

Strength & Sustainability Conference Overview

The Strength and Sustainability (S&S) Conference is an annual convening of statewide peer leadership, convening to strategize and plan for the peer workforce, advocacy, and building peer-run businesses. This is a self-sustaining, grassroots conference coordinated through consultation by LaVoy Wagner LLC¹.

Conference Goal

The S&S Conference is a look at what is working, what is not working, and what can we do together to make it better.

- It is about owning our **strength** as a movement and as individuals.
- It is about building paths toward **sustainability** in practices, policies, and community.

The Conference's goal is to connect newly activated peer supporters, organizational leaders, and experienced advocates for a deep dive into the state's past, current, and future actions of the Peer Movement, a diverse network of people with lived experience who want to transform the mental health system inside and outside.

Conference Tracks

The conference has three areas of focus:

Peer Workforce - S&S Conference organizers bring engaging and informative presenters to add to the discussion of Peer Support Specialist employment in the state. Topics discussed may include, but are not limited to, wages, scope of work, ethics, core competencies, certification, best practices, career ladder, and supervision. Attendees will meet to discuss ideas for improving the delivery of peer support in the workplace and how to better support one another as providers.

Advocacy - The S&S Conference is an opportunity for longtime advocates to educate new advocates in a collaborative process. This is also a space for looking at successes and challenges in the current state advocacy community. Attendees will participate in discussions about strategies and ideas for next steps in the ongoing system transformation.

Peer-Run Organizations and Leadership - The S&S Conference provides opportunities for building relationships between peer-run organizations across counties and regions. In addition, participants are invited to strategize and plan for empowerment, growth, and sustainability.

¹ LaVoy Wagner LLC is a New York limited liability company founded by Andrea Wagner. It is a for-profit event planning and consulting firm dedicated to raising awareness of and capital for peer-run businesses.

Principles and Values

Guiding principles of the S&S Conference is tied the historic and ongoing Peer Movement, and the long-held concept: Nothing about us without us! Organizers hold to the value that consumers/clients must have a major role in the envisioning, development, and implementation of local and state mental health policies and programs.

The committee also holds to the values of self-determination and choice as a social justice imperative. The S&S Conference promotes and supports voluntary, non-clinical, person-centered, peer-run organizations, services, and programs for all people who experience mental health challenges.

Conference Activities:

- *Keynote address*
- *Areas of Focus Panel*
- *Workshops*
- *Community Discussions*
- *Entertainment*
- *Healing Arts Practices*
- *Giveaways*
- *Networking and socializing*
- *Resource Fair*

Conference Committee

The S&S Conference is organized by a committee of people with lived experience who are trained Peer Support Specialists and advocates. Jaime Faurot and Andrea Wagner are the co-chairs of the committee. The committee members were an integral part of three previous peer statewide conferences that were organized under the California Association of Mental Health Peer Run Organizations (CAMHPRO). They came together with a passion for maintaining an annual statewide conference after seeing the importance and impact such events have had.

Jaime is a longtime peer advocate working in several Bay Area with individuals, groups, and government agencies to ensure diversity and inclusion of all peers in the mental health system of care and to amplify the peer voice. Andrea, who was formerly mentored by peer movement pioneer Sally Zinman, is a native of the Superior Region of California and has worked as an advocate in peer support for the past nine years. Both Jaime and Andrea met as ACCESS Ambassadors under the CalVoices ACCESS California program more than four years ago.