



Depression and Bipolar
Support Alliance

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Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance VP Speaks at May 18 Congressional Briefing on Peer Specialists

CHICAGO, May 19, 2016 – Lisa Goodale, DBSA Vice President of Peer Support Services, was a featured speaker at a congressional briefing on the value of peer specialists. Titled *Combatting PTSD in Veterans with More than Pills: The Rise of Peer Specialists in the VA* (Veterans Health Administration), the briefing took place on May 18 and was organized by Congressman Tim Ryan (D-OH). Other speakers included Dr. Jeffrey Burk, director of the National Mental Health for Psychosocial Rehabilitation and Recovery Services at the VA Central Office in Florida and certified peer specialist Todd Harwood. The session was timed to coincide with Memorial Day and Mental Health Awareness Month.

While there have been many Congressional briefings on the state of mental health in the America and Veterans' health care, this briefing was the first that focused specifically on the role of the peer specialist. These professionals have lived experience of recovery from mental health and/or substance use disorders and are trained and certified to work as an integral part of mental health treatment teams. More than 1,100 trained peer specialists now work in Veterans Health Administration hospitals and facilities, in both one-on-one and group settings.

Evidence shows there are many benefits to using peer specialists within health care. Individuals utilizing peer specialist services experience improved relationships with health care providers, better engagement in their care, and increased ability to manage their symptoms. Additionally, there are reductions in expensive inpatient service use and recurrent psychiatric hospitalizations for patients at risk for re-admission.

For many service members, the battle does not end when they come home. Unfortunately, the demand for mental health services often exceeds the supply. Innovative service delivery options, such as peer specialists, can help improve accessibility, improving the quality of life for many more Veterans and their families.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading peer-directed national organization focusing on depression and bipolar disorder. Directed by and created for individuals living with these conditions, DBSA provides hope, help, support, and education to improve the lives of its constituents. We do this by providing free, empowering tools and

information focused on an integrated approach to wellness; supporting research; and working toward equitable treatment for people with mental health conditions.