

Workforce

The State of Alaska has the workforce capacity in place to support the resources and funding of a Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program.

Objective 9.1: Strengthen workforce capacity with improved recruitment and retention to obtain and maintain knowledge, support innovation, and modernization.

Objective 9.2: Advance the competencies of the healthcare, behavioral health, and public health workforce.

Objective 9.3: Ensure funding is available to support the strategies identified in Alaska’s Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program.

Alaska’s healthcare sector is currently facing a pivotal challenge, characterized by an acute disparity between the increasing demand for healthcare professionals and the availability of qualified workers. Recent analyses reveal that the state requires **approximately 7,950¹** new healthcare workers annually to keep pace with both growth and turnover within the sector. This situation necessitates a multifaceted approach to enhance the capacity, capabilities, and competencies of Alaska’s healthcare workforce. The absence of such measures could compromise the state’s ability to provide a continuous spectrum of services and care, particularly to its most vulnerable populations.

The risks associated with this workforce shortage are significant. They include a heightened reliance on the most intensive and costly services, such as emergency departments in hospitals, or on more restrictive settings like residential care or correctional facilities.

Furthermore, this shortage may compel Alaskans to seek certain necessary services outside the state, which presents additional challenges.

“...the healthcare sector is expected to add 4,500 new jobs over the next 10 years through growth, more jobs than any other sector in the state.”

[2023 Alaska Healthcare Workforce Analysis²](#)

To address this issue effectively, a series of key workforce strategies have been proposed. One such strategy is the concept of “growing our own,” which focuses on ensuring that Alaskans of all ages, especially those entering the workforce, are informed about and have clear pathways to careers in healthcare. This involves establishing training opportunities that not only provide essential skills for service provision, leadership, and career advancement, but also increase the accessibility and availability of training for both new and current workers. This can be achieved through technological advancements, the development of new programs, enhancing program accessibility, and the implementation of employer-sponsored models. Additional measures include the utilization of loan repayment programs, incentives, and various other recruitment and retention strategies.

Innovative approaches and the collaborative leveraging of efforts are crucial in establishing a comprehensive, integrated mental health program plan for Alaska. This requires appropriate funding, including amendments to the Medicaid State Plan and the 1115 Behavioral Health Reform Medicaid Waiver to adequately serve the needs of all Alaskans. Additionally, evaluating Medicaid and grant-funded programs and services is vital to ensure the implementation of best practices and the achievement of desired outcomes. To realize these objectives and strategies, it is essential to support collaborative engagement of all stakeholders across the state. This comprehensive approach is imperative to address the critical stage of Alaska’s healthcare sector workforce, ensuring the provision of quality healthcare services to all residents, particularly those in the most vulnerable segments of the population.

Objective 9.1: Strengthen workforce capacity with improved recruitment and retention to obtain and maintain knowledge, support innovation, and modernization.

- a. **Strategy:** Prepare Alaska’s youth for health careers.
- b. **Strategy:** Improve retention strategies for existing health professionals.
- c. **Strategy:** Develop effective leadership courses and offerings.

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- d. **Strategy:** Promote organizational culture that supports workforce development.
- e. **Strategy:** A stable, sustainable statewide network of behavioral health providers is available to serve Alaskans with behavioral health needs.

Objective 9.2: Advance the competencies of the healthcare, behavioral health, and public health workforce.

- a. **Strategy:** Create an attractive career path for those entering the workforce with accompanying training.
- b. **Strategy:** Expand and enhance training and professional development opportunities for all healthcare and behavioral health professionals.
- c. **Strategy:** Enhance the use of technology for distance-delivered educational opportunities.
- d. **Strategy:** Support curriculum development and the training of health professionals to ensure they learn, enhance, and update essential knowledge and skills.
- e. **Strategy:** Support training and other activities that enhance the health workforce’s competency in providing culturally and linguistically appropriate care.
- f. **Strategy:** Expand the number and type of training and technical assistance opportunities that educate K-12 and post-secondary students, clinicians, and professional providers to work in inter-professional/inter-disciplinary teams and participate in practice transformations.

CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICES:

Effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful quality care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs.

*National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care*³

- g. **Strategy:** Support technical assistance, training, and other opportunities to help [safety net providers](#)⁴ expand, coordinate, and effectively use Health Information Technology (HIT) to support service delivery and quality improvement.

Objective 9.3: Ensure funding is available to support the strategies identified in Alaska’s Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Program.

- a. **Strategy:** Advocate to ensure the Mental Health Budget Bill includes the appropriations necessary to fund the operating and capital expenditures for the continuum of services.
- b. **Strategy:** Evaluate and provide grant funding to pay for essential behavioral health services which are not funded through Medicaid or other sources.
- c. **Strategy:** Develop an interdepartmental process for evaluating the efficacy of grantee programs and having technical support services for grantee programs and their services.
- d. **Strategy:** Adequate infrastructure is in place to support program efforts and collaboration between DOH and the DFCS.
- e. **Strategy:** Leverage Medicaid funding and further explore Medicaid Waivers and other state plan amendments.
- f. **Strategy:** Assess reimbursement aligning with the actual cost of providing services.

MENTAL HEALTH BUDGET BILL:

Alaska is unique in that it has an operational budget, a capital budget, and a mental health budget bill. The mental health budget bill provides appropriations/funding to ensure there is an integrated comprehensive mental health program.

*Alaska State Legislature — 44.25.290*⁵



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ENDNOTES

- 1 Recent analyses reveal that the state requires approximately 7,950 new healthcare workers annually to keep pace with both growth and turnover within the sector. https://www.alaskahha.org/_files/ugd/ab2522_bde54b435a474ca48101c58d9239da21.pdf
- 2 2023 Alaska Healthcare Workforce Analysis. https://www.alaskahha.org/_files/ugd/ab2522_bde54b435a474ca48101c58d9239da21.pdf
- 3 National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in Health and Health Care. <https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/assets/pdfs/EnhancedNationalCLASStandards.pdf>
- 4 Support technical assistance, training, and other opportunities to help safety net providers. <https://health.alaska.gov/dph/Emergency/Pages/healthcare/SafetyNetDirectory.aspx>
- 5 Alaska State Legislature — 44.25.290. <https://www.akleg.gov/basis/statutes.asp#44.25.290>