



General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Joint State Government Commission
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One page Summary in response to House Resolution 193 of 2019
Pennsylvania Mental Health Care Workforce Shortage: Challenges and Solutions

Within the Commonwealth and the entire nation, policy makers, professional organizations, and health care providers are taking notice of a peculiar trend. Although the demand for mental health treatment is on an upward trajectory, there is an apparent paucity of mental health care providers. This observation is backed by some worrying data. For instance, Pennsylvania has a below average number of mental health care providers per capital and more than half of adults suffering from a mental illness in the Commonwealth did not receive treatment as of 2017.

This report identifies those professionals who fall within the scope of the Commonwealth’s “mental health care workforce.” The report then discusses the current state of this workforce, utilizing data from the Health Resources and Services Administration and the Bureau of Labor Statistics — federal agencies which collect data on the health care workforce — as well as other sources. The Commission also analyzed data from these sources to project employment in certain professions within the Commonwealth’s mental health care workforce five and ten years from calendar year 2020.

The issues believed by researchers, academics, and clinicians to be behind the shortage of mental health care professionals are investigated, and include the burden of student loan debt, burnout, inadequate enforcement of mental health parity laws, restrictions on mental health information sharing among patients’ providers, and a lack of faculty and training opportunities needed to educate new entrants into the field.

Solutions and proposed recommendations to stop, reverse, or otherwise mitigate the shortage of mental health care professionals in the Commonwealth are also discussed. These solutions include creating new psychiatric residency programs and positions, increasing the use of psychiatric advance practice nurses and psychiatric physician assistants, including undertaking reforms to support nurse-managed health centers and designate more facilities as federally certified Rural Health Clinics. Further, this report recommends easing the burden of student loan debt on new graduates in psychiatry, psychology, and allied health fields by increasing awards made under the Commonwealth’s student loan repayment program as well as holding down tuition at state-owned and state-related universities and colleges. The report also recommends undertaking reforms to allow wider use of telemedicine and telepsychiatry.

The full report is available on our website, <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>