

Issue Briefs: Massachusetts Behavioral Health Analysis

Workforce Data Issues

It is well established that there is a current and projected national shortage of qualified behavioral health professionals.^{1,2} However, the average rate of behavioral health professionals per population in Massachusetts is well above average. For instance, the Boston area has almost two and a half times the national average in psychiatrists per 100,000, leading the country in psychiatry and social workers per capita.³ However, information about the number of licensed practitioners does not provide information about how much and where they are practicing.

The key mental health and substance abuse professional groups include Psychiatrists, Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialists, Psychologists, Social Workers, Licensed Mental Health Clinicians, Marriage and Family Therapists, and Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors. One potential way to enhance workforce data would be collect information from licensees at the time of license application and renewal. For purposes of health planning, the following data elements would be important:

- Work setting
- Location(s) of current practice
- Estimated weekly hours of practice (total and in each location if multiple locations)
- Payer mix

Additional information about languages spoken, race/ethnicity, gender, years of experience, and specialization might also be helpful.

One challenge to undertaking this data collection effort is the fact that several different boards manage licensure of the professionals listed above and each has its own data system. The Boards include:

- Board of Registration in Medicine – Psychiatrists
- Board of Registration in Nursing – Psychiatric Clinical Nurse Specialists
- Division of Professional Licensure (DPL) – There are separate Boards of Registration for Psychologists, Social Workers, and Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals (including Licensed Mental Health Clinicians, Marriage and Family Therapists, Rehabilitation Counselors, and Educational Psychologists). Applications are all in the same format.
- Department of Public Health (DPH), Bureau of Substance Abuse Services Quality Assurance and Licensing Unit – Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselors.

¹² *An Action Plan for Behavioral Workforce Development*, The Annapolis Coalition on Behavioral Workforce Development, 2007. Retrieved 6/13/14 from <http://annapoliscoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/action-plan-full-report.pdf>.

² Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation. (2009). Accessing children's mental health services in Massachusetts.

³ Dartmouth Atlas of Healthcare, 2006 data. Retrieved from http://www.dartmouthatlas.org/data/table.aspx?ind=144&tf=8&ch=&loc=23,85&loct=3&addn=ind-144_tf-8&rus=1&fmt=169.

While the Boards differ in the type and amount of data collected, in general, licensure applications/renewals for these professions do not comprehensively collect the data fields described above. To improve data sources available to the Council for its future work, DPH plans to work with these boards to develop consensus on opportunities for enhanced data collection.