

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2022**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 10**

**SUBJECT: ADDRESSING THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKER SHORTAGE IN SAN DIEGO COUNTY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

The County of San Diego (County) is facing a significant behavioral health worker shortage. Today, we lack 8,100 behavioral health workers to meet the current demand. By 2027, it is estimated we will need a total of 18,500 behavioral health workers. This forecast takes into consideration current workforce recruitment and retention projections and anticipated growth in demand. Our behavioral health workers serve some of our most vulnerable populations along the behavioral health continuum of care and range from peer support specialists to psychiatrists.

A recent report conducted by the San Diego Workforce Partnership, “Addressing San Diego’s Behavioral Health Worker Shortage” (Attachment A), commissioned by Chair Nathan Fletcher, discovered that San Diego regional behavioral health workers are paid less than their counterparts in most California counties, and are leaving the San Diego workforce. Although many behavioral health workers report they love their profession, many elements such as low compensation, burdensome documentation, inaccessible educational opportunities, and stress on the job are pushing workers out of the region and profession.

Given the heightened need for behavioral health workers to address the local substance use, mental health, and homelessness crisis, it is imperative the region implement policies to build and sustain the workforce. A year-long report by San Diego Workforce Partnership provides San Diego with an understanding of the worker shortage and outlines potential solutions for how to recruit, train, and retain behavioral health workers in the region. Today’s action recommends the County adopt solutions outlined in the report to address this crisis. We urge your support.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**CHAIR NATHAN FLETCHER AND SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER**

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to advance a comprehensive strategy to address the regional behavioral health workforce shortage, including advancing the five key recommendations within the San Diego Workforce Partnership Report (Report), which shall include:

1. Receive the San Diego Workforce Partnership Report (Report), “Addressing San Diego’s Behavioral Health Worker Shortage” (Attachment A, on file with the Clerk of the Board).
2. Direct the CAO to include in the Board’s Legislative Program, Priority Issues, support for legislation that would address behavioral health worker recruitment, training, and retention. In addition, add to the Legislative Program, Guidelines, support for legislation that includes but is not limited to provisions to improve behavioral health workforce licensing and credentialing, supervision and training, higher education, and parity.

3. Direct the CAO to report back in 180 days with the feasibility and, if feasible, a plan to invest in competitive compensation for behavioral health workers by establishing competitive salaries for all behavioral health positions in the County region (County positions and contracted providers), as identified in the Report “Figure 11: Wage recommendations for 10 BH professionals,” such that compensation aligns with the median or higher cost-of-living adjusted wages for California Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). Implementation shall promote best practices and standards that ensure workers are paid and treated equally regardless of if they are County workers or contracted providers.
4. Direct the CAO to report back in 180 days with the feasibility and, if feasible, a plan to pursue administrative relief by implementing the “Opportunities” found in the Report in “Table A.5: Administrative Relief Issue Areas and Opportunities,” with the overarching goal to remove administrative barriers for those providing behavioral health services, and ultimately higher quality and more timely care provision. For those Opportunities that are deemed feasible, an implementation strategy should be developed, the feasible actions should be implemented, and the CAO should provide a progress report back to the Board every 120 days on the status of implementation.
5. Direct the CAO to report back in 180 days with the feasibility and, if feasible, a plan to establish regional behavioral health training centers of excellence, which are multiple-purpose sites that serve the public and develop core competencies in training and supervision programs, to establish partnerships with educational institutions, community-based organizations, health systems, workers, and the San Diego Workforce Partnership, to develop multi-agency partnerships at existing service sites.
6. Direct the CAO to report back in 180 days with a plan to build a regional behavioral health workforce training fund and identify Private Sector, County, State, and Federal resources that could be invested in the workforce training fund.
7. Direct the CAO to report back in 180 days with strategies to continue listening to workers during implementation of the aforementioned recommendations, planning, and progress reporting. The plan shall include regular surveys of workers to assess working conditions, updates to the community on the results of the survey, and the establishment of an advisory committee of stakeholders consisting of key healthcare, behavioral health professionals, service provider executives, and labor to help support these activities.
8. Direct the CAO to report back in 180 days with a plan to implement a regional master training agreement with San Diego area community colleges, colleges, and universities that provide practicum placements for future behavioral health professionals.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

We need a behavioral health workforce that reflects the diversity of the population it aims to serve and is culturally competent, linguistically diverse, and representative. Not only do we have a workforce shortage, but our workforce is not representative of our diverse communities. Survey respondents from the Report noted a need for more BIPOC clinicians who are generally underrepresented among licensed providers. Women are underrepresented among psychiatrists, yet make up most of the masters-trained providers. Cultural competency and humility are key components in most training programs, yet the

workforce fails to represent the population it services either in language or cultural background. Today's action, through investment in competitive compensation, training centers, and financial support for workers, are all essential for attracting the future workforce and retaining the one we currently have.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

The proposed action to advance efforts to recruit, train, and retain the local behavioral health workforce will contribute to goals in the behavioral health continuum of care to provide services in the communities where people live and reduce the need to travel long distances to find a care provider. Increasing the behavioral health workforce could result in positive social and economic enhancements, contributing to the overall sustainability of the region by providing a large workforce that supports the most vulnerable of our community. Behavioral health workers provide many necessary services to our community that creates a healthier, stronger, and more resilient San Diego. Their dedication to the well-being of others provides positive social contributions to our communities, and therefore, positive social sustainability for our region.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with recommendations 1 and 2. There will be future fiscal impacts based on recommendations 3 through 8, as staff begins to explore feasibility of and advance overall recommendations from the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) Report. If recommendations are not feasible immediately, the report will outline rationale for barriers. The SDWP report referenced a cost of \$128 million associated with a variety of projects through a regional training fund. Additionally, work associated with recommendation 6 could result in significant additional ongoing costs above and beyond the SDWP training fund scope, depending on how it is structured and implemented.

It is anticipated that initially some of the work would begin with funding from the \$15 million of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds allocated for behavioral health renewable funds per Board action taken on August 30, 2022 (20). As different components are deemed feasible and ready to implement, staff will return to the Board for approval with specific fiscal impacts that will result from moving forward in recommended areas. Staff will identify any available funding sources including ARPA funds or other program revenue as available, including reprioritization of existing funding for Board consideration as needed. At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

### **ACTION:**

ON MOTION of Supervisor Fletcher, seconded by Supervisor Lawson-Remer, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

AYES: Vargas, Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Fletcher, Desmond

State of California)  
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER  
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



**Signed**  
**by** Andrew Potter

