



BHWC

**BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
WORKFORCE CENTER**

Board Presentation to the Illinois Board of Higher
Education on November 12, 2025

BACKGROUND

- **2018:** A bipartisan group of IL state legislators sponsored a resolution declaring that *Illinois is suffering from a behavioral healthcare workforce emergency.*
- **2019:** A task force created to study the problem recommended the creation of a behavioral health workforce center.
- **2022:** The Center was funded.
 - Southern Illinois University - primary hub
 - University of Illinois Chicago - secondary hub

Pre-pandemic data: 23.3% of Illinoisans' mental health needs met by its workforce (Kaiser Family Foundation).

The pandemic increased needs and accelerated loss of behavioral health providers.

Faced with unmanageable demand for services, many agencies have now closed their waitlists, leading to untreated mental health issues and increased use of emergency services.

OUR PARTNERS





ILLINOIS FACES A **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE SHORTAGE** AFFECTING EVERY COUNTY AND SETTING.

High turnover and unfilled vacancies—especially in rural areas—lead to long wait times across psychiatry, psychology, social work, counseling, occupational therapy, and substance use prevention.

Insufficient training and limited continuing education mean residents often lack access to evidence-based, cutting-edge care.

Illinois ranks 22nd in population-to-mental health professional ratio (349:1).

Only 22% of mental health needs are met with the current workforce.

The Behavioral Health Workforce Center (BHWC) was established in 2021 as part of the Health Care and Human Services Reform Act

[1] [KFF State Fact Sheet](#).

The BHWC will increase access to effective behavioral health services through coordinated initiatives to recruit, educate, and retain professionals in behavioral health.



CENTER GOALS

Strengthen the behavioral health care system in Illinois by achieving the following:

- 1** Assess the shortage and needs of the behavioral health workforce across the state on an on-going basis to provide information on areas with the most critical need.
- 2** Increase the number and diversity of behavioral health workers, including individuals with lived expertise, social workers, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other mental health professionals providing effective behavioral health services across the state.
- 3** Identify and address barriers to behavioral health care workforce recruitment, training, and retention.
- 4** Increase quality of care through support for training initiatives.
- 5** Increase access to services by increasing the capacity of providers to address behavioral health and substance use needs in primary health care settings through effective telehealth services and in non-traditional settings.



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PILLARS OF WORK

DATA

POLICY

PATHWAYS

**RECRUITMENT
& RETENTION**

TRAINING

RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Strategic Planning Process



VISION

Illinois's behavioral health workforce will have the capacity and skills to meet the needs of all state residents.

MISSION

The BHWC will increase access to effective behavioral health services through coordinated initiatives to recruit, educate, and retain behavioral health professionals.

PRIORITIES

In 3–5 years, the BHWC will have leveraged its subject matter expertise and collaborative partnerships to contribute to:

- **Enhancing access** to a diverse, prepared, and robust behavioral health workforce
- Developing **clear, accessible, and expanded career pathways** for behavioral health utilizing existing career pathways for health professions as well as pathways specific to behavioral health
- Providing **effective and accessible clinical training** and professional development
- **Reducing administrative burden** and **recommending policy improvements** for behavioral health workers
- Ensuring **adequate and substantial supports** and reimbursement rates for behavioral health services and providers
- Tracking Illinois behavioral health **workforce and data trends**



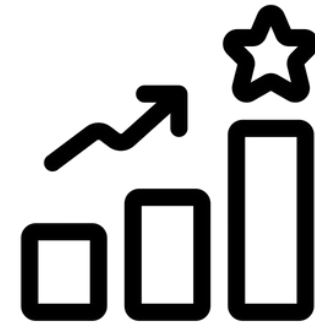
GOAL 1

Strengthen and expand behavioral health curriculum and clinical training experiences

Objective 1: Reduce the identified skill gaps in the workforce

Objective 2: Increase the number of clinical placements in rural and underserved regions

Objective 3: Increase the number of Illinois students who stay in the state for post-graduate residency and internship training



GOAL 2

Strengthen educational advancement across systems

Objective 1: Increase the number of students pursuing a degree in behavioral health programming

Objective 2: Address recruitment and retention of underrepresented candidates across professions



GOAL 3

Build and utilize evidence to develop policy recommendations

Objective 1: Utilize data to drive policy

Objective 2: Provide data to support the state's investment in increasing the behavioral health workforce

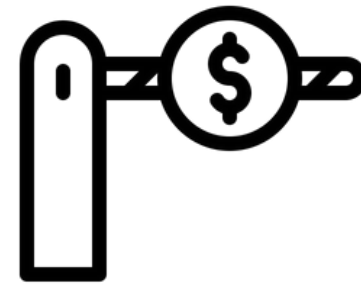


GOAL 4

Strengthen pre-career programs and awareness

Objective 1: Increase awareness of behavioral health careers

Objective 2: Increase participation in behavioral health-focused career pathways



GOAL 5

Address financial barriers to behavioral health education and workforce entry

Objective 1: Reduce student loan burden for students graduating from behavioral health education and training programs



GOAL 6

Support and retain the incumbent workforce in providing high quality care

Objective 1: Increase capacity to promote effective behavioral health services in high-need areas shown to have significant training gaps

Objective 2: Support retention of behavioral health providers through targeted programs

Objective 3: Implement a framework for a culturally responsive behavioral health workforce

Objective 4: Support primary care providers in the delivery of behavioral health services

Thank you!!
Questions???

Kari M. Wolf, MD

Professor and Chair, Department of Psychiatry, Co-Executive Director, SIU
Neuroscience Institute, CEO of the Behavioral Health Workforce Center
Psychiatry



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