



Support the ACCESS in Mental Health Act

The ACCESS in Mental Health Act aims to support graduate programs in mental and behavioral health professions at minority-serving institutions. The bill seeks to address the shortage of mental health professionals by providing financial assistance and resources to these institutions, thereby increasing the number of qualified graduates entering the behavioral health workforce.

Mental and behavioral health needs increasing while shortages of providers persist

Our nation's mental and behavioral health continues to be in a state of crisis; one quarter of U.S. adults report alarming levels of stress and anxiety.ⁱ Predictably, psychologists report high demand for treatment for anxiety and depression. Practitioners are seeing increased workloads and longer waitlists, which have contributed to higher levels of burnout within the profession.ⁱⁱ



It is estimated that 158 million U.S. residents—nearly half of the population—live in a mental health workforce shortage area.ⁱⁱⁱ In fact, nearly every county and district in the country has at least one federally designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Area. These shortages are expected to persist over the next decade, with rural communities facing major challenges in recruiting licensed mental and behavioral health care professionals.^{iv, v, vi}

The U.S. is facing a concurrent shortage of culturally and linguistically competent behavioral health care providers. For example, bilingual psychologists represent about one tenth of the workforce.^{viii} Culturally and linguistically competent behavioral health care is necessary to meet both the demand for services and the behavioral health challenges facing communities across the United States. This includes rural, tribal, and frontier communities, where shortages of qualified providers are particularly severe. Cultural and linguistic competency among behavioral health providers helps ensure that these professionals can effectively understand and address the individualized needs of all populations, leading to more effective outcomes and reducing mental and behavioral health stigma.

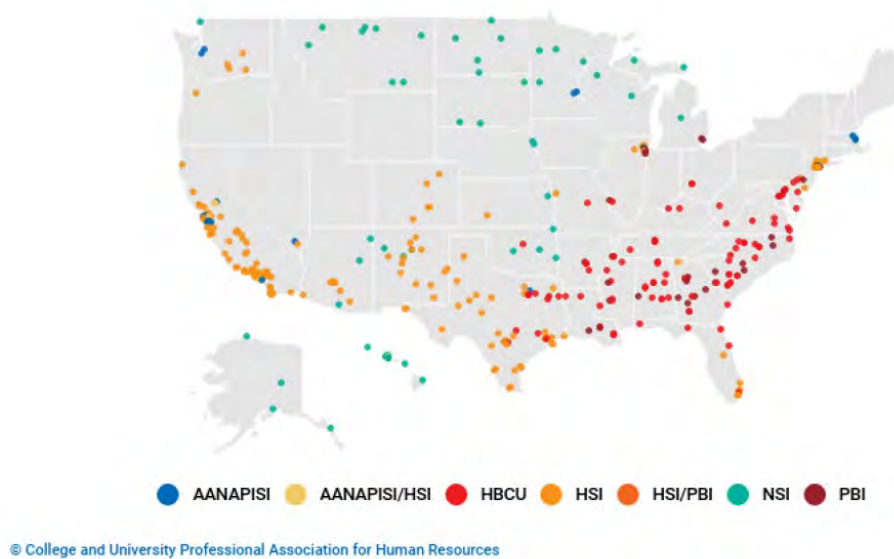
Cost of education continues to be a barrier

The cost of attending graduate school poses a significant barrier to growing the behavioral health workforce. All states require a graduate degree for licensure as a behavioral health provider, including in psychology, and to finance their education, most graduate students working towards degrees in these fields have few options other than to borrow. This is true across all fields, but data show that low-income and first-generation students working toward doctoral psychology degrees also significantly rely on student loans.^{xiv} The prospect of student loan debt often serves as barrier to the pursuit of advanced degrees, reducing the probability that qualified professionals will pursue lower-paying but high-demand public service careers, such as behavioral health care, including in rural communities.^x

Minority-serving institutions are key to addressing behavioral health workforce needs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other minority-serving institutions are among the bedrocks of our higher education system, yet they have been historically underfunded. Despite that, they have, for example, still managed to graduate more physicians and teachers of color than any other institutions in the country.^{xi} With more resources, these institutions can similarly be education and training hubs for psychologists and other behavioral health providers, thereby helping to grow the behavioral health workforce.

Map of Minority-Serving Institutions



The ACCESS in Mental Health Act would help grow the mental and behavioral health care workforce by:

- Providing grants to Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Tribal Colleges and Universities, Hispanic Serving Institutions, and other Minority Serving Institutions to create, expand, or improve graduate programs in mental health fields, including psychology, counseling, social work, psychiatry, school-based mental health professions, and substance use disorder prevention and treatment.
- Providing grants to students pursuing graduate degrees in mental health fields at these institutions to help cover the cost of attendance.

ⁱ American Psychological Association. (October 2022). *Stress in America: Concerned with the future, beset by inflation*.

<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2022/concerned-future-inflation>.

ⁱⁱ American Psychological Association (December 2023). *Psychologists reaching their limits as patients present with worsening symptoms year after year, 2023 Practitioner Pulse Survey*. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/2022-covid-psychologist-workload>.

ⁱⁱⁱ KFF. (2024). *Mental Health Care Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs)*. <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/mental-health-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/>

^{iv} U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. *Occupational Outlook Handbook, Psychologists*. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/psychologists.htm#tab-6>.

^v Health Resources and Services Administration. (2023). *Behavioral Health Workforce Brief*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

<https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bureau-health-workforce/Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Brief-2023.pdf>

^{vi} Rural Health Information Hub. (2021). *Rural Mental Health*. RHIhub. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/mental-health>

^{vii} Health Resources and Services Administration. (n.d.). *Workforce Projections*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/workforce-projections>

^{viii} Hamp, A., Stamm, K., Lin, L., & Christidis, P. (2016). *2015 APA Survey of Psychology Health Service Providers*. Center for Workforce Studies, American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/15-health-service-providers/>

^{ix} Wilcox, M. M., Barbaro-Kukade, L., Pietrantonio, K. R., Franks, D. N., & Davis, B. L. (2021). It takes money to make money: Inequity in psychology graduate student borrowing and financial stressors. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology, 15*(1), 2-17. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000294>

^x Choi, Y. (2014). Debt and college students' life transitions: The effect of educational debt on career choice in America. *Journal of Student Financial Aid, 44*(1), 3. <http://publications.nasfaa.org/jsfa/vol44/iss1/3/>.

^{xi} Ma, A. (February 24, 2023). *HBCUs produce nearly half of all Black teachers in the U.S.* PBS Newshour. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/hbcus-produce-nearly-half-of-all-black-teachers-in-the-u-s>.