

Joint Mental Health Workforce

The Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) request \$1,600,000 to maintain and expand efforts of the Center for Health Workforce Planning and to provide additional resources to focus on the growing need for accessible mental health services in Iowa, particularly in rural areas. Proposed activities include:

- Educational loan repayment to mental health workers who agree to practice in Iowa under a two-year contract.
- Post-graduate training programs for advanced practice nurses and physician assistants to provide mental health services in Iowa. Potential employers of graduates include community service providers, clinics, hospitals, Department of Corrections, Department of Human Services and the Iowa Veteran's Home.
- Demonstration projects to transform the physical environment and workplace culture by including the use of telemedicine technology. Outcomes will improve client care and improve access to services.
- Community new hire assistance grants to support recruitment and retention of qualified professionals in mental health shortage areas and expanded access to mental health services.

In 2004, the Center for Health Workforce Planning identified mental health professionals as the workforce classification most at risk for shortage. Out of 24 health professions studied, fifteen (63%) projected more than 20 percent of their licensees to be age 55 and older compared to the national average of 13.9 percent for all types of occupations. The Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) ranked Iowa 47th among states in psychiatrists per 100,000 population and 46th for psychologists per 100,000 population in 2000. In addition:

- Impending retirements will impact the ability of experienced professionals to provide health care services to an aging Iowa population whose demand is increasing.
- Of 233 psychiatrists in Iowa, 85 are employed in administration, work for a federal agency, a state agency, or are in student health or teaching/research positions. This leaves 148 private practice psychiatrists to care for Iowans' mental health needs outside of state or federal facilities.
- The shortage of mental health professionals is particularly evident in rural areas. Ninety percent of psychiatrists are located in Des Moines and Iowa City (University Hospitals). Persons who need mental health care must travel significant distances to access professional help or go without the help they need. The southern two tiers of counties and the northeast quadrant of Iowa have the fewest mental health professionals of all types. There are three mental health catchment areas without any psychiatrist. The need for child and adolescent psychiatrists is most acute in western Iowa where there are only two child psychiatrists.
- In a 2005 survey of small rural hospitals (Critical Access Hospitals or CAHs), 87% said recruitment and retention of mental health providers affect access to mental health services. Workforce supply was also ranked at the top of a list of all barriers to accessing mental health services.
- Eighty-one of the 99 Iowa Counties are designated or awaiting designation as Mental Health HPSA's (Health Professional Shortage Areas).