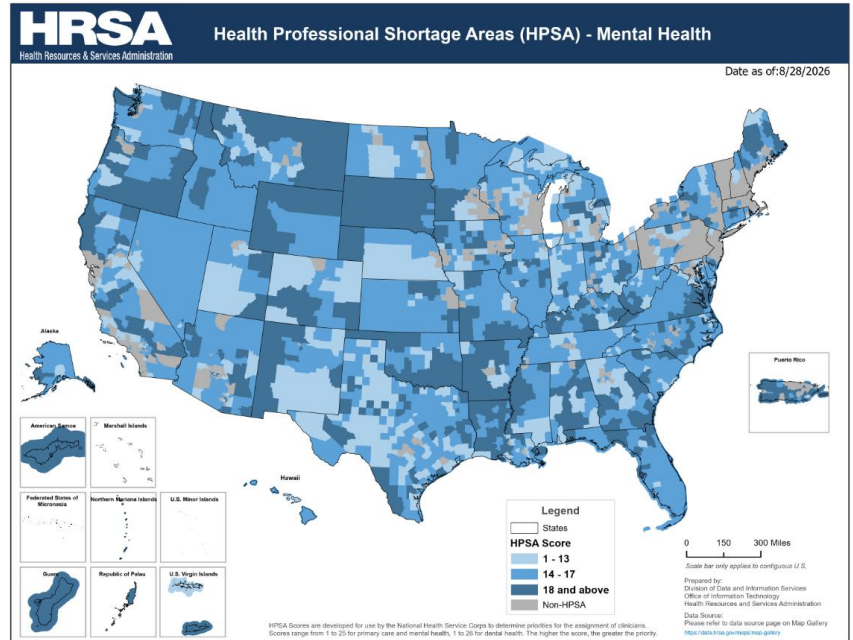




Psychology Workforce Development Programs and Legislation

Our nation's mental and behavioral health system continues to face significant challenges. One in four U.S. adults reports alarming levels of stress and anxiety (APA, 2022), and psychologists are seeing unprecedented demand for treatment of anxiety and depression. Increased workloads and longer waitlists have contributed to higher levels of burnout among providers (APA, 2023). At the same time, nearly half of the U.S. population, an estimated 158 million people, live in designated mental health workforce shortage areas (HPSAs) (KFF, 2024). Almost every county and district in the country has at least one federally recognized shortage area as illustrated in the HPSA map to the right, and these gaps are projected to persist for the next decade (U.S. Department of Labor; Health Resources and Services Administration, 2023). Rural communities, in particular, face ongoing difficulties in recruiting licensed mental and behavioral health professionals (Rural Health Information Hub, 2021).



To address these shortages and ensure access to care, federal programs and legislation play a vital role in strengthening and growing the psychology workforce. The initiatives below aim to expand training opportunities, increase access to care for underserved communities, and strengthen support for professionals serving high-need areas.

Current Programs Supporting the Psychology Workforce

Graduate Psychology Education (GPE) Program

The Graduate Psychology Education Program, administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), provides grants to accredited doctoral, internship, and postdoctoral psychology programs to expand training in integrated behavioral health care, and also provides supervised mental and behavioral health services to underserved communities. This program emphasizes trauma-informed care and substance use disorder prevention in underserved primary care settings. By fostering interprofessional education and strengthening faculty capacity, GPE helps address clinical training gaps and prepares culturally responsive health service psychologists to practice in high-need areas, improving access to mental health services nationwide.

Minority Fellowship Program (MFP)

As part of a broader effort to bolster the behavioral health workforce, the Minority Fellowship Program (MFP) was established by Congress in 1973 to increase the number of well-trained, culturally competent professionals in clinical practice, research, education, and policy development. Administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), MFP provides funding for training, career development, and mentoring for mental and behavioral health professionals to work in underserved communities with limited access to services. Specifically, the program focuses on training students, postdoctoral fellows, and residents in culturally responsive mental and behavioral health care to address the needs of underserved communities.

Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) Program

The Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training Program, funded by HRSA, supports psychology and other behavioral health trainees through internships, field placements, and clinical supervision. This program emphasizes integrated care and services for youth and families in community-based settings. BHWET strengthens competencies in collaborative care and expands the number of skilled practitioners serving high-need populations by embedding psychology trainees in interprofessional teams.

Integrated Substance Use Disorder Training Program (ISTP)

The Integrated Substance Use Disorder Training Program (ISTP), administered by HRSA, expands training opportunities for health service psychologists and other behavioral health professionals to provide integrated mental health and substance use disorder care in underserved community settings. The program supports training in prevention, treatment, and recovery services for substance use disorders, including opioid use disorder, helping prepare providers to deliver comprehensive, evidence-based care. By increasing the number of professionals trained to address co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions, ISTP strengthens the behavioral health workforce and improves access to care in high-need communities.

Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery Loan Repayment Program (STAR LRP)

Administered by the HRSA, the STAR LRP helps strengthen the behavioral health workforce by providing loan repayment assistance to eligible professionals, including psychologists, who commit to working full-time in substance use disorder treatment settings. Participants provide direct patient care at approved facilities located in HPSAs or in communities with elevated drug overdose mortality rates. The STAR Loan Repayment Program supports the recruitment and retention of psychologists and other behavioral health professionals, expands access to evidence-based substance use disorder treatment, and helps address critical workforce shortages nationwide by reducing the financial burden of graduate education and incentivizing service in high-need communities.

National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Scholarship and Loan Repayment Programs

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC), administered by HRSA, helps address behavioral health workforce shortages by providing scholarships and loan repayment assistance to health professionals, including health service psychologists, who commit to serving in HPSAs. Through its scholarship and loan repayment programs, NHSC reduces financial barriers to entering and remaining in the profession while encouraging psychologists to practice in communities with limited access to care, including rural, urban, and tribal areas, thereby strengthening the psychology workforce and improving access to needed services for patients across the country.

Legislation Supporting the Psychology Workforce

The Accelerating the Development of Advanced Psychology Trainees (ADAPT) Act

The ADAPT Act would allow Medicare to reimburse for behavioral health services provided by advanced psychology trainees under the supervision of a licensed psychologist. This change would help expand access to care while giving trainees valuable clinical experience, strengthening the pipeline of future psychologists.

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. By providing financial assistance and resources to these institutions, the bill seeks to address the shortage of mental health professionals and increase the number of qualified graduates entering the behavioral health workforce.

The Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Recovery (STAR) Plus Scholarship Act

The cost of graduate education can deter talented students from entering the behavioral health workforce. Through a new federal scholarship program, the STAR Plus Scholarship Act seeks to reduce financial barriers for students pursuing careers in mental health, behavioral health, and substance use disorder treatment, with a focus on service in communities experiencing workforce shortages.

The Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act

To address the significant student debt burden carried by many mental health professionals, the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act would establish a HRSA-administered loan repayment program providing up to \$250,000 in student loan repayment assistance for eligible mental health professionals who commit to serving in designated HPSAs. By reducing educational debt and incentivizing long-term service in underserved communities, the bill would help recruit and retain mental health professionals where they are needed most.

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