



DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

hope. recovery. wellbeing.

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October 14, 2022

TO: Supervisor Holly J. Mitchell, Chair
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FROM: Lisa H. Wong, Psy.D. *Lisa H. Wong, Psy.D.*
Interim Director

SUBJECT: **REPORT RESPONSE ON “ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES
(ITEM 73A, AGENDA OF SEPTEMBER 27, 2022)”**

On September 27, 2022, your Board approved a motion instructing the Interim Director of the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to provide a written report and present to the Board on October 18, 2022, on the steps DMH is taking, in collaboration with our network of providers, to ensure our system has the adequate staffing and capacity to serve those at risk or suffering from severe mental illness.

Background

Mental health is at a critical juncture, and people are struggling. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there existed a huge need for mental health services, already impacted by provider shortages and retention issues in the public mental health system. These challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and the need for critical mental health services is far greater now than ever, impacting one's self, our families, our children, and our communities. As we begin to move toward a path of healing, DMH continues to make it a top priority to address recruitment and retention challenges to ensure that our system, including our network of providers, has the adequate staffing and capacity to serve those at risk of, or suffering from, severe and persistent mental illness.

This report provides a description of DMH's progress toward adequate staffing, its current challenges, and what efforts DMH has implemented or is actively pursuing to respond to those challenges.

Current DMH Workforce

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2022-23 Final Adopted Budget reflects 6,509 budgeted positions. Of that amount, 4,695 (72%) of the total positions are currently filled as of September 30, 2022. The remaining 1,789 positions are vacant resulting in a 28% overall vacancy rate departmentwide. Efforts continue to fill a number of these vacancies as there are hiring transactions in progress. The table below provides a breakdown (does not include candidates who have been selected but are still in process).

	Budgeted Positions	Filled Positions	Vacant Positions	Percent Vacant
Psychiatry Positions	255	194	61	24%
Post-Grad Psychiatry Interns	24	24	-	0%
Non-Psychiatry Licensed Clinicians	2,452	1,869	583	24%
Non-Licensed Mental Health Positions	1,368	838	530	39%
Public Guardian	123	96	27	22%
Program Support	1,504	1,074	430	29%
Central Administration	783	600	183	23%
	6,509	4,695	1,814	28%

DMH Hiring Efforts to Date

DMH continues to work on efforts to ensure that our system has adequate staffing and capacity. For FY 2021-22, DMH hired 519 employees overall, including promotions. For the first three months of the current fiscal year, a total of 202 positions have been filled, including promotions.

For example, in DMH's outpatient programs directly-operated clinics, which consists of adult outpatient, child/family outpatient, and Full Service Partnership (FSP), there are a total of 2,232 positions, with 1,861 positions encumbered. Currently, there are over 70 pending hiring transactions to fill these vacancies, in addition to 134 positions where recruitment/interviews are underway.

Since September 2022, DMH also filled many vacancies in significant leadership positions, including hiring a Human Resources Director (a position that had been vacant for over three years), a Program Manager IV to oversee the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Division, a Service Area Chief for Service Area 1, a Program Manager III in the Intensive Care Division, and Program Manager IIs for Olive View Mental Health Center and East San Gabriel Valley Mental Health Center.

Candidates have been selected and are in process for the Senior Deputy Director over the Child Wellbeing and Prevention Division, as well as the Deputy Director of Prevention.

Challenges/Solutions

There is currently a nationwide shortage of mental health professionals. While the shortage itself is nothing new, the pandemic has aggravated the problems within an already overwhelmed mental health system. There are providers who have left their jobs citing burnout, providers who have moved out of state, a shortage of staff willing to work in person or in field-based positions, and others who have responded to recruitment from other sources. In light of these challenges, DMH is committed to ensuring that our system has adequate staffing and capacity for those we serve, while also incentivizing staff and providers to want to continue to work in the mental health arena.

The following recruitment and retention efforts have been implemented by DMH or are in progress:

Loan Forgiveness:

DMH has reinstated the Psychiatrist Student Loan Forgiveness program. For FY 2022-23, as of September 21, 2022, the total amount of awards granted for Student Loan Repayment is \$400,000 and Recruitment Incentive is \$75,000 for a grand total of \$475,000.

By the end of FY 2022-23, DMH estimates that additional awards granted for Student Loan Repayment and Recruitment will be \$1,419,657 and \$150,000, respectively, which will be an estimated total of \$2,044,657 for the fiscal year.

Financial Incentives:

DMH has been working on financial incentives that are available to the public mental health workforce, including those that go directly through the California Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI). For example:

- DMH was successful in re-initiating the Stipend program which provides stipends to social work, psychology, and psychiatric nurse practitioner students who are graduating and come to work for our directly-operated or contracted specialty mental health providers. The schools will begin to identify students this academic year;
- DMH is recruiting mental health psychiatrists and offering recruitment incentives for those that meet selection criteria;
- DMH is offering reimbursement for relocation expenses for out-of-area mental health psychiatrists for those that meet selection criteria;

- Through the Workforce Education and Training (WET) Regional Partnership Program, DMH will award Mental Health Loan Repayments to over 850 mental health staff in our Legal Entity and directly-operated programs after they complete one year of service; and
- DMH was successful in negotiating a field assignment bonus for specialized mobile mental health teams with our labor partners and is working with the Chief Executive Office (CEO) to explore the possibility of signing and retention bonuses to recruit new hires for our mental health workforce, as well as retain members of our current workforce.

Recruitment Efforts:

The following are DMH's recruitment efforts aimed at growing our mental health workforce:

- DMH Subject Matter Experts have been meeting with Department of Human Resources (DHR) to develop a mechanism to recruit for hard to fill positions such as psychiatric social workers/marriage and family therapists, clinical psychologists, and licensed psychiatric technicians;
- Selection Fairs;
- Psychiatry Residency Training Program with Charles Drew University;
- Dedicated psychiatry recruitment staff; and
- Directly-operated clinics and contracted providers becoming training sites.

Academic Outreach:

- Outreach to partner with schools and professional organizations; and
- Pipeline/engagement in high schools emphasizing work in the public mental health system.

Flexibility:

DMH has continued to allow some of its workforce to telework, provided that the work assignment can be completed remotely without detrimentally impacting the needs of our clients. As such, 71% of DMH's workforce is teleworking at least one day a week, while 31% are teleworking four to five days a week.

Collaboration with Network Providers

As the County Mental Health Plan, DMH's network consists of directly-operated clinics and legal entity providers working in partnership to provide specialty mental health services. DMH recognizes that this vital work cannot be completed without the assistance and support from our legal entity providers. The following are examples of hiring and retention practices discussed with our providers, and a range of options implemented by our providers, as a means of increasing access to care:

- Increasing salaries: DMH increased the County Maximum Allowance rates which provided the opportunity for Legal Entities to increase employee salaries;
- Providing bonuses (general sign-on bonus, and sign-on bonus for intensive services, performance, bilingual, employment referrals);
- Providing alternate work schedules (e.g.: telework, hybrid, and flexible work schedules);
- Hiring consultants to promote diversification and retention to promote greater work-life satisfaction/retention;
- Encouraging the use of interns from multiple disciplines (e.g.: announcing job opportunities for new graduates, retention of interns to eventually become licensed and work for the agency);
- Providing DMH resources and information related to staff retention/recruitment (e.g.: Community-Based Organization (CBO) Health Workforce Grant, scholarship opportunity for peer support specialist certification, Community Health Worker CBO committee, mental health loan repayment program through the WET Regional Partnership program); and
- For access to care, utilizing different service paradigms to increase client attendance (e.g.: offering mental health services in person, in the home, and through telehealth).

Conclusion/Next Steps

DMH is committed to building the strong, talented, and dedicated workforce necessary to provide quality mental health services to the residents of Los Angeles County. With collaboration from our network of providers and leveraging workforce incentives related to State, local, and all other available resources, DMH will continue to pursue and expand on our recruitment and retention efforts to ensure that our system has the needed staffing and capacity to serve those who depend on the critical mental health services we provide.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact me or staff can contact Patty Choi, Acting Chief of Staff, at (213) 760-2347 or pchoi@dmh.lacounty.gov.

LHW:CDD
PC:td

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors
Chief Executive Office
County Counsel