

North Dakota Behavioral Health Workforce: Next Steps

Proposed Action Steps

Fact Sheet

North Dakota has been improving the behavioral health workforce situation for decades in the face of local and national workforce and behavioral health trends that have impacted the workforce environment: population changes, the pandemic, and economic conditions. But because of its history and the accompanying track record of success, North Dakota is well-positioned to take the next steps to address behavioral health care workforce issues in 2023 and beyond.

The report—*North Dakota Behavioral Health Workforce: Next Steps*—is the result of a collaborative project of the North Dakota Behavioral Health Strategic Plan workforce committee (Aim 7 Committee) and the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education’s Behavioral Health’s Behavioral Health Program (WICHE BHP) with multiple objectives: research of past and current behavioral health workforce efforts; key stakeholder interviews; a Summit with community stakeholders; and, a draft strategic plan and recommendations.

This has resulted in identification of the following Issue Areas, Key Takeaways, and Recommendations:

Issue Areas

- ✓ Primary/secondary student recruitment to workforce
- ✓ Funding for workforce initiatives
- ✓ Career pathway development
- ✓ Career satisfaction
- ✓ Competition among organizations
- ✓ Internship and supervisory costs
- ✓ Loan repayment
- ✓ Data
- ✓ Occupational licensing boards capacity and coordination
- ✓ Scope of practice and credentialing
- ✓ Executive and legislative, statewide, state-to-local, local-to-local cooperation and coordination

Key Takeaways

- A. **Visible and tangible commitment** across the state and in local communities.
- B. **Too few dedicated people**, organizations, and agencies working on planning and implementation, very often without any funding or resources.
- C. Attention must be paid to **needs of, and impacts on, local communities**, particularly in rural and tribal areas.
- D. Initiatives must have a **comprehensive, multi-level, systemic approach**.
- E. **Consider similarities and differences** between mental health and substance use/substance abuse/addiction workforce, as well as public and private.
- F. **Design impact for the entire ‘pipeline’**, from primary school through retirees/career changers—and across the entire continuum of care.
- G. **Leverage existing efforts, initiatives, and collaboratives** by adding or enhancing behavioral health workforce components.
- H. **Sufficient resources will be critical** to achieving success in any efforts.
- I. **Time is of the essence** to take advantage of—or mitigate against—workforce and employment trends.

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WICHE BHP Recommendations

Summit participants from communities across North Dakota identified six categories of workforce issues and 30 proposed action steps. Below are five recommendations based on that work that should be considered for immediate action:

1. *Fully fund and resource a ‘backbone’ organization to lead behavioral health workforce initiatives in North Dakota (Proposed Action Steps: 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.5, and 6.6)*

Create a collaborative task force—or identify and enhance an existing collaborative—to:

- a. Oversee and implement a state-level behavioral health workforce strategic plan;
- b. Coordinate, integrate, and communicate behavioral health workforce-related initiatives and efforts, including strategic planning at the regional and local levels;
- c. Evaluate, and be accountable for, strategic plan outcomes.

2. *Design and field ‘pipeline’ and workforce costs needs assessment/gaps analyses (Proposed Action Steps 2.1, 3.1, 4.7, 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, and 6.3)*

Analyses should consider factors such as impacts on rural and tribal areas, continuum of care, and across the spectrum of behavioral health professionals. A workforce costs analysis should assess costs faced by providers and organizations on the local level.

3. *Enhance existing recruitment programs and create new ones (Proposed Action Steps 2.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 4.2)*

- a. Create a behavioral health workforce scholarship for North Dakota residents.
- b. Create a career pathway for individuals who lack degrees, those who are switching careers, or retirees.
- c. Create a ‘Behavioral Health Workforce Innovation Fund’ to identify and incentivize innovative approaches to community collaboration on workforce needs.

4. *Collect, review, and report on behavioral health workforce-related licensure regulations, policies, and procedures (Proposed Action Steps 1.1, 1.2, and 4.3)*

Identify any barriers to licensure, such as renewals and current licensees, any potential changes that would streamline licensure requirements across the relevant boards, and review and revise statutes and regulations that are unnecessarily burdening providers and individuals, such as background checks and disqualification criteria.

5. *Finalize and implement a behavioral health workforce strategic plan*

By June 2023, complete the behavioral health workforce strategic plan.

- a. Identify a strategic plan process with appropriate membership and needed resources.
- b. Adopt of specific and measurable action steps.
- c. Assign lead agencies and organizations.
- d. Set clearly defined deadlines and evaluation process.