

Network News

January 2016

With so much going on at the local, state and national level, we decided this is a good time for a general news update. These items are just some of the things we're working on. We hope to make this a more regular feature in 2016.

The Sober Living Network Board of Directors

Welcome to our new bulletin

A lot is happening in California and nationally that is impacting the sober living community. Sometimes membership meetings don't quite suffice as a regular source of information about events and developments elsewhere. With luck, this will be a regular Network

communication. You can help make future updates more interesting and relevant to our community. If you have an item you'd like to see us cover, or if you have news about local events, homes, coalitions and chapters, let us know. Contact information is on the last page. If you're getting this newsletter from someone else, or are reading it on the web, [add your name to our mailing list](#) and you'll get future editions in your inbox.

In this issue ...

California's Medi-Cal program now permits sober living as a health care benefit.

Fair housing battles continue in California and elsewhere

New recovery advocacy training in 2016 – be a voice for recovery in your community

Finally – a statewide standard for sober living homes, to be developed by the Network and CCAPP, and based on the new national standard

New model for recognition of sober living homes being promoted by the Network

Lower rates for the Network's group liability insurance plan; call the plan administrator for details.

A Network-wide get-together may happen later in 2016

California revolutionizing Medi-Cal for substance abuse services

This will be a game changer for sober living homes



The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services recently approved a very significant waiver for California, permitting the state to make several changes to the way Drug Medi-Cal is delivered. Recovery residences (their language) are included as permitted benefits in the waiver. Other language makes clear that the permission refers to sober living homes. **This is a major development.**

Implementation of the waiver is up to each county, including service offerings and the speed of converting to the new system. The Network and the L.A. County Department of Public Health are already in discussions about implementation. We have asked our grassroots leaders elsewhere to meet with their own county executives about plans to incorporate sober living homes in their implementation plans. Proper integration of

sober living into health care will not happen properly without active input from practitioners. We can provide tips about how to frame that conversation, can work with you on a list of questions you should ask (and questions you should be prepared to answer), and can provide talking points.

Successful integration of sober living homes into the Drug Medi-Cal program will be an important step toward our goal of convincing private health plans to include sober living homes as reimbursable health care services.

California's inclusion of sober living homes is a direct consequence of our work in Sacramento, and at a national level through NARR. California agencies have never used the "recovery residence" term before—in any context. However state planners drew on prior discussions with us, reviewed NARR's material, and adopted the term.

Fair housing update – the fight continues

Old and new disputes will be with us for the foreseeable future

Several of California's local governments continue to oppose the fair housing rights of recovering individuals. These actions are harmful on several levels. We wish that our work in this area would end, but the issue is not going away anytime soon.

Most people in our field are aware of the significant win in the Newport Beach fair housing case – several sober living providers and their legal counsel received a \$5.25 million settlement from the city for unlawful housing discrimination. The fight took seven years.

Costa Mesa

Despite the size of the Newport Beach award, an immediately adjacent city, Costa Mesa, has decided on an even more drastic law to curtail fair housing rights. Their law not only singles out recovery housing for targeted treatment, it was recently extended to cover recovery housing in all residential zones including multifamily and mixed-use neighborhoods. Two cases have been filed in

Federal court against the city, and the Network is a co-plaintiff in one of them. On December 10 the Ninth Circuit Court ruled that the city cannot enforce its law until the matter is decided by the court.

Elsewhere

Sacramento County has enacted an ordinance similar to Costa Mesa's in many ways, but has put enforcement on hold due to fears of legal action from affected homes. CCAPP, based in Sacramento, has asked the Network for assistance in that case, should enforcement resume.

Housing rights are being contested in communities across America. In Texas, the Department of Justice is preparing to intervene in a Ft. Worth case where the city is trying to limit the number of residents in a home. Homes in New Jersey, Michigan and Ohio (among others) also face housing discrimination at the hands of local governments.

Become an advocate for recovery

Training will give you the tools for effective advocacy in your local community

Fair housing conflicts and NIMBY issues are symptoms of a larger problem we need to confront as a recovery community – social stigma and discrimination are very real facts of life for too many people in recovery. The Network would like to resume advocacy training, and we need support from providers to make that a reality. We have a great relationship with one of California's foremost advocates for the rights of recovering individuals, and she would like to update the workshops we last offered five years ago. The Network also has new material. With training, participants will be able to:

- Confidently ask for and get face-to-face meetings with your local government representatives.
- Discuss discrimination and lack of services devoted to individuals in recovery.
- Cultivate local media relationships that will raise the profile of recovery issues.

- Speak before local groups, including local government meetings, with confidence and messaging clarity.

Ask your coalition and chapter leadership how they and you can be a part of this new series of workshops.

The Network standard at the state and national level

The Network and CCAPP are joining forces to make a California sober living standard a reality.

The Network's standard for sober living homes was a key contributor to the new NARR national standard, just approved in October. We and CCAPP are using the NARR update as an opportunity to create a truly statewide standard for the first time. A few volunteers have already begun work, representing each of our organizations. Drafts will be circulated to our coalitions for comments as the work progresses. The project is expected to take several months to complete.

Homes that are already fully compliant with our current standard will almost certainly be in full compliance with the new one. Health and safety requirements are mostly unchanged. Changes will be most apparent in two major areas:

- Required contents for resident and operating documents are much more explicit.
- Measures of the quality of the home recovery environment are spelled out much more clearly.

You can view the current Network standard on the documents page of our website [at this link](#). The new NARR standard is available [here](#). We will be providing additional information about how to prepare for the changes. This will be a discussion topic at your coalition and chapter meetings in early 2016.

We're building a brand-new website!

Better listings, more content and a host of member benefits

A generous foundation grant will help us realize one of our long-planned goals. The grant will fund the development of a new web-based information platform, not just a new website.

The site will be built using business grade software. Navigation will reflect all aspects of the Network's mission and will offer the public several easy-to-use ways to find sober living homes. Coalition and chapter representatives will be involved in the planning process. Listings will include more information, presented in a more visually compelling way. ***Basic listings will still be a free membership benefit, available to all homes meeting Network standards.***

We'll be eliminating paper application and renewal forms. The application process will be completely web-based. Members will also be able to make changes to their web listings directly through the site—no more waiting for Network administrators to make them. Training will be provided at your coalition and chapter meetings when the time comes to convert to the new system.

Coalitions' application review process will also be web-based. Inspectors will be able to record the results of site visits directly to the system, through a web interface. Document reviews will also be web based. We will have more information for you about why this is important. In short, the process will help us keep costs low, and raises the credibility of the certification your homes earn.

The new platform will also offer a lot more content, including local items, tips, training material, document templates, and advocacy content. Eventually, our site will be the means by which your homes can be listed on a national directory of standards-compliant and accountable sober living homes earning the NARR certification.

Network promotes a new model for state recognition, support for sober living homes

This innovation is taking hold outside California, with Network help.

California currently provides neither recognition nor support for the largest and most successful system of sober living homes in the nation. Local governments are demanding state licensure and strict control over sober living homes. There is a better way, and California's regulators are beginning to listen

The Network is helping other states implement a new model for collaboration and incentives. It features voluntary certification along the lines of what the Network offers, combined with incentives for good homes to become certified and accountable. Four states have implemented a version of this framework.

Ohio, Florida, Maryland and most recently Massachusetts have adopted policies that provide either exclusive referrals or access to capital for homes that comply with the NARR standard, and that are subject to the oversight of state-level organizations modeled after the Network. We provided advice to all four of those states and, through NARR, we are actively engaged as consultants by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to help them establish their system there. In our discussions with state agencies, we and CCAPP are promoting this model for California.

California's renewed interest in our work is driven by several factors. The state's new Medi-Cal plan recognizes the role and need for good sober living homes as part of a comprehensive health care system. The state Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation needs more quality sober living capacity for re-entry programs. Homelessness

in Southern California has increased, while counties lack enough suitable supportive housing. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development just issued guidance that abstinence-based recovery housing options need to be included in a well-designed continuum of care framework.

Liability insurance news

Lower rates for the Network insurance plan

The group plan has been renegotiated, and is significantly less expensive than last year's plan. A company inspection is required before coverage can be effective. Call the plan office for details at (800) 494-9844.

Sober living get-together

Possibly on our 2016 calendar

We originally envisioned our Recovery Summit as an opportunity for sober living homes—operators, managers and residents—to get to know each other and exchange information of mutual interest. We aren't likely to have a Summit in 2016, so the board is considering a Network-wide event for our sober living community to get to know each other, and to discuss issues affecting the field. We will have more detailed information on this as plans develop. We want to keep participation costs low. If you know of a centrally located local college or other venue that might be willing to donate space, please let us know. We have a few ideas, but can always use more.

Support the Network

Your donations make a difference.

You can make a difference in the lives of thousands of people in Southern California seeking recovery. Private donations help us expand our support while keeping fees low. You can [donate online here](#).

Have material or suggestions for future newsletters? Send them to Vince Roncone, Network Project Director, at vincelosangeles@yahoo.com.

We want to make this bulletin a semi-regular publication. If you received it from someone else, or read it on our website, please use [this convenient online form](#) to add your name to our mailing list.