

Mental Health Workforce - Rural Focus

What is it?

Rural mental health workforce refers to the issues involved in the recruitment, retention, and training of mental health professionals along a spectrum of education and experience. Rural areas face unique workforce challenges such as:

- More than 60% of rural Americans live in mental health professional shortage areas
- More than 90% of all psychologists and psychiatrists, and 80% of MSWs work exclusively in metropolitan areas
- More than 60% of rural Americans get their mental health care from their primary provider
- The mental health crisis responder for most rural Americans is a law enforcement officer

Why is it important to State systems?

State mental health systems are responsible for rural service delivery, not only urban-located care. The public mental health system should ensure the availability of competent providers and accessibility to affordable services in rural communities. Rarely do state public mental health systems and higher education systems communicate about the needs, trends, and strategies for the workforce in general, and even less so specifically for the rural mental health workforce. The primary institutions for producing the workforce and the system that will employ this workforce have little opportunity to work as partners in addressing rural workforce issues.

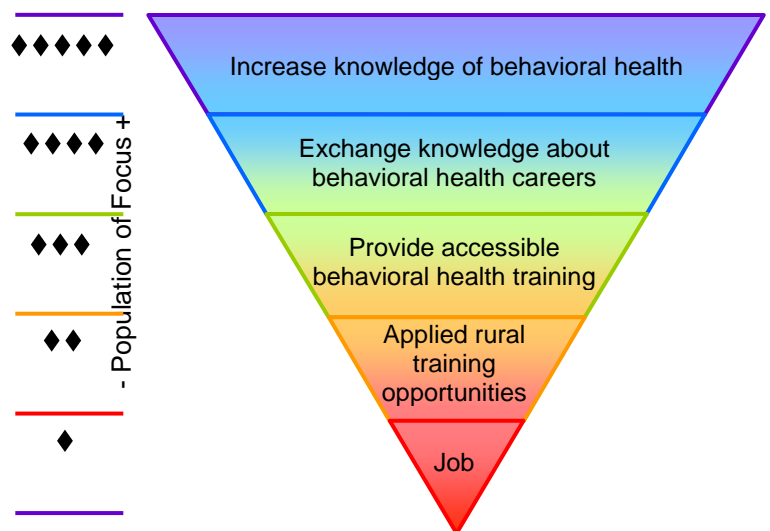
It is critical for states to “grow their own” workforce, meaning to educate, train, recruit and retain mental health professionals in order to meet and sustain the demand for competent rural health care. Additionally, establishing career ladders is necessary to make it easier for para-professionals and professionals to navigate the educational system, and to ultimately have a degree or competency-based training that translates into a real job with career growth opportunities.

Technical Assistance:

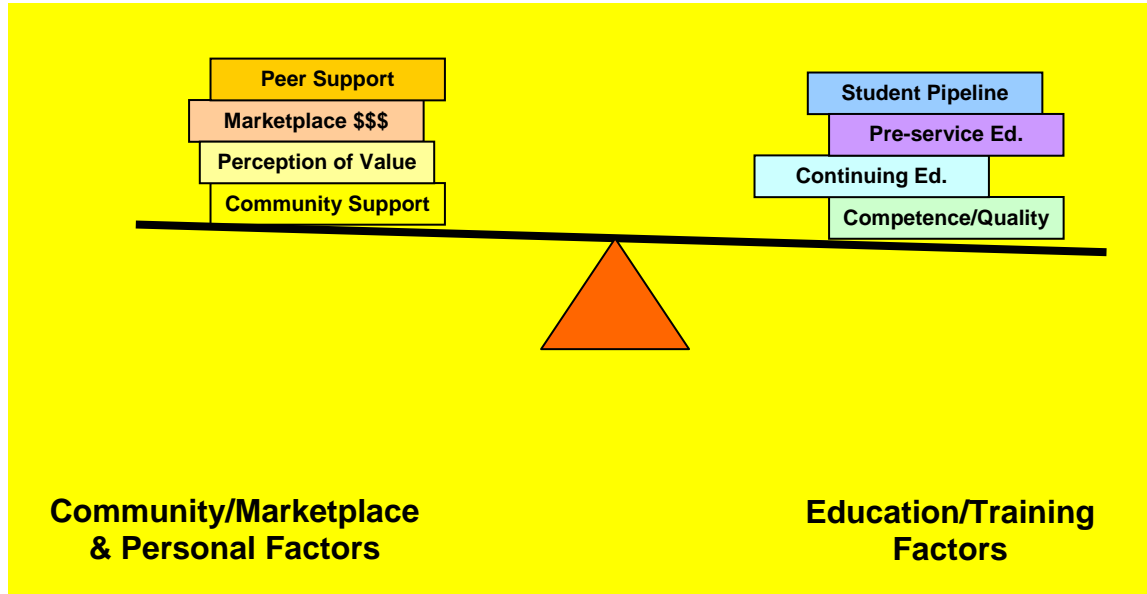
WICHE provides technical assistance by **partnering with states** to address rural mental health and behavioral health workforce issues. The specific

tasks, priorities and **action plans** that result are quite varied depending on the distinctive needs of each state. Generally, this process begins with an initial meeting of a small group of State mental health leaders to identify key issues and stakeholders, followed by the development of a state-specific mental health workforce report. Next, is the development of a **state-specific workforce strategy process**, facilitated by WICHE, which brings together key stakeholders such as state mental health, higher education, and provider agencies to identify specific goals and tasks to be **implemented collaboratively**.

**Rural Mental Health Workforce
Grow Your Own Strategy Logic Model**



Finding Balance in Rural Behavioral Health Workforce Development



Project Examples and Outcomes:

- ❖ Mental Health/Behavioral Health Workforce Reports: AK, HI, NV, ND, ID, NM – Interdisciplinary applied training environment for practicums, internships, etc., AZ – resulted in the integration of recovery as a core principle in the higher education academic training programs
- ❖ Alaska: Three committed partners (State, Higher Education, and Local Funder) engaged in a multi-year initiative with over 1.8 million in funding dedicated to addressing workforce development issues and a state behavioral health strategic plan. Some outcomes include: Articulated educational pathways (Rural Human Services) and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding for job-based learning through a collaboration with WICHE, University of AK and the Norton Sound Health Corporation
- ❖ Wyoming: Development of the Western Consortium for Rural SW Education: AK, CO, ID, KS, ND, NV, UT

About WICHE:

The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) was founded in 1953 to improve access to higher education throughout the western states. WICHE is an Interstate Compact comprised of 15 western states, and therefore a regional governmental entity.

WICHE Mental Health Program - Established 1955

Mission:

- 1) Assist states in improving systems of care for mental health consumers and families; and
- 2) Advance the preparation of a qualified mental health workforce in the West.

WICHE Mental Health Program Functions:

- Primary focus Rural Mental Health
- Collaborating with states to meet the challenges of changing environments through regional research and evaluation, policy analysis, program development, technical assistance, and information sharing
- State Specific Technical Assistance
 - **Workforce Development**
 - System Redesign
 - Primary Care Integration Training
 - Systems of Care
 - Cultural Competence
- Western States Decision Support Group
- WICHE Center for Rural Mental Health Research

Contact Information: WICHE Mental Health Program, 3035 Center Green Drive, Boulder, CO 80301
303-541-0200 **General Information:** www.wiche.edu/mentalhealth **Follow-up Contact:** dkupfer@wiche.edu