

Adoption
Alliance of Community Assistance
Ministries of Greater Houston (ACAM)
Alliance Adolescent & Children's
Services
Arrow Child and Family Ministries
Bering Omega Community Services
Care for Elders
Career and Recovery Resources, Inc.
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of
Galveston-Houston
ChildBuilders
CHILDREN AT RISK
Children's Defense Fund
Coalition for Behavioral Health Services
Coalition for the Homeless of
Houston/Harris Co., Inc.
Collaborative for Children
Communities In Schools
Community Family Centers
Covenant House of Texas
DePelchin Children's Center
Family Services of Greater Houston
Fort Bend Regional Council on
Substance Abuse, Inc.
Gateway to Care
Good Neighbor Healthcare Center
Gulf Coast CHIP Coalition
Harris County Child Abuse Task Force
Harris County Healthcare Alliance
Healthcare for the Homeless-Houston
Houston Area Association for the
Education of Young Children
Houston Area Women's Center
Houston Food Bank
Houston Area Immunization Registry
IntraCare Hospitals
Jewish Family Service
Jewish Federation of Greater Houston
Justice for Children
League of Women Voters Houston
Legacy Community Health
Services, Inc.
Memorial Hermann Healthcare System
Mental Health America
of Greater Houston
NAMI Metropolitan Houston
NAMI West Houston, Inc.
Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
Neuhaus Education Center
Northwest Assistance Ministries
Planned Parenthood of Houston
and Southeast Texas, Inc.
Prepared 4 Life
San Jose Clinic
SEARCH
South County Community Clinic,
DBA The Community Clinic
Spaulding for Children
St. Luke's Episcopal Health System
Systems of Hope
Texans Together Education Fund
Texas Children's Hospital
The Arc of Greater Houston
The Methodist Hospital System
The Network of Behavioral
Health Providers
United Way of Greater Houston
Wesley Community Center
YMCA of Greater Houston
YWCA of Greater Houston

Behavioral Health: Workforce Expansion

Position Statement approved by One Voice: November 14, 2008

Issue/Concern: Texas is facing a critical shortage of behavioral health (mental health and substance abuse) professionals, including psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, clinical social workers and licensed chemical dependency counselors. With the passage of the federal mental health parity bill, demand for providers is likely to increase, exacerbating this shortage. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, almost three quarters of Texas counties have been designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSA's).

Specific Policy Recommendation(s):

- ★ Increase funding for psychiatric residency positions.
- ★ Implement loan forgiveness and repayment programs for behavioral health professionals who agree to work in MHPSA's for a certain number of years.

How does this issue/recommendation relate to prevention and early intervention or maximizing federal funds for health and human services? Behavioral health professionals are critical to ensuring that consumers with mental health and/or substance abuse disorders receive needed care. When public and private systems are faced with a shortage of behavioral health professionals, access to needed care is reduced, and the quality of the services that are provided is gravely compromised.

Many providers have found it increasingly difficult to recruit qualified psychiatrists since 2003 when the Legislature cut funding for psychiatric residency programs. While Texas medical schools graduate hundreds of psychiatry students each year, the shortage of residency slots forces many of these students to seek opportunities out-of-state—a significant loss for Texas taxpayers who heavily invested in their education.

Other issues that have contributed to the behavioral health workforce shortage include the lack of financial aid options for individuals seeking to enter the field and the difficulty faced by many behavioral health professionals in paying off student loans. Because clinical positions in the behavioral health field generally pay lower wages than comparable positions in other fields, many recent graduates seek out more lucrative jobs to pay off student loans.

The Legislature must work diligently to address these issues to ensure that Texas has an adequate supply of behavioral health professionals that can provide quality services to consumers with mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Supporting Facts/Research/Resources:

- ★ 176 of 254 Texas counties are designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. 17 Texas counties are partial Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. (Department of State Health Services, April/May 2008)
- ★ Nationally, Texas ranks 33rd in the number of psychologists, 34th in the number of social workers, and 40th in the number of psychiatrists. (Mental Health America national survey, 2003)

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