Addressing San Diego’s Behavioral Health Worker Shortage

A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals
### How Many More Behavioral Health Professionals Does San Diego Need?

**18,500 more workers needed by 2027**

17,000 behavioral health professionals in the current workforce

8,100 more to meet today’s demand

7,800 to replace those leaving in next 5 years

2,600 to meet growth in demand by 2027

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2022 Workers</th>
<th>2022 Needed</th>
<th>2027 Needed</th>
<th># Leaving Profession</th>
<th>Additional Needed 2022-2027</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Health Worker &amp; Social Service Assistant, including Peer Support Specialist</td>
<td>4,644</td>
<td>6,930</td>
<td>7,588</td>
<td>2,783</td>
<td>5,727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage and Family Therapist</td>
<td>4,443</td>
<td>6,637</td>
<td>7,101</td>
<td>2,111</td>
<td>4,770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse and Behavioral Disorder Counselor</td>
<td>2,566</td>
<td>3,631</td>
<td>4,248</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>2,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Worker</td>
<td>1,283</td>
<td>1,913</td>
<td>2,142</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>1,476</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist (Clinical, Counseling, and School)</td>
<td>1,603</td>
<td>2,401</td>
<td>2,522</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>1,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric Technician</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>1,181</td>
<td>1,334</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered Nurse working in BH settings</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>1,548</td>
<td>1,641</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric Aide</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatrist</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physician’s Assistant working in BH settings</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>16,949</td>
<td>25,109</td>
<td>27,600</td>
<td>7,841</td>
<td>18,493</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Why Do Behavioral Health Workers Leave Jobs?

- **44%** likely to search for a job in the next 12 months, vs 18-37% nationally
- **45%** turnover for San Diego behavioral health workers, vs. 42% in the rest of California.
WHAT ARE WORKERS SAYING?

I just want to help people. But being extremely short-staffed—feeling the pressure, it’s brutal. I’m really burned out and I’m white knuckling it. Being hyper-vigilant in that way is not conducive to being a good clinician. It’s pretty maddening to be honest. I’m disillusioned.
– Pre-Licensed Counselor, Female

I have had to take out personal loans to cover my groceries. Rent is a whole paycheck. I’ve thought about going to grad school, but is it worth it to go thousands in debt for two more dollars an hour? I want to do this for the rest of my life, I love it. It makes me sad, but I don’t think I will be able to.
– SUD Counselor, Female

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS THIS SHORTAGE?

INVEST $128M IN A REGIONAL TRAINING FUND

$98M for scholarships, stipends, loan forgiveness and expanding programs.

$30M first-in-the-nation renewable training fund providing 0% interest loans to students and financing to establish training and supervision programs.

Sample projects for $128M Fund

$6M to recruit, place, certify and provide on-the-job-training for 600 certified peer support specialists.

$3M for a regional apprenticeship program to train 600 community health workers.

$8.5M in scholarships and 0% interest loans to recruit, train, place and certify 1,150 substance use disorder counselors.

$1.3M to establish a psychiatric technician program with regional community colleges.

$7.8M for stipends for 260 master of social work students to complete paid internships in BH settings.

$7M to create 280 new supervision slots for associate social workers to accrue the 3,000 hours for LCSW licensure.

$64M to train 84 psychiatrists and 200 psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners to work in integrated teams in community settings.

Loan forgiveness and down-payment assistance in exchange for public service for diverse professionals to build wealth, live and work in San Diego long term.

Invest in Competitive Compensation
San Diego BH professionals are paid less than other CA counties. 55% of workers surveyed were dissatisfied with pay.

Pursue Administrative Relief
Streamlining documentation is a top concern for BH professionals. Explore 12 issue areas and 29 opportunities to reduce administrative requirements.

Build Regional Workforce Training Fund
This report provides a financial framework for a $128M down payment to train 4,250 more professionals.

Establish Regional Training Centers of Excellence
Sites would deliver services, expand training and supervision opportunities, and provide research opportunities focused on integrated care, workforce optimization, and training best practices.

Continue Listening to Workers
Input from 1,600 San Diego workers and students informed this report. Levels of job satisfaction, burnout, intent to leave, and other factors driving career decisions should be surveyed annually to inform implementation and measure progress.

WHAT ARE WORKERS SAYING?
Message from Nathan Fletcher

As Chair of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, my single highest policy priority since taking office in 2019 has been behavioral health—the intersection of mental health and addiction treatment. Since then, the County of San Diego has made unprecedented investments in behavioral health services. As part of my 2021 State of the County Address, I called on our County government to work with entities across San Diego County to develop a strategy to tackle the shortage of trained behavioral health workers in our region. The full report provides a deeper understanding of the worker shortage and existing talent attraction and retention challenges. It also brings new solutions to expand the number and diversity of mental health and addiction treatment professionals in San Diego.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this important project. With this roadmap, it is imperative we act with urgency to recruit, train and retain more mental health and addiction treatment professionals to work in San Diego County. Let’s get to work!

Nathan Fletcher, Chair, San Diego County Board of Supervisors

Thank you

To the 1,600 San Diego Behavioral Health workers and students who shared their experiences despite being busier than ever. No workforce strategy is complete without hearing directly from workers.


To the members of the San Diego Behavioral Health Workforce steering committee that generously volunteered hundreds of collective hours to help guide our understanding of the Behavioral Health system.

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Caryn Sumek, Vice President, Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties
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Josh Bohannon, Policy Advisor, Office of the Supervisor Nathan Fletcher, Fourth District, Chair of the County Board of Supervisors

This work was conducted in collaboration with and through input from the following partners:
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Lisa Alvaron Rodriguez, United Nurses Associations of California (UNAC)
Golby Rahimi-Saylor, Mental Health Contractors Association
Nicole Howard, Health Center Partners of Southern California

Thank you for asking about all this. These are conversations we need to be having more of.
– Peer Support Specialist, Male