

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 2690

---

**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Health Care & Wellness

**Title:** An act relating to mental health first aid.

**Brief Description:** Creating a mental health first aid course.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Cody, Hasegawa, Morrell, Green, McIntire and Simpson.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 1/24/08, 1/31/08 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Directs the Department of Social and Health Services to provide for mental health first aid training.

---

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Morrell, Vice Chair; Barlow, Campbell, Green, Moeller, Pedersen, Schual-Berke and Seaquist.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Hinkle, Ranking Minority Member; Alexander, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Condotta and DeBolt.

**Staff:** Dave Knutson (786-7146).

**Background:**

In 2000 in order to help people provide initial support for someone with a mental health problem, Betty Kitchener and Professor Tony Jorm from the Centre from the Mental Health Research at the Australian National University developed a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training course. This is a 12-hour course with the aim to improve the mental health literacy of members of the Australian community. Mental Health First Aid courses have now been conducted for approximately 10,000 participants. These participants have included members of the general public and people from a broad spectrum of workplaces such as teachers, nurses, case managers, support workers, social welfare staff, employment agencies staff,

---

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

personnel staff, and staff of many commonwealth and state government departments. Participants receive a course manual and also a certificate at the completion of the course.

These courses are now being conducted in every state and territory of Australia and overseas in Scotland, Hong Kong and the State of New York, U.S.A.

The MHFA course provides skills and knowledge designed to help a person better manage a potential or developing mental health problem in him/herself or in a family member, a friend, or a work colleague. Like other first-aid courses, it does not train people to diagnose or treat health problems. The course runs over four sessions of three hours each for a total of 12 hours. It covers helping people in mental health crisis situations and/or in the early stages of mental health problems. The course provides information about depression, anxiety disorders, psychosis, and substance use disorder. Participants in the course learn:

- how to recognize the symptoms of these mental illnesses;
- the possible causes or risk factors for these illnesses;
- the evidence based medical, psychological, and alternative treatments available;
- how to give appropriate initial help and support to a person suffering one of these illnesses; and
- how to take appropriate action if a crisis situation arises involving suicidal behavior, panic attack, stress reaction to trauma, or threatening psychotic behavior.

---

### **Summary of Bill:**

The Department of Social and Health Services will provide mental health first-aid training to the general public, based on the model developed at the Australian National University in Melbourne, Australia.

---

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

### **Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Mental health first-aid training will allow family, friends, and co-workers to recognize the signs of a mental health problem much sooner. It will get people the help they need before a problem becomes serious.

(Opposed) This is another attempt to treat people with a mental health problem with drugs.

**Persons Testifying:** (In support) Representative Cody, prime sponsor; and Rick Weaver, Washington Community Mental Health Council.

(Opposed) Steven Pearce, Citizens Commission on Human Rights of Seattle.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.