



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health

The Evolving Workforce: Redefining Health Care Delivery in South Carolina

The South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health (IMPH) is a nonpartisan convener with the mission to collectively inform policy to improve health and health care. The Workforce for Health Taskforce was launched in April 2018 to determine South Carolina-specific policy changes and health care workforce solutions needed to create sustainable, person-centered systems of health care that promote population health.

The Taskforce represented more than 60 of the state's leading experts from health care systems, state agencies, consumer groups, academia, community-based organizations, nonprofits and philanthropic organizations.

In the report *The Evolving Workforce: Redefining Health Care Delivery in South Carolina*, state specific, evidence-based practice and policy solutions are outlined in four key areas:

- Embracing the evolution of health and human service roles,
- Training and educating health and human service providers,
- Behavioral health workforce needs and
- Setting the stage for the evolving workforce.



Behavioral Health Workforce Needs

Behavioral health providers are in high demand. On an annual basis, substance use disorders and mental health illnesses cost the United States an estimated \$740 billion and \$200 billion in lost earnings, respectively. Additionally, behavioral health disorders are expected to be the leading cause of disability in the U.S. by 2020.

Creating a behavioral health system in South Carolina that fully meets the needs of residents and the behavioral health workforce is critical to improving the state's overall health. In order to accomplish this over the next several years, the Workforce for Health Taskforce recommends the following:

1. Improve reimbursement for behavioral health services and enable government agencies and community based organizations (CBOs) to improve pay for behavioral health professionals.

Budget constraints and lack of career advancement opportunities in state agencies drives experienced clinicians to private practice or other settings providing better compensation. The Taskforce encourages the Governor, the Department of Administration and the State Legislature to consider collaborating to adjust public sector pay bands to be more competitive and reflect the level of education required for behavioral health workers.



2. Reduce financial barriers to entry for students interested in behavioral health certifications and degrees.

Educational entities and other state partners should provide behavioral health students with additional tuition reimbursement opportunities, loan repayment programs and incentives funded by local, state and/or federal investments. Offsetting much of the cost of obtaining a degree will protect students from the significant loans they may incur and help them view a career in behavioral health as a financially sound investment.

3. Ensure educational entities, students and employers are aware of the need for more behavioral health professionals in our state.

Relevant government agencies and academic and training institutions should partner with health and human service providers to market roles within the behavioral health workforce to middle school, high school and college students.

Behavioral health stakeholders should ensure students have a clear line of sight to behavioral health careers, job opportunities and information about educational requirements. This could include an online tool and interactions with high school students and freshman and sophomore college students.

4. Place special emphasis on creating a positive, supportive work environment with opportunities for growth in behavioral health settings.

Behavioral health providers have some of the most challenging jobs in the health care industry. Given the sensitivity of their work, employers of behavioral health providers should prioritize the creation of a positive and supportive work environment for employees by dedicating time for motivational activities and bonding among co-workers, utilizing coaching and consultation during field clinical supervision and identifying and implementing career ladder models for advancement and provide continuing education at no cost to employed behavioral health professionals.

**For more information, please visit IMPH.org
or contact Brie Hunt at Brie@IMPH.org.**

References:

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