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60TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 1970: Black Behavioral Health Navigator Certification

BILL SUMMARY

This bill will require the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) to establish, within the current Community Health Worker (CHW) certificate program, guidelines for a specialized certificate program tailored to Black Behavioral Health Navigators. Additionally, the bill will require the development of specific training requirements for this certification.

Further, the department will also be required to gather and report data, at least annually, regarding the number of certified individuals, including graduates of specialty certificate programs, and the number of individuals actively engaged in community health worker positions.

BACKGROUND

Today racial and ethnic disparities persist in mental health care services for many Californians, but especially the members of the Black community. For example, Black individuals with mental illness use fewer behavioral health services, such as prescription medications and outpatient care, compared to non-Hispanic whites. Additionally, Black individuals are less likely to access psychiatric services, and when they do, the quality of care they receive is often lower than that provided to white individuals. Consequently, the unmet need for behavioral health care is more pronounced among Black populations than among white populations.¹

Disparities in equitable health care navigation and delivery are contributing factor to the behavioral health crises within aspects of California's health care delivery, but perhaps none more pronounced than emergency room (ER) visits.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, non-Hispanic Black adults have the highest rates of mental health-related ER visits.

Furthermore, rates of ER visits for specific mental health disorders, including substance use disorders, anxiety disorders, and mood disorders, are highest among non-Hispanic Black adults.²

PROBLEM

California's Black communities lack needed and equitable access to health care services, primarily because of a shortage of trained professionals to guide individuals toward appropriate care options.

Although California has allocated additional financial investments in recent years to expand the role and efforts of Community Health Workers, there is still a distinct absence of targeted training and services specifically tailored to the Black community to help navigate those who need behavioral healthcare services.

SOLUTION

This bill will ensure California's Community Health Workers are properly trained and certified to help its Black individuals and communities find proper and appropriate behavioral health-care services.

SUPPORT

California Black Health Policy Advisory Council (Sponsor)
California Family Resource Association
California Pan - Ethnic Health Network
California State Association of Psychiatrists
Child Abuse Prevention Center
National Association of Social Workers California
Prevent Child Abuse California
Safe Kids California

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¹ [Mental health care among blacks in America: Confronting racism and constructing solutions - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

² [National Health Statistics Reports, Number 181, March 1, 2023 \(cdc.gov\)](#)