



# West Virginia Behavioral Health Initiative

Working to train, retain and grow outstanding  
behavioral health professionals in West Virginia.

*“I have lived in this state all of my life and have seen the mental health needs of individuals living here. There are many factors that go into those needs, and I would like to be a part of helping West Virginia move forward and succeed.”*

*– West Virginia Master's Student*



# West Virginia Needs the Behavioral Health Initiative

“ My roots are here and helping reclaim a community I grew up in is important to me. I want to bring mental health awareness and recovery to people who trust me – because I am one of them.”


– West Virginia Master's Student

## West Virginia faces an extreme shortage of behavioral health professionals

Almost all of West Virginia's communities are designated behavioral health professional shortage area sites (HRSA, 2021). Meeting the critical need for behavioral health providers is a significant workforce challenge for our state.

The behavioral health field spans a variety of career options, with many roles that require advanced degrees, specialized training and continuing education throughout one's career. Job duties often involve services for children, adolescents and adults who may be dealing with behavioral and emotional challenges, mental illness, stress, trauma and substance use.





*“ Social workers and other behavioral health professionals are an integral part of keeping our communities safe, happy and healthy. ”*

*– West Virginia Master's Student*

## The BHI will help stabilize and build our behavioral health workforce

The success of state plans to address substance misuse, the foster care crisis and workforce re-entry for people in recovery depends on the quantity and quality of our behavioral health workforce. If we hope to make progress toward resolving these problems, West Virginia will need more:

- Mental health counselors
- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Certified alcohol and drug counselors
- Psychiatric nurses
- Psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners
- Physician assistants specializing in mental health
- Psychiatrists
- Peer support specialists
- Individuals working in prevention and outreach

Identifying resources and dedicating funding toward behavioral health workforce development will help to tackle the extreme challenges and issues the state faces with behavioral health.





## WHAT IS THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE?

The Behavioral Health Initiative (BHI) is a comprehensive approach to the recruitment, training and retention of behavioral health providers in West Virginia that will:

- Expand behavioral health career pipeline programming to K-12 students;
- Create incentives for behavioral health education and practice in West Virginia; and
- Collect and share data on education and workforce supply and demand to enable sound future policy decisions

### Streamlined approach to ensure success of the initiative

The BHI as developed would be a state-funded program managed by the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission. The Commission would sponsor statewide initiatives and advance others through grants to local training programs, behavioral health employers, non-profit organizations and other stakeholders.

Modeling from the Rural Health Initiative (RHI), successful programs in other states, and by expanding existing work in West Virginia, the Behavioral Health Initiative would focus on the following areas:

- 1 Studying behavioral health workforce supply and demand
- 2 Incentivizing and promoting advanced careers in behavioral health disciplines
- 3 Pipeline recruitment – promotion and programming in secondary and undergraduate education
- 4 Increasing support for attainment of specialized credentials and telehealth proficiency
- 5 Connecting stakeholders for continuous innovation, collaboration and growth

# BHI Delivers: Workforce Generation & Retention for WV



## A healthy workforce requires access to mental health treatment

Mental illness and substance misuse cost employers an estimated \$80 to \$100 billion annually in indirect costs alone. (*businessgrouphealth.org*)

According to the Journal of Employee Assistance, data from 4,707 clients who received employer-sponsored mental health programming found that a company received the equivalent of more than \$10,000 in additional employee productivity, per year, for each employee who used those behavioral health services. Productivity at work increased by more than 25 percent.

## BHI would follow proven model to retain graduates in West Virginia

The Rural Health Initiative (RHI) Act created by the West Virginia Legislature in 1991 provides funding toward the placement and retention of primary care providers in underserved areas. The model used for the RHI could translate well for behavioral health workforce development.

Currently, the state lacks providers and funding to support workforce development in these areas. Using similar incentives as those used to attract and retain rural health providers also could work to encourage behavioral health graduates to remain in state. In addition, many graduates stay in the communities or with the agencies where they complete their internships and clinical training.

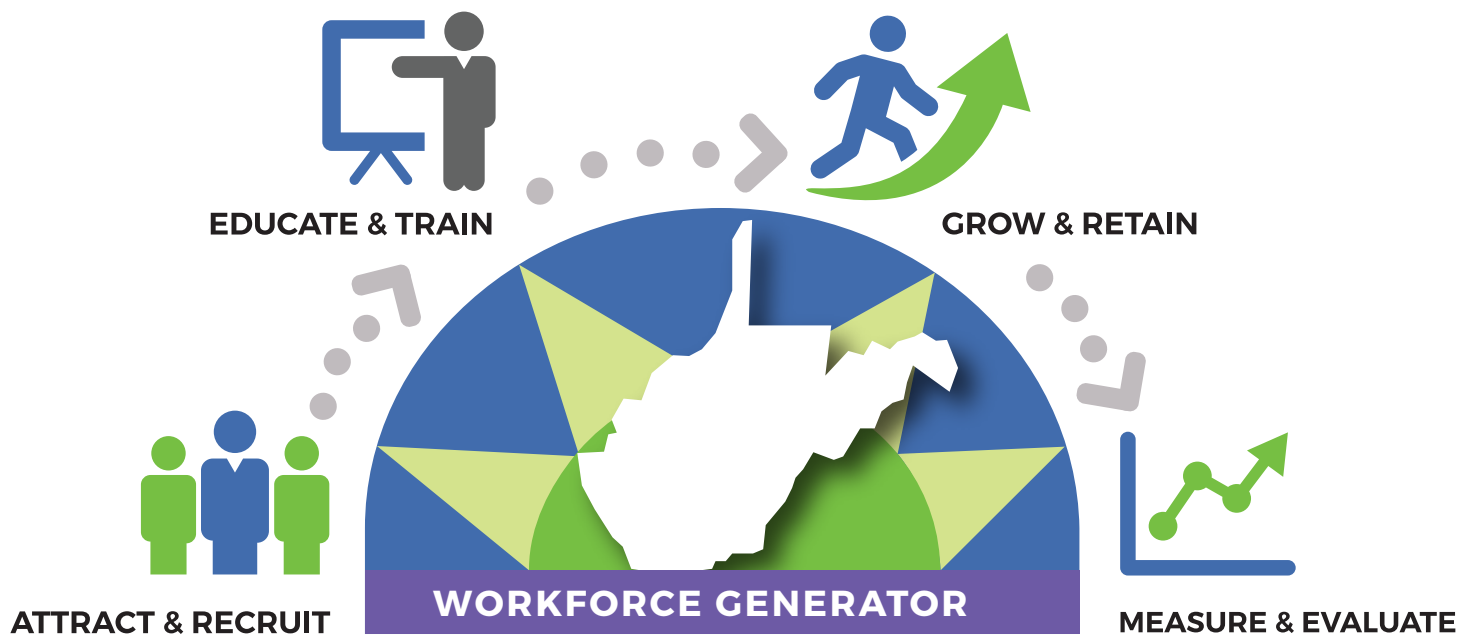
## Building sustained capacity

West Virginia needs a consistent, stable funding source focused solely on behavioral health workforce development. Working with policymakers, state leaders, education and industry partners across the state, we can work to advance dedicated resources toward West Virginia's most challenging issues in behavioral healthcare.

- West Virginia has actively sought and received significant federal grant funding to support and improve the state's behavioral healthcare infrastructure.
- Small awards from philanthropic and private organizations have included support for behavioral health workforce development.
- State funding for the Mental Health Loan Repayment Program supports retention in underserved communities.

Because of these efforts and investments, we have a solid base in place to continue building a sustainable workforce infrastructure. The BHI is poised to immediately put additional funding to work for the Mountain State.





### BHI Key Participants

WV Higher  
Education  
Policy  
Commission

WV  
DHHR

Behavioral  
Health  
Provider  
Network

Federal  
Workforce  
Programs

K-12  
Education

Colleges  
&  
Universities





## BHI — Solid foundation with ability to meet state needs

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission's Division of Health Sciences provided financial and strategic support for the following pilot behavioral health workforce initiatives. These projects and others have built a solid base for a larger and more sustained investment that would have a statewide impact.

### Recent projects and higher education partnerships

The BHI worked with these institutions to develop programs, pipelines and opportunities to recruit, train and retain behavioral health professionals in West Virginia:

- Concord University Social Work Department
- Davis & Elkins College Department of Psychology and Human Services
- Fairmont State University Behavioral Sciences Department
- Marshall University Psychology Department
- West Liberty University Psychology Department
- West Virginia University Social Work Department

### Recent efforts to attract, train and retain behavioral health professionals in WV:

- Strengthening the pipeline for the psychology workforce in rural WV (2018-2020)
- Addressing school psychologist shortages (2019-2021)
- Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative pilot projects (2019-2021)


### Current successful BHI initiatives

Partnering with nationally recognized philanthropies, such as the Benedum Foundation, the BHI has undertaken a variety of projects to support future growth of the initiative including:

- Mental Health Loan Repayment Program (MHLR) (2019-Current)
- Expanding high school/college dual credit psychology opportunities (2021-Current)
- Campus mental health grants (2020-Current)
- Healthcare workforce planning fellowship (2021-Current)
- BehavioralHealthWorkforceWV.com website (2020-Current)

*“ I want to do my part to make West Virginia a better place. A place where people want to live. A place people are proud of. ”*

*– Sheila, Mental Health Loan Repayment Program Recipient, Wayne County*

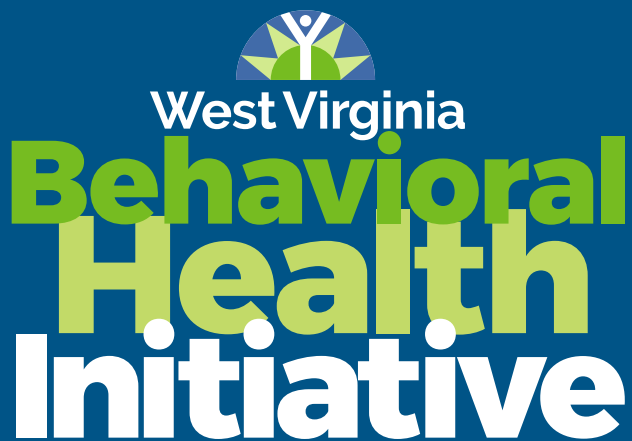


**Together, with  
additional support,  
we can address  
a critical need  
to build and  
grow West Virginia's  
behavioral health  
workforce.**

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE**

For more information on the BHI's focus areas and to see the full plan, view studies, white papers and data related to the initiative, please visit:

**[behavioralhealthworkforcewv.com](http://behavioralhealthworkforcewv.com)**



**West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission**  
Division of Health Sciences  
1018 Kanawha Boulevard, East – Suite 700  
Charleston, WV 25301

**Carolyn Canini, Director of Behavioral Health Programs**  
Office – (304) 558-0530, ext. 1  
Email – [Carolyn.Canini@wvhepc.edu](mailto:Carolyn.Canini@wvhepc.edu)

