

Behavioral Health Human Resource Crisis: Rural Responses

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Big ideas. Real-world thinking.

Rural Behavioral Health Challenges

Problem Persistence

Age

Health

Geography

Access

Economics & Funding

Workforce

Technology

Overview (and it isn't pretty...)

- **Age:** Rural populations older. Less likely to have health insurance.
- **Demographics:** While smaller compared to urban pop, rural pop increasing.
- **Population Health:** Higher rates of chronic illness, heart disease, diabetes, untreated mental illness, etc.
- **Geography:** Remote, that's what defines rural.
- **Economics & Funding:** Lower incomes, fewer community assets, lower funding for rural providers.
- **Workforce:** Limited # of providers, especially specialists.
- **Technology:** Limited access to broadband. Slower connections. Fewer technologists to support operations. Higher costs.

Responses

- **Age:** Recognize issues associated with age groups. Support age-focused services. WIC, Medicaid, Medicare.
- **Population Health:** Integrate public & community health care with behavioral health care services. Improve public health services.
- **Workforce:** Expand NHSC scholarships. Recruit from rural. Create “pipelines” from rural to higher ed back to rural. Develop Peer Specialists training/programs.

Responses

- **Technology:** Tech specialists in rural, training in use of tech by rural service providers, improve access to high speed broadband. Tele-mental health services.
- **Geography:** Recognize that rural DOES NOT fit into conventional economy of scale models. Develop different cost models.
- **Economics:** Recognize that rural areas are typically poorer. Rather than focusing on trying to “change” rural economics, focus on improving broad health of rural communities. Improve services through existing mechanisms (County social services, VA, Dept of Ag, Community Action).

Conclusions

- Improve rural broadband and related technology
- Address rural whole health needs
- Support NHSC behavioral health scholarships
- Create workforce “pipelines” & selectively recruit
- Increase peer support specialists & fund appropriately
- Accept that rural service costs are different
- Address rural economic challenges
- Listen to rural residents – What do they need from us?

