

# Children's Behavioral Health Workforce Development Recommendations for the 2023 Legislative Session

## 1. ADJUST REIMBURSEMENT RATES TO REFLECT ACTUAL COSTS

- 1a. Partner with behavioral health providers to set appropriate rates for Medicaid and commercial insurers. Ensure rates are sufficient to cover variability of costs including those for serving children with acute or complex needs.
- 1b. Establish a standardized process for adjustments to reimbursement rates and state grants and index to inflation.
- 1c. Enforce parity law utilizing the results of the study required by CT Public Act No. 22-47.

Other states have engaged in rate reviews and subsequently made significant increases; Maine raised rates by an average of 22% and Oregon by 30%. CT Public Act No. 22-47 required the review of reimbursement rates for behavioral health services to assess sufficiency for attracting the workforce as well as parity with medical services. *Availability of timely services for children in the state is contingent upon reimbursement rates that reflect actual costs.*

## 2. REMOVE UNNECESSARY BARRIERS TO LICENSURE AND RECRUITMENT

- 2a. Add a grace period that authorizes new graduates to continue working during the period of time their licensing applications are being processed.
- 2b. Conduct a review of licensing requirements and costs across behavioral health professions, inclusive of review for racial bias, equity across fields, reciprocity and interstate compacts, and comparison of costs and prerequisites with those of other states.

Connecticut is among the most expensive states in the country for licensure. Recent revelations regarding the racial bias of a national licensing exams, as well as other undue burdens related to licensing requirements and costs across behavioral health professions, met with the current crisis in workforce shortages, necessitates that the state engage in an assessment of barriers related to licensing that can be lifted to support hiring needs and equity while not reducing the standard of quality of staff and services.

## 3. FUND HIGH IMPACT, SHORT-TERM FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

- 3a. Fund recruitment and retention stipends for behavioral health providers that are flexible to address varying provider needs, incentivize hiring of peer supports with lived experience, and increase availability of staff with expertise to support high need populations (e.g., children with developmental or intellectual disabilities, LGBTQ and gender minority youth, justice-involved children, and others currently underserved within the system).
- 3b. Fund stipends for providers offering field placement for students and supervision of new graduates.
- 3c. Address constraints within current state agency contracts that hamper recruitment such as salary caps and unnecessary minimum qualifications.

Behavioral health providers face substantial challenges in recruitment and retention of staff, not only due to pipeline shortages, but also competition with public agencies and private practice. Massachusetts recently funded providers at a rate of 10% of their total agency expenditures and required 90% of the payments be used for recruitment and retention. Similarly, Oregon invested \$60 million in increasing diversity of their behavioral health workforce. Connecticut should make similar substantial investments in recruitment and retention.

## 4. DEDICATE FUNDING FOR INVESTMENT IN LONGER-TERM STRATEGIES THAT WILL SUSTAIN A DIVERSE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE PIPELINE

To sustain an infrastructure that can monitor and report on the behavioral health workforce pipeline and employment, respond in real time to fluctuations in the field, and disseminate longer-term pipeline supports, Connecticut should dedicate a behavioral health workforce development center just as other states, such as Massachusetts, have done. Connecticut is currently engaged in efforts to identify best practices and innovative strategies that will grow and sustain a diverse pipeline of behavioral health professionals to meet the future needs of children in the state. It will be critical that there is funding for implementation of these strategies, and an infrastructure to ensure ongoing support.