

Health Sciences Pathway Landscape Assessment

Strengthening a health sciences workforce that builds health and wealth for all

Behavioral Health

A health sciences workforce that reflects the communities it serves is essential to creating better health outcomes and drives inclusive economic opportunities. The greater Kansas City region is quite diverse with large populations of people of color and includes several rural communities. Health Forward commissioned a regional landscape assessment to study the health sciences workforce and its educational and career pathways.

In 2024, NORC at the University of Chicago conducted a mixed-methods assessment of the Greater Kansas City region's community health ecosystem. The goal was to deepen understanding of how to better support individuals who are under-represented in health professions, **including those living in rural areas**. The data shared in this infographic are critical findings from this larger assessment. You can access the [full report here](#), including its methodologies and catchment areas.

Demand

With increasing demand and projected supply falling short, these roles have the highest expected shortages for behavioral health professions.



Representation

Latino/a/x professionals face the most severe shortfalls across the behavioral health workforce.

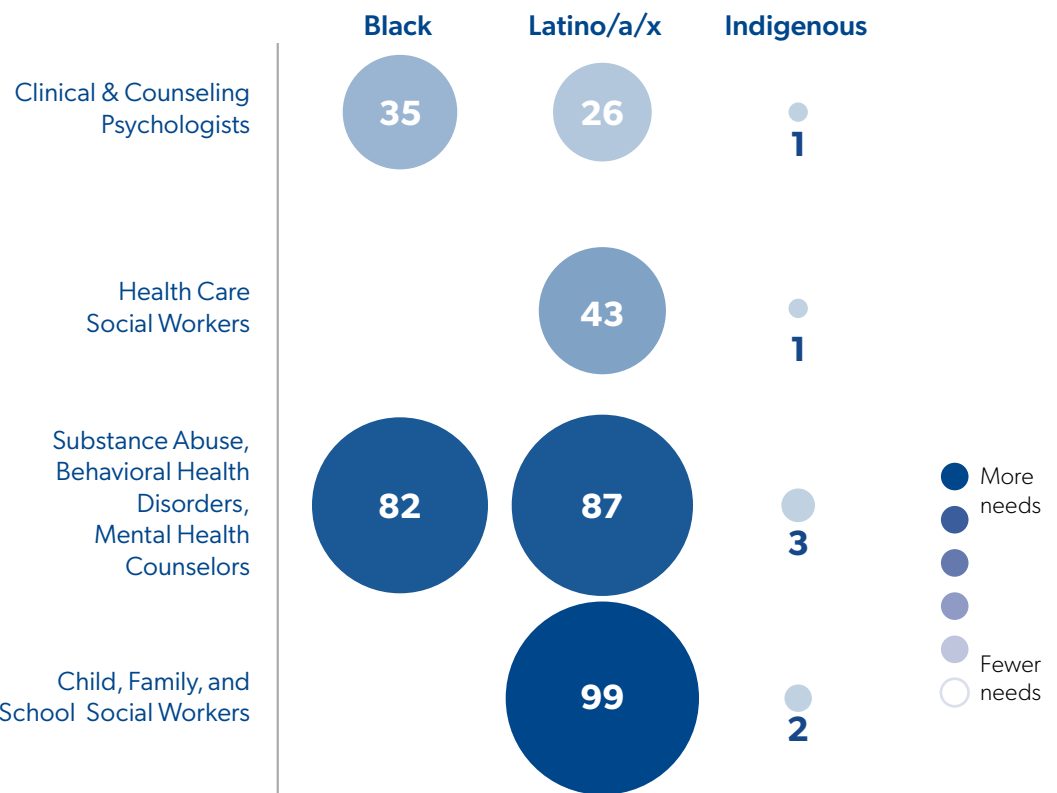
Pathway of Graduates

The data reveals that we are projected to have a strong pathway of Black social workers, whose expertise and community lens enhances the region's child, family, school and healthcare counseling services.

Recent graduates show a more balanced and diverse pathway, suggesting a strengthening for Latina/o/x, Black, and multi-racial professionals.

Needs by 2034*

This reflects the number of providers needed for each role to close the gap in representation of race/ethnicity across the Kansas City region.



Qualitative Findings

Assessment participants stressed the unique role of the non-hospital safety net health system such as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), and Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs). These organizations play an important role serving community and filling the gap in providing people of color and individuals from rural areas the opportunity to gain practical health professions experience.

In recent years, there has been increased demand for behavioral health services rising from the pandemic, especially in communities of color, but the workforce has not grown to meet these needs. Participants described a need to partner with state, local, and philanthropic organizations to invest in the behavioral health workforce by removing barriers to entry, supporting career pathways, and advocating for increased Medicaid reimbursement rates for behavioral health providers.

Findings from NORC's assessment also point to opportunities to expand upon or create more career laddering initiatives and a need to examine and refine hiring and retention practices where there is disparate representation.

NORC's Recommendations

Solutions suggested by NORC to strengthen behavioral health pathways include:

Early Exposure

Empower future practitioners by introducing mental health career paths at primary and secondary education levels, inspiring diverse youth to envision themselves as leaders in behavioral health.

Streamlined Entry

Accelerate entry into the field by simplifying licensure requirements, including support for interstate licensure compacts, so qualified professionals can contribute their expertise more quickly.

Financial Support

Expand access through scholarships, loan forgiveness, and stipends, especially for graduate study, to unlock opportunities for talented individuals into the behavioral health field who may face financial barriers.

Culturally Diverse Workforce

Recruit and train clinicians who reflect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities they serve, ensuring care is responsive and inclusive.

Mentorship Networks

Build mentorship networks that connect aspiring behavioral health professionals with established practitioners from diverse backgrounds, fostering growth, guidance, and belonging.

These recommendations are based on the comments and perspectives of participants in the landscape assessment and the reflections and observations of members of the NORC assessment team.

Health Forward sees an opportunity to strengthen our region's behavioral health workforce by building strategic partnerships and investing in workforce development. By working together and leveraging our community's strengths, we can ensure a robust pipeline of diverse professionals are ready to meet our region's evolving behavioral health needs.