Lehman plan to stay in communication regarding the TPAPN matrix.

The next TPAPN Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled to occur on Friday December 3, 2021. This is a non-action item for informational purposes only.