

Rural Behavioral Health Workforce Development

What we Do and Don't Know, and How to Move Forward

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Introduction

- Workforce challenges abound. Multiple sectors and industries currently impacted. Why? Baby Boomer generation left workforce, Gen X considerably smaller population.
- Behavioral health currently especially impacted.
- Rural behavioral health beyond especially impacted. Serious shortages with no changes to situation anticipated. Likely will grow worse. Why?

Many factors: Smaller rural population, smaller potential cohort of students, reduced access to higher education, less likely to consider behavioral health as occupation.

What do we know?

What don't we know?

What are some practical solutions?

What do We Know?

- Rural providers tend to be younger, worked fewer years, work more hours per week (compared to urban counterparts)
- Approx 80% of mid-level providers practice in urban/suburban locations
- Approx 90% of Psychiatrists practice in urban/suburban locations
- For every 10 miles one goes away from an urban center with higher education facility, the difficulty in hiring a social worker increases by 3% (150 miles = 45% more difficult in hiring)
- Top 3 predictors of who becomes a rural behavioral health provider?
 - They are from a rural background (calibrate expectations differently/familiarization)
 - They completed a practicum/internship in a rural location (culture and agency interfacing)
 - They received rural content as a part of their educational curriculum (affirmation/demystification)

What Don't We Know?

Why we continue to struggle with this workforce concern:

Political influences

State & Federal

How will future social & political structures play out?

Advocacy

How can we steer broad advocacy work necessary to steer resources toward this problem?

Education 1.0

Nearly all behavioral health & social services requires min of bachelor, many master degrees.

Why has it been historically difficult to develop workable connections and solutions?

How can we increase educational investment in training rural behavioral health and social service providers?

Education 2.0

- How can we entice youth to consider working in these fields of practice?

Practical Suggestions

- Embed behavioral health & social services in junior high and high school career planning,
- Define partnerships & academic pathways between high schools, community colleges, & universities,
- Utilize online education when and where appropriate,
- At college/university level, focus on practicum/internship placement in rural regions,
- Enhance loan forgiveness & scholarship programs targeting rural behavioral health (scholarships similar to Title IV-E Child Welfare assistance, dedicated internships),
- Education: Increase rural content within rural curriculum & program design,
- Identify and address recruitment and retention barriers unique to regions,
- Strategic recruitment - focus on those more likely to seek out rural employment.

More Suggestions

- Improve rural broadband and related technology,
- Expand NHSC behavioral health scholarships,
- Create education-to-workforce “pipelines” & selectively recruit,
- Increase peer support specialists & fund/reimburse appropriately,
- Accept that rural service costs are different & different economies of scale,
- Listen to rural residents - What do they need from us?

Retention: Critical Post-Hire

Improving the workforce population is critical, but only part of the equation. Once hired, retention becomes the next concern.

Why do people exit these occupations?

- Lack of professional development opportunities,
- Lack of professional growth opportunities,
- Lack of agency resources,
- Dual relationships,
- Professional & social isolation.

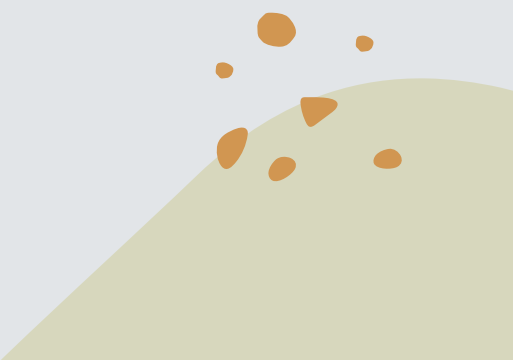
Conclusion



We know a lot about the problem but continue to struggle to identify effective solutions.

Research strongly suggests “growing our own” to be one of the strongest predictors among those practicing in rural areas. Develop pathways from high school to college (articulation agreements, curriculum planning, college-university strategic planning, etc)

Address financial barriers and support funding to support transition from college to practicum to workforce.



*It's really about
connecting the dots...*



EDUCATION



RECRUITMENT



SUPPORT

