



Depression and Bipolar  
Support Alliance

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance Announces Support for Veteran Peer Act** *Bi-partisan legislation establishes peer specialists in VA patient-aligned care teams*

CHICAGO, IL - September 29, 2017 – The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance announces support of the Veteran PEER Act, introduced September 27, 2017 by U.S. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs and U.S. Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO), a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee. This bipartisan legislation would ensure that veterans who seek care at a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) medical/primary care center can connect seamlessly with a mental health or substance use provider through the engagement of a peer specialist.

Over a two-year period, the program would be implemented in 50 locations across the nation. It would take into consideration the needs of female veterans when establishing peer support programs and ensure that female peer specialists are made available to veterans through the program. The VA also would be required to consider rural and underserved areas when selecting program locations.

To track progress and learn from the pilot sites, the VA would report regularly to Congress with information on the benefits to veterans and their families derived from utilization of peer specialists, data on the gender of clients served by the program, and information on the specific role of peer specialists in engaging community providers and veterans receiving behavioral health services in the community

Speaking about the legislation, DBSA President Allen Doederlein stated, "The Veteran PEER Act would improve the link between primary and behavioral health care providers and increase patients' engagement in their own care." Mr. Doederlein further stated that, "Peer support is an evidenced-based practice shown to improve symptom management and reduce reliance on higher-cost clinical services while still achieving positive recovery outcomes."

### **ABOUT DBSA**

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) strives to improve the lives of people living with mood disorders. The organization fosters an environment of understanding of the impact and management of these life-threatening illnesses by providing up-to-date, scientifically based tools and information; supports research; and works to ensure that people living with mood disorders are treated equitably. Assisted by a scientific advisory board comprising leading researchers and clinicians in the field of mood disorders, DBSA has more than 600 peer-run support groups across the country. Hundreds of thousands of people are assisted each year with in-person and online peer support; readily understandable and current information about depression and bipolar disorder; and empowering tools focused on an integrated approach to wellness.

DBSA was honored to support the VA as it executed a 2012 Executive Order to hire and train 800 peer counselors by December 31, 2013. DBSA provided assistance in developing the training curriculum and has trained over 600 peer counselors to date.

Among the organizations submitting support letters as part of the Congressional Record when the legislation was introduced are:

American Association on Health and Disability

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness

Beacon Health Options

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance

Lake County Veterans and Family Services Foundation

Lakeshore Foundation

Mental Health America

Phenix Legacy

The Soldiers Project

Vets Advocacy