

# Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage

A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain  
essential behavioral health professionals



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
AUGUST 2022





# 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 workers needed to meet **today's** demand

**7,800**

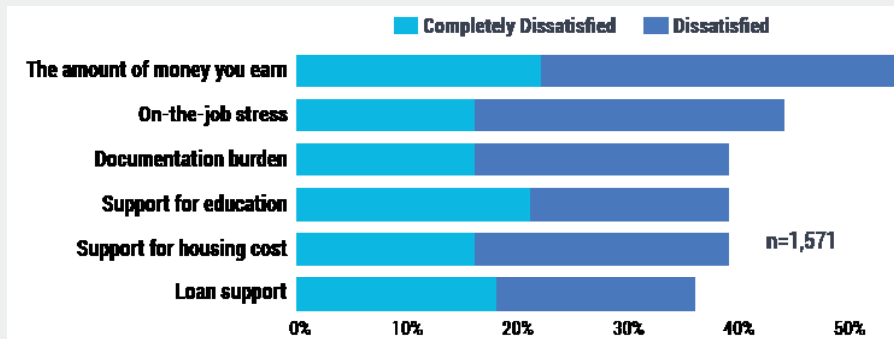
to replace those leaving in next 5 years

**2,600**

to meet growth in demand by 2027

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

## 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 CAN BE DONE TO ADDRESS THIS SHORTAGE?



### 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.

**\$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.

## WHAT ARE WORKERS SAYING?

“ 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

“ 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

# 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.

Report authored by **Andy Hall, Karen Boyd, Ph.D., Daniel Enemark, Ph.D.,** and **Karen Connolly** from the San Diego Workforce Partnership with support from Social Finance, Health Management Associates and Mission Driven Finance.

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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**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