| **Greater Houston Behavioral Health Legislative Forum 2022** |
| --- |
| **We**, the undersigned, along with the **chief executives** of the **City of Houston** and **Harris County**, are **nonprofit and organizational partners and professional associations in the Greater Houston area** that provide and **advocate for behavioral health** (mental health and substance use) services. We represent **over 200 agencies and thousands of behavioral health professionals who serve hundreds of thousands of clients and patients each year**. The “second pandemic,” has been a surge of children, youth and adults experiencing mental health and substance use disorders, we urge the Legislature to:1. **Explore opportunities to develop and invest in the Texas’ behavioral health workforce** to address the dire shortage, including, but not limited to: reimbursement rates increase, recruitment efforts, retention payments, and loan repayment program funding.
2. **Make substantial investments and develop innovative strategies to address the mental health of children and youth**, specifically in school-based interventions.
 |
| **Behavioral Health Workforce Development** |
| The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a “second pandemic,” of increased prevalence rates of mental health and substance use disorders. **In 2020, 4 in 10 adults across the nation reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, compared to 1 in 10 in 2019.[[1]](#footnote-0)** With that being said, **37% of nationally surveyed psychologists reported having received increased referrals from 2020 to 2021**, and that number increased to **62% between 2021 and 2022**.[[2]](#footnote-1) The increased demand for behavioral health services has impacted Texas providers significantly. **In 2020, more than 75% of surveyed psychiatrists self-reported having experienced burnout.[[3]](#footnote-2)** One of the most significant factors affecting an individual’s ability to access high-quality behavioral health care **is the availability of a well-trained, culturally and linguistically responsive behavioral health workforce.** Texas’ behavioral health workforce shortage is dire, **with all but one county designated a full or partial Mental Health Professional Shortage Area** (MHPSAs).[[4]](#footnote-3) To break this down further**, in 2021: 168 of 254 Texas counties reported having 0 licensed psychiatrists, 147 counties reported having 0 licensed psychologists, 91 counties reported having 0 licensed clinical social workers, 78 counties reported having 0 licensed chemical dependency counselors, 41 countries reported having 0 licensed professional counselors,** and 211 counties reported having 0 psychiatric-mental health advanced practice registered nurses (PMHAPRNS).[[5]](#footnote-4) In Texas, there are **over 15 million people living in areas with substandard or no accessible mental health care.[[6]](#footnote-5)** In order to address this crisis, the Legislature must increase the behavioral health loan forgiveness program; expand access to scholarships; invest in pipeline programs to encourage students to enter the field; provide incentives to increase completion of behavioral health training programs and supervision; and increase the capacity of professions such as community health workers and peer specialists to serve people with behavioral health conditions. |
| **Children’s Mental Health in Schools** |
| The behavioral health of children has not been left untouched by the aftermath of COVID-19. **About 1 in 6 children in Texas have a mental illness.[[7]](#footnote-6)** In 2021, **148 school districts in Texas reported having 0 school counselors.[[8]](#footnote-7)** Licensed behavioral health professionals who work in schools help positively impact the behavioral health needs of students. Between 2020-2021, there were **over 5 million students enrolled in Texas schools, who were served by almost 14,000 certified school counselors and over 3,500 licensed specialists in school psychology**.[[9]](#footnote-8) Additionally, partner organizations such as Communities in Schools (CIS) staffed over 300 licensed behavioral health professionals in Texas schools during the same year.[[10]](#footnote-9) Unfortunately, the demand to meet this need will be growing as **reports show behavioral health providers leaving the field entirely, citing burnout, low wages, and the like**.[[11]](#footnote-10) The Legislature must invest in best evidence-based practices and personnel to meet the needs of the behavioral health needs of children in schools. Resources are needed to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to prevent and ameliorate the effects of school violence tragedies in communities nationwide.    A picture containing text, clipart  Description automatically generated |

1. <https://www.kff.org/health-reform/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/> [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. [https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2021/10/mental-health-treatment-demand#](https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2021/10/mental-health-treatment-demand) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. <https://www.ncsl.org/research/health/state-strategies-to-recruit-and-retain-the-behavioral-health-workforce.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=TX> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/charts/7?state=TX> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. <https://www.dshs.state.tx.us/chs/hprc/publications/2020factsheets.aspx> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/report/rpt23259/NSDUHsaeTotals2018/NSDUHsaeTotals2018.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34144509/> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. [https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fschoolmentalhealthtx.org](https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2F) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
10. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34144509/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
11. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34144509/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)