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**TINA KOTEK**

# Behavioral Health Talent Council

*Licensing and Credentialing*

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# Action Plan: Supporting Lived Experience in the Workforce



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- **Purpose:** Recognize the central importance of lived experience in behavioral health work by increasing supports and eliminating barriers for behavioral health workers with lived experience of mental illness, substance use, and criminal justice involvement.
- **Focus Area:**
  - Streamline credentialing for Certified Recovery Mentors and Traditional Health Workers to eliminate duplicative requirements and clarify career pathways for peers with lived experience in either or both fields.
  - Reform the background check process for behavioral health professionals to eliminate unnecessary barriers and reduce disparities, and to make it easier to navigate.
- **Lead Agencies:** OHA, Licensing Agencies, DHS Background Check Unit, Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission

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## Key Strategies and Actions

Strategy	Action
Consolidate peer credentials with duplicative trainings and add endorsements/micro-credentials for more specialized areas of practice	Creation of a new peer credentialing model from MHACBO to streamline peer credentialing, and joint recommendations from OHA and MHACBO on proposed changes to CRM/THW credentialing models to reduce duplication for workers seeking both credentials.
Revise current background check system to remove unnecessary exclusions, create a more efficient and accessible system, and account for challenges in background checks for providers treating Integrated Co-Occurring Disorders.	The Alcohol and Drug Policy Commission will convene a committee to examine the current background check system and make recommendations for potential changes in line with the goals set forth by the BHTC.
Support people with lived experience in navigating the background check process.	The relevant agencies will collaborate to create a toolkit for people navigating the background check process.

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## Key Outcomes and Goals

Outcomes	Goals
Create increased career mobility for peers while reducing unnecessary hurdles for credentialing.	Eliminate duplicative trainings peers are required to undergo when looking to practice in multiple areas, while creating clear pathways to train on and be credentialed for specialized areas of expertise.
Remove unnecessary barriers for people with lived experience to enter behavioral health professions, particularly those that disproportionately affect BIPOC, Latine, Native, and LGBTQ+ practitioners.	A background check process that is more inclusive and trauma-informed, and a more diverse workforce where lived experience is recognized as an important asset in behavioral health work.

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## Implementation Considerations

- **Barriers**
  - **Systemic Inertia**
    - Many of our systems were built prior to peers becoming such a key part of our behavioral health system, and were not made to incorporate their diversity of skills and experience. Stakeholders will need to be willing to examine deep-rooted assumptions about how things have been done vs. how they could be done in the future.
  - **Stigma**
    - While gains have been made in the behavioral health system and in society as a whole, there remains significant prejudice to overcome for people with lived experience with mental illness, substance use, and criminal justice involvement. This recommendation from the Talent Council can serve to further push back on that stigma by showing strongly that we support behavioral health workers with lived experience.



# Action Plan: Supporting Licensees and Reducing Barriers



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- **Purpose:** Streamline the licensing process and support workers who are seeking licensure by improving access to resources and guidance, exploring alternative pathways to licensure, and improving access to clinical supervision.
- **Focus Area:**
  - Resource licensing boards to be able to process applications quickly and provide timely, accessible customer support to licensees with questions about their applications.
  - Examine and implement alternative paths to licensure for applicants who have completed all other requirements but have not been able to achieve a passing score on the test (including potentially allowing additional supervision hours and supervisor recommendations to substitute for test passage.)
  - Support test preparation programs through both licensing agencies and providers.
  - Explore pathways to reduce pressure on supervisors to bill hours rather than providing meaningful support and preparation to their supervisees.
- **Lead Agencies:** MHRA, BLSW, MHACBO

# Action Plan: Supporting Licensees and Reducing Barriers



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**Significant progress has been made across State licensing boards on application processing times**

- Latest Average Licensing Times:**
  - Board of Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists: 2 days
  - Board of Psychiatry: 1 day
  - Board of Licensed Social Workers: 30 days (initial submission to approval)
- Customer Service Targets**
  - MHRA policy – agency staff must acknowledge voicemail and email communications within one business day
  - BLSW policy – 80% of phone calls answered immediately, most voicemails returned within 24 hours, most e-mails returned within 48 hours
- **However, the current major limitation on state licensing boards is an outdated licensing system that prevents agency employees from operating at maximum efficiency.**

# Action Plan: Supporting Licensees and Reducing Barriers

## Key Strategies and Actions



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Strategy	Action
Give State licensing boards the resources they need to process applications in a timely manner, provide in-depth customer service, and avoid interruptions in service due to an outdated system.	MHRA and BLSW are currently working with DAS on a proposal to update their joint licensing system. The BHTC can emphasize the importance of prioritizing this upgrade to the legislature.
Expand access to licensure by exploring responsible alternative pathways to testing for qualified applicants who struggle to pass the licensing exams.	The State licensing boards will implement alternatives to testing for applicants who have tried and failed to pass the test, with guardrails to ensure the qualification of the applicant such as additional supervision hours and letters of recommendation.
Support applicants by providing accessible test prep.	Provide grants and models to licensing agencies and providers to support their licensees/workers in preparing for licensing exams.



# Action Plan: Supporting Licensees and Reducing Barriers



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## Key Outcomes and Goals

Outcomes	Goals
Continue to improve the efficiency of the licensing process and the availability of service and supports to applicants.	Increase morale in the workforce, free up resources at licensing agencies for other important work, and ensure that every qualified applicant can make it through the licensing process.
Expand and improve the workforce by offering pathways to licensure for people who struggle with traditional testing but are otherwise qualified to do the work.	A more diverse workforce and a licensing system that has a path for every qualified applicant to be licensed.

# Action Plan: Supporting Licensees and Reducing Barriers



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## Implementation Considerations

- **Barriers**
  - **Fiscal Barriers**
    - The new licensing system and any supports we choose to fund for test preparation will require some fiscal resource, though those requirements should be moderate. However, licensing agencies are funded through fees, and so in order to provide these resources the agencies will either need to raised licensing fees or seek support from the legislature to defray the costs.
  - **Disagreements in the Field on Testing Requirements**
    - While data from the Association of Social Work Boards clinical exam show significant racial disparities in first-time passage rates, their surveys also indicate that a large majority of working social workers consider the exam to be crucial and do not support removing the exam requirement. This includes a large majority of practitioners of color. In other states that have designed alternative pathways to licensure, they have found a compromise by still requiring every applicant to take the test, but providing an alternative pathway with safeguards to ensure proper qualification for those who do not pass.