



The Consumer Voice Mortality Issue

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Protecting your Health on the Streets

By Art Rios Sr.

After years on the streets of many cities, I have learned that your health is a vital part of survival. You find yourself on the streets trying to remember the time and dates of your doctor's appointments, treatment recovery classes, and court dates. If you have to make appearances in front of your judge or parole/probation officer, it all becomes part of health concerns.

At one time, I was on the streets and with just about 1 year being clean and sober in 2006, finalizing my last few months of treatment. The plan was to keep myself busy in many different ways. I happened to make a plan with my healthcare provider, and it's included with a medication treatment plan, meetings, volunteering, and making sure to stick to my appointments.

I walked into Frighttown a local haunted house and this became my sanctuary to protect my health while being on the streets. It becomes a 3-month family, friends, and reminders of new beginnings for me. This helped me with my overall health care to be a better person.

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What Is NCAB?

The National Consumer Advisory Board (NCAB) is a committee of people who have experienced homelessness and been clients of Health Care for the Homeless projects across the country, and who are involved in the governance of those HCH projects. NCAB is a standing committee of the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, and NCAB's elected Chairperson sits on the Council's Board of Directors.

Homeless Person's Memorial Day

by David Peery

Nighttime holds special significance for persons who are experiencing homelessness. Night is when we seek shelter, seek safe places for our belongings. Night is also when we're most vulnerable, when theft and violence are most likely to occur. This is why, for nearly thirty years, communities nationwide observe National Homeless Persons Memorial Day (HPMD) on or near the winter solstice, the longest night of the year, on December 21. Co-sponsored by the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, and the National Consumer Advisory Board, hundreds of cities, representing all 50 states and the District of Columbia, host HPMD events to remember our unhoused neighbors who died during the past year.



HPMD events bring much-needed public attention to the tragedy of homelessness during the height of the holiday season. Communities commemorate HPMD in a variety of ways. Past events have included:

- Candlelight vigils
- Silent marches
- Graveside services
- Plays and performances
- Special religious services
- Public policy advocacy events



We at the National Consumer Advisory Board encourage communities to commemorate HPMD. We believe it is important to give a measure of dignity and respect to our brethren who may not have received the benefit of such compassion when they were alive. HPMD events serve as a powerful reminder that homelessness should never be tolerated in our civilized society.

For more information on HPMD events, or technical assistance in setting up your own event, please contact the National Consumer Advocate, Katherine Cavanaugh at kcavanaugh@nhchc.org.



Homelessness Doesn't Have to be Fatal: From Unhoused to Peer Advocate

By Keith Belton

I was raised on the west side of Chicago Illinois, by two parents who were both using drugs and alcohol. From the ages of 12 to 16, we were homeless, sometimes together and sometimes I was on my own. I slept in abandoned buildings, abandoned cars, park benches, and waiting areas. Sometimes I would get put into juvenile detention centers, jails, and shelters.

I would use substances all day every day. I would hurt anyone to get what I wanted. I wound up in prison for 5 years and when I got out, I was determined to begin a new journey.

I built new friendships and went to Heartland Alliance for health care and case management services. My case manager John introduced me to volunteer work, the Consumer Advisory Board, and peer support advocacy.

My work in Chicago connected me to the National Health Care for the Homeless Council and the National Consumer Advisory Board (NCAB), where I am the Regional Representative on the Steering Committee. With NCAB, I have presented workshops across the US sharing my story and strategies for trauma-informed consumer leadership.



Get involved!

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Board projects



NCAB Mission

To be the vehicle for consumers of HCH projects to become a collaborative voice on national issues. We hold central the priorities of assisting consumers in the development of CABs and serving as a clearinghouse for information and assistance to consumers.



CAB SPOTLIGHT: Central City Concern HSAC in Portland, Oregon

The CAB Spotlight looks at Consumer Advisory Boards around the nation. In this issue, we interview Sandra Delarosa and Art Rios, Sr., members of Portland's CAB, known as the Health Service Advisory Council (HSAC).

What are some of the Portland HSAC's activities over the last year?



Art: We sponsored and played an active role in several activities in 2019, including Portland's annual Pride Parade, the Homeless Persons Memorial Day and various webinars throughout the year. For instance, HSAC members played a critical role in gathering resources for a CAB Manual webinar that I recently presented with the National Consumer Advocate, Katherine Cavanaugh.



Sandra: This last year I had the honor of presenting the "Sandy Anderson Award" to a clinic staff member, Leslie Tallyn, on behalf of the Portland HSAC. We started the Sandy Anderson award five years ago and named it after our Head Pharmacist, who made sure each person had great service with the pharmacy. So we give this award every year to a clinic staff member who demonstrates excellent service to consumers and patients of the clinic.

What are your responsibilities with the Central City Concern HSAC?



Sandra: As Chair, I lead meetings, prompt the Introductions, including using the appropriate pronouns, make sure we operate by our guidelines, move to approve the monthly minutes, and go through the monthly agenda. I always try to encourage all attendees to fully participate in the meeting.



Art: As a consumer member of the clinic's Board of Directors, I act as a liaison between consumers and the clinic's Board of Directors, to both report on issues of concern to the Board and transmit Board policies back to consumers. I also mentor our new members who join the CAB.

What's the HSAC's biggest challenge?



Sandra: As Chair, I'd say our biggest challenges are fundraising, recruitment, keeping people involved in national activities of the Health Care for the Homeless Council, and coordinating advocacy projects with other CABs and community organizations.

What are peer support specialists and what role do they play with Central City Concern and the HSAC?



Art: A peer specialist is a person who shares the same/or similar life experiences as a consumer and can relate to the struggles of recovery, which can be in areas of drug/alcohol, or mental health. They provide support to other consumers and help them navigate through the system. Most importantly, peer support specialists empower people by helping them find their own voice, which promotes self-esteem and success on their journey to living a new healthier lifestyle. Over half of the staff at Central City Concern is a peer.



Sandra: We have a peer support person who leads wellness classes at the Old Town Recovery Clinic, which is the outpatient rehabilitation side of Central City Concern. We also advocate for organizations to hire consumers as peer support specialists.

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