

Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Workforce

Georgia – through cross-agency collaboration efforts, the work of partners, and recent policy and practice changes – has made steady progress in reducing barriers to behavioral health services and supports.

Recent Accomplishments

- Created a school-based mental health workforce pipeline program that provides school-based graduate training opportunities (within Georgia Apex programs).
- Embedded trauma training into the practicum program of five schools of social work and one counseling program, in partnership with the Interagency Directors Team and System of Care State Plan (training students, as well as supervising licensed providers).
- Passed key legislation to help alleviate provider shortages, allowing Georgia to enter into interstate compacts for physicians to practice medicine and psychologists to practice telemedicine in the state, and requiring equal reimbursement for telemedicine services among insurers.
- Passed the **Mental Health Parity Act (MHPA)**, requiring the creation of the Behavioral Health Care Workforce Database, the development of a cancelable loan program for behavioral health professionals, and a study reimbursement rates for child and adolescent behavioral health services across public and private insurers (i.e., Medicaid, PeachCare for Kids, State Health Benefit Plan) and medical necessity denials.

Mental Health Parity Act (MHPA)

The Mental Health Parity Act (MHPA) improves access to behavioral health services beyond the components that strengthen the workforce. Other provisions include:

- Ensuring limitations for behavioral health services are no greater than those for physical health services;
- Requiring care management organizations to spend 85% of premium revenues on medical claims and efforts to improve quality of care;
- Creating the Multi-Agency Treatment for Children (MATCH) team, which has the potential to help increase access to community-based services and supports for children with complex and unmet treatment needs; and,
- Increasing training and support for co-responder programs.

CHALLENGES FACING THE CHILD AND ADOLESCENT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

The Access Challenge

Despite these improvements, access to behavioral health services and supports remains a challenge for Georgia's children and families.

Factors Affecting Access to Needed Mental Health Care



Stigma



Difficulty navigating
the behavioral health
system



Lack of insurance
or time off



Cost



Lack of transportation

Select Workforce Challenges

72

Georgia counties do not
have a psychiatrist¹

25%

of Georgia adults
reported unmet
behavioral healthcare
needs²

67%

of youth with major
depression reported not
receiving mental health
services³

More than

96%

of Georgia's counties are
designated as Mental
Health Professional
Shortage Areas
(MHPSAs)*

*Mental health shortage area designations are based on the number of providers relative to the population; the population to provider ratio must be at least 30,000-to-1 (20,000-to-1 if there are unusually high needs in the community).

Additional Workforce Challenges

- Graduates lack certain skills, training, and confidence in evidence-based therapies and administrative skills.⁶
- Psychiatric nurses have a more limited scope of practice than in comparable states.⁷

The Cultural Competency Challenge

If families can overcome these hurdles, then they face a second, major barrier – **the lack of adequate, appropriately trained and culturally and linguistically competent behavioral health professionals.**

Georgia's Increasingly Diverse Population



14%
of Georgia's residents
speak a language other
than English at home⁴



Asian and Hispanic populations
have increased by
53% and 32%,
respectively, while White
individuals make up barely over
half of the population



More than **10%**
of Georgia's population is
foreign-born, which is an
almost 40% increase from
1990⁵

Recommendations

Scope and Practice Environment

- Encourage the practice of combining primary health and mental health care in one setting and ensure payer reimbursement for such integrated care.
- Streamline insurer provider certification, prior authorization, and billing practices and increase reimbursement rates to encourage more providers to accept public and private health insurance and maintain employees.
- Expand authorization and capacity of psychiatric nurses to include additional prescriptive abilities and the ability to practice independently.

Education and Training

- Expand and standardize culturally responsive care training for the behavioral health workforce.
- Develop a registered behavior technician (RBT) program within the Technical College System of Georgia to help meet the state's need for a larger autism and behavioral health workforce.
- Intentionally encourage, recruit, and support diverse and rural students to pursue mental and behavioral health careers (e.g., Georgia Department of Education's Georgia HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America)).

Support

- Create a subcommittee of the Healthcare Workforce Commission to identify ways to integrate foreign-trained health professionals into Georgia's healthcare workforce, including creating a licensure pathway and allowing temporary licenses.
- Dismantle barriers to licensing for behavioral health professionals, including funding to support required supervised hours.
- Increase funding to support additional staffing within the Georgia Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists.

In-Depth Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Workforce Resources

- An Analysis of Georgia's Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Workforce
- Sustaining Georgia's Child and Adolescent Workforce Through Supervision
- Licensing Barrier for Foreign-Trained Behavioral Health Professionals
- Whole Child Primer, 3rd Edition

Sources for Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Workforce

- 1 Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce. Physician Specialty by County: 2020. <https://healthcareworkforce.georgia.gov/main-publications-reports/data-publications/physicians-specialty-county>.
- 2 Mental Health America. (2022). The State of Mental Health in America: Access to Care Ranking 2022. Retrieved <https://mhanational.org/issues/2022/mental-health-america-access-care-data>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Center for Immigration Studies. (2019). 67.3 million in the United States Spoke a Foreign Language at Home in 2018. <https://cis.org/Report/673-Million-United-States-Spoke-Foreign-Language-Home-2018>.
- 5 Migration Policy Institute. State Immigration Profiles: Georgia. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/GA>.
- 6 Voices for Georgia's Children. (2017). An Analysis of Georgia's Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health Workforce. Retrieved from <https://georgiavoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/BHWF-New-Foreword-2020.pdf>.
- 7 Ibid.