

North Carolina Health Workforce Sentinel Network *Findings Brief: Behavioral Health*

In May through June 2023, healthcare employers in North Carolina reported on their current workforce needs related to staff vacancies, turnover, training/onboarding priorities, and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic over the past 6 months (January-June 2023). This brief summarizes the responses from **behavioral health (BH) organizations**.

More findings and responses from other health care settings may be viewed at nc.sentinelnetwork.org/findings/.

12 Behavioral Health Survey Responses	9	Behavioral-mental health office/practice or clinic
	3	Other residential treatment facility

Highlights

- In the last 6 months,
 - Exceptionally long **vacancies** and highest **turnover for peer counselors in behavioral-mental office/practice or clinic and other residential treatment facility**
 - **Burnout improved for 25%** of survey respondents but **stayed the same for most respondents (42%)**
 - **Impact of staff shortages due to the pandemic** remained primarily the **same** for most respondents **(67%)**
 - **42%** of respondents reported providing **telehealth/virtual visits** at the same level as a year ago, while **25%** reported providing **fewer** of these visits as compared to a year ago

Exceptionally long vacancies

by BH Facility Type

Behavioral-mental health offices, practices, or clinics:

- Peer Counselors (33% of respondents)
- Registered nurses (RNs) (22% of respondents)

Other residential treatment facility respondents noted different position types for long-term vacancies

- Case or Care Manager
- Direct Support Professional
- Licensed Practical Nurse (LPNs)
- Medication Aide

Reasons for Long Vacancies

“Hiring RNs has been a miserable cross-your-fingers-and-pray experience for the last three years. Gaps range from 5-8 months.”

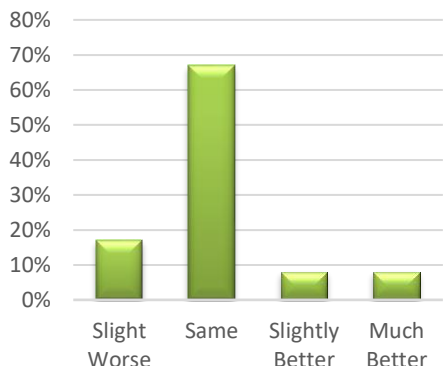
“Case Manager are a new role for us. The difficulty we have had is that candidates are required by state regulation to have a certain amount of experience working with the specific population. Since the population for our care managers is I/DD and MH, we are having trouble finding candidates with experience in both disciplines.”

Top workforce needs that changes to policy, regulations, or payment could alleviate

Need	Suggested Changes
Improve staff salary and benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates to allow for payment of higher wages • Adjust overall payment structure for reimbursement for behavioral health services • Ensure State House and Senate, CMS, and private insurance companies continue to pay at parity for telehealth claims • Provide paid family leave • Increase staff pay
Increase workforce pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove high school diploma requirement for direct care workers • Provide more tuition reimbursement opportunities for all behavioral health-related degrees/programs • Approve Social Work License Compact

In the past 6 months, has the impact of staff shortages on your facility’s capacity to provide care gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?

(% of 12 responses to this question)



[Slightly Worse] *“Time spent with clients has gotten shorter.”*

[Same] *“Even with doubling the number of therapists at the practice, we remain inundated with referrals and all caseloads remain full or fill immediately when a vacancy arrives.”*

In the past 6 months, has burnout as a workforce issue at your facility gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse?

(% of 12 responses to this question)



[Slightly Worse] *“The long-term affects of working in mental health during a pandemic and never-ending demands, takes its toll. The bureaucracy that comes with all this adds to the stress and work demands.”*

[Slightly Better] *“Consistent and present leaders have helped alleviate some concerns in this space.”*

[Much Better] *“After some COVID restrictions lifted and we raised our pay, we were able to backfill positions, which was a relief on both managers and experienced staff.”*

Data Limitations

Findings presented in the brief represent the responses from a convenience sample of health system administrators who voluntarily participated in the Summer 2023 Sentinel Network questionnaire (Jan-June 2023). Generalizability of these findings to the broader North Carolina health care system may be limited.

About the North Carolina Health Workforce Sentinel Network

The Health Workforce Sentinel Network links the healthcare sector with policymakers, workforce planners, and educators to identify and respond to changing needs for healthcare workers; visit:

<https://nc.sentinelnetwork.org/> Questions? Contact: nc@sentinelnetwork.org