

The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission Division of Health Sciences provided financial and strategy support for the following initiatives to address the behavioral health workforce in West Virginia. These projects have built a solid base for a larger and more sustained investment in the behavioral health workforce in West Virginia. Further investment will allow expansion of successful projects with statewide impact.

Recent Initiatives

Development, Construction and Completion of a Psychology lab at Shepherd University (2016-2021). This project provided funding for the creation of shared laboratory space with a primary use for psychophysiological research in which physiological signals like electromyogram (electrical activity of muscles) and electroencephalogram (electrical activity of the brain) will be recorded using electrodes placed on the skin while research participants perform psychological tasks. The lab provides space for excellent preparation for students moving on to graduate training in psychology, medicine, or research.

Addition of a Social Worker to Calhoun County Schools (2019-2021). This project provided funding to expand the Student Services Center in Calhoun County Schools, where mental health workforce shortages contributed to the school's challenges providing support for elementary students. The funds provided partial support to hire a seasoned social worker to provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 services to elementary students and their families.

Strengthening the Pipeline for the Psychology Workforce in Rural WV (2018-2020). This project exposed Marshall graduate psychology students to the needs of rural communities to encourage retention in-state post-graduation. The project piloted joint community-based projects between high school AP Psychology students and graduate psychology students and offered dual enrollment psychology courses to McDowell County high schools.

Addressing School Psychologist Shortages (2019-2021). In response to practitioner shortages, this project provided funding for MU's School Psychology Program to offer a hybrid model for course delivery within the School Psychology Program to include candidates in northern WV, adding capacity for an additional 10-15 masters level students to enroll annually and increasing the geographic diversity of the graduates.

Rural Integrated Behavioral Health Postdoctoral Psychology Fellowship (2013-2020). This project provided funding for multiple phases of a fellowship program at Cabin Creek Health Systems to offer quality postdoctoral psychology training in rural integrated primary care. The fellowship included observation experiences with medical school faculty working in health psychology and specialty integrated care settings to expose trainees to diverse areas of integrated practice and to improve care for rural patients.

Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative Pilot Projects (2019-2021). The West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC), with partial funding from the Benedum Foundation, awarded six West Virginia training programs with grants in April 2019. The projects focused on areas of the educational and practice pipeline for behavioral health professionals and piloted strategies for increasing the number of professionals holding clinical credentials. Project teams reported outcomes indicating an increase year over year in the number of undergraduate psychology students planning to pursue a graduate program in behavioral health and a drastic increase in the number of Licensed Independent Clinical Social Workers (LICSW) eligible to provide supervision for others toward the independent practice credential.

Project summaries:

- **Concord University Social Work Department-** The Clinical Licensure and Preservice Program (CLaPP) was developed to increase access to clinical supervision for Licensed Independent Clinical Social Work (LICSW) candidates which in turn increases the number of individuals who can provide independent mental health practice. This project provided a substantial increase in the number of LICSWs now eligible to supervise social workers toward their independent license.
- **Davis and Elkins College Department of Psychology and Human Services** - The department utilized a three-fold approach to develop an undergraduate college pipeline that promotes careers in clinical behavioral health and encourages students to enroll in clinical master's level programs that lead to licensure. Three new courses and a GRE preparation station were created. Out of the graduates for Spring 2020-Spring 2021, the program saw over a doubling of students actively planning, applying, or being accepted into graduate programs leading to licensure for school psychology or licensed professional counseling.
- **Fairmont State University Behavioral Sciences Department-** The project provided undergraduate students with information on behavioral health careers and networking opportunities with current providers in behavioral health agencies. Posttests examined interest and intent to pursue a behavioral health career and found a statistically significant difference between individuals exposed to the presentations and the control group such that the students who attended presentations expressed higher interest in behavioral health fields compared to the introduction to psychology control group. Individuals who attended the presentations planned on going into a behavioral health field to a greater percentage (60%) compared to the Introduction to Psychology control group (14%).
- **Marshall University Psychology Department-** The project provided information to high school students and college undergraduates regarding careers in the behavioral health field. An ambassador training module was used by 15 psychology undergraduate students to speak to students enrolled at their alma mater high schools in southern WV. Through the sharing of materials about careers in behavioral health at recruitment events and providing follow-up outreach, project team identified thirty students with intent to declare a major in a behavioral health program through incentive program. Career preparation and pathways content developed by project team were made available for statewide use in communicating career pathways for paraprofessionals and professionals working in behavioral health settings.
- **West Liberty University Psychology Department in partnership with Marshall University Psychology Department-** The project aimed to increase the number of well-trained licensed psychologists in West Virginia by creating online resources for psychology licensure exam preparation and substance use treatment training modules. 112 test questions were developed and uploaded in the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP) practice test in Blackboard for use by students in preparation and a twelve-module substance use treatment course was created.
- **West Virginia University Social Work Department-** The purpose of this project was to stimulate student interest in clinical social work and prepare students for social work licensure. Seven competitively selected students successfully completed clinical social work internships throughout West Virginia, gaining clinical practice knowledge, experience, and exposure to the broader clinical practice network in West Virginia. Student evaluations of the project were positive with 60% of participants indicating that participation in the clinical placement was a positive influence on their career interest in clinical social work. Thirty-five students participated in licensure exam training sessions. Results indicate statistically significant improvements on a range of content areas and demonstrated efficacy for improving student knowledge of licensure processes and preparation.

Current Initiatives

Healthcare Workforce Planning Fellowship (2021-current). With a focus on the behavioral health workforce, the fellow works with the WVHEPC Health Sciences Division staff to study healthcare workforce needs for the future, including the supply of and demand for existing and emerging roles. The fellow has developed Minimum Data Sets for behavioral health professions in an effort to help improve data availability in the future. At the conclusion of the fellowship, a workforce data dashboard will be housed on BehavioralHealthWorkforceWV.com.

West Virginia Alliance for Creative Health Solutions (WVACHS) (2014-current). Funded by a multi-year grant from WVHEPC and the Benedum Foundation, this Practice Based Research Network received additional funding from Pew Charitable Trusts and the Benedum Foundation to support a study of the facilitators and barriers to Medication Assisted Treatment in West Virginia.

West Virginia HealthLink (2017-current). Led by faculty at WVU's Department of Geography, WV HealthLink provides interactive maps for health care access within the state of West Virginia. The project enables users to compare location and ability to travel and acquire an appropriate and affordable level of care for primary care, COVID-19 services, and behavioral health. The project provides important data for workforce distribution as it maps access based on analysis of various non-spatial barriers.

Behavioral Health Initiative Whitepaper and Stakeholder Convening (2018-current).

Building on successful models from other states, in 2018 the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission (WVHEPC) convened a workgroup to study the barriers to pursuing education and practice in mental health fields in WV and to map out the scaffolding of an initiative to support the educational development and growth of the state's workforce. The group detailed this initiative in a whitepaper, pulling concepts from other states that have strong programs and adding elements in response to the greatest barriers in WV. Focus areas of the initiative include:

- Promoting careers in behavioral health
- High school pipeline programming
- College pipeline programming
- Enrichment activities and support for master's/doctoral-level trainees
- Career development and skills enhancement for the existing workforce
- Improving trainee access to clinical supervisors
- Incentivizing careers in behavioral health
- Supporting attainment of specialized addiction credentials

In 2021, legislation was first introduced to create the Behavioral Health Initiative with funding for the above areas of focus. Later in the year, stakeholders met to refine the focus areas of the initiative and to prioritize components with the most return on investment. While all areas are of importance to stakeholders, the highest cost focus areas with greatest return are incentivizing careers in behavioral health and expansion of pipeline programming.

Mental Health Loan Repayment Program (MHLR) (2019-current). State Legislation to create the Mental Health Provider Student Loan Repayment Program passed in 2019 and was funded beginning in 2020. The program, administered by the WVHEPC, repays student loans for

licensed mental health providers who provide therapy or counseling services, reside in WV, and work in an underserved area of WV. Providers are awarded \$10,000 in exchange for a year of service, renewable up to three years and based on a competitive application process. A brief video highlights recipients and describes the program's impact:

<https://www.collegeforwv.com/programs/mental-health-loan-repayment-program/>

STLR/MHLR Recipient Joint Cohort for Professional Development (2021-current).

Recipients of the Mental Health Loan Repayment Program, administered by WVHEPC, and the Statewide Therapist Loan Repayment Program, administered by the WV Bureau for Behavioral Health participate in a joint cohort for professional development. The group provides a venue for participants to connect for support, ask questions, gain broader perspectives, and share ideas and opportunities among professionals practicing in similar settings, with long-range goals to help reduce isolation and increase retention of professionals in rural practice settings.

Expanding Dual Credit Psychology Opportunities (2021-current). This project, funded by the Benedum Foundation and implemented by Marshall University's Psychology Department, builds on prior pilot work to expand access to dual credit courses in rural high schools, with an emphasis on psychology. The courses build capacity in rural school districts by helping teachers pursue the credentials to teach dual credit and expose rural students to career opportunities in behavioral health.

Campus Mental Health Grants (2020-current). To help raise awareness about mental health on campuses, WVHEPC awards small grants to public 2-year and 4-year institutions to implement evidence-based programs or best practices that address student mental health. These focus on mental health needs of current students and creating campus environments that support wellness. Some projects directly address students in behavioral health training programs.

Student Mental Health Summit for Health Sciences and Behavioral Health Students (2021). Recognizing that the mental health and wellness of future practitioners is a key component of a healthy and capable workforce, this summit brought together national and local experts and students to discuss strategies for integrating a culture of wellness within the helping professions.

BehavioralHealthWorkforceWV.com (2020-current). On this page, behavioral health educators, employers, students, and practitioners in West Virginia can find up-to-date information and resources to help increase workforce participation and strengthen the preparation and retention of behavioral health providers. The site includes data helpful for preparing reports and grant applications and links to pathways materials and successful initiatives.

Project ECHO for Campus Mental Health (2022). The ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) model is being applied to college and university faculty and staff to provide expert presentations and case discussion on student mental health in an effort to support behavioral health professionals working with the college population. Project ECHO for Campus Mental Health provides professional development and reduces isolation of providers.

Roadmap to Behavioral Health Careers in WV Student Conference (2022). The objective of the conference is to provide students at the high school, undergraduate and graduate levels with information and tools to help in their exploration and pursuit of a career path in counseling, social work, psychology, and other behavioral health careers requiring advanced education. Recorded video segments will be available for school counselors and college instructors to use with students in future years.