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## Health Care & Wellness Committee

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### SSB 5189

**Brief Description:** Establishing behavioral health support specialists.

**Sponsors:** Senate Committee on Health & Long Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Trudeau, Wagoner, Conway, Dhingra and Wilson, C.).

#### Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Establishes the profession of behavioral health support specialist.
- Requires the Health Care Authority to ensure that behavioral health support specialist services are covered by the state Medicaid program by January 1, 2025.
- Requires carriers to provide access to behavioral health support specialists in accordance with network adequacy standards established by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner by July 1, 2025.

**Hearing Date:** 3/10/23

**Staff:** Ingrid Lewis (786-7293).

#### **Background:**

##### Professional Licensure.

The Department of Health (DOH) licenses and certifies health care professionals. Licensure or certification may entail the adoption of rules, verification of educational attainment and completion of supervised training, completion of a background check and verification of good character requirements, administration of a knowledge or practical skills examination, and collection of license or certification fees. The Uniform Disciplinary Act provides laws governing the conduct and discipline of license and certification holders, with the DOH acting as the disciplinary authority.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

### Behavioral Health Support Specialist Training Programs.

There are two certificate programs in Washington that offer training to become a behavioral health support specialist. Programs prepare behavioral health support specialists to provide low-intensity interventions to individuals with mild to moderate mental health or substance use disorders while under the supervision of a qualified health care professional.

### Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council.

The Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council is an entity appointed by the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries to approve apprenticeship programs and establish apprenticeship program standards.

### **Summary of Bill:**

"Behavioral health support specialist" is defined as a person certified to deliver brief, evidence-based interventions under the supervision of a state credentialed provider who can assess, diagnose, and treat mental and behavioral health conditions within their scope of practice. A behavioral health support specialist is not permitted to make diagnoses within their scope of practice but are able to track and monitor treatment response and outcomes using measurement-based care.

The Department of Health, in collaboration with the University of Washington Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and in consultation with stakeholders, must develop rules for the certification of behavioral health support specialists by January 1, 2025. Certification rules must include appropriate standards for approval of behavioral health support specialist educational programs. The educational program may be integrated into a bachelor's degree program or structured as a postbaccalaureate continuing education program or registered apprenticeship approved by the Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council, provided that the apprenticeship is in combination with an approved bachelor's degree or postbaccalaureate certificate. The program must include a supervised clinical practicum with demonstrated clinical skills in core competencies.

An applicant for certification must have a bachelor's degree, complete an approved behavioral health support specialist educational program, and pass an exam. Following initial certification, a behavioral health support specialist must complete 20 hours of continuing education every two years.

Behavioral health support specialists are subject to professional discipline under the Uniform Disciplinary Act.

The Health Care Authority must ensure that behavioral health support specialist services are covered by the state Medicaid program by January 1, 2025. By July 1, 2025, every carrier must provide access to behavioral support specialists in a manner sufficient to meet network adequacy standards established by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains multiple effective dates. Please see the bill.