

HB 2175

Developing Oklahoma's mental health workforce

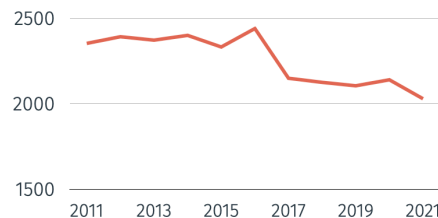
Rep. Cynthia Roe and Sen. Paul Rosino

Oklahoma has a critical shortage of mental health professionals, and the number of new providers joining the workforce isn't enough to keep pace with the growing needs of the state's residents. Oklahoma already has the infrastructure to increase the incoming workforce with the passage of SB 773 in 2019, which created the Mental Health Loan Repayment Revolving Fund.

HB 2175 changes the name of the fund to the Behavioral Health Workforce Development Fund and expands how the fund can be used to strategically grow the mental health workforce.

Addressing a public health emergency

- **Oklahoma has critical shortages in almost all major mental health fields**, including psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, psychologists, social workers, and licensed marriage and family therapists.
- **By 2035, Oklahoma will not have enough providers to meet demand.** The state will have only 59% of the psychologists needed and only 80% of mental health counselors needed to serve Oklahoma's population.
- **The number of psychiatrists leaving the workforce will exceed those joining** the workforce 2-to-1 by 2024.
- **Mental health need has hit all-time high.** Rural Oklahoma saw a 27% annual increase in suicide during the pandemic, and as many as half of all Oklahomans experienced anxiety or depression since 2020.



2021 had the fewest mental health-related degrees conferred by Oklahoma institutions in more than a decade.

Source: Legislative Office of Fiscal Transparency

A workforce solution

- Provide loan repayments to mental health and substance use providers to encourage them to **serve and stay in high-need areas**.
- Increase the number of psychiatric residencies and retention rates. Oklahoma only has **23 psychiatric residency slots**, and only 58% of physicians in Oklahoma who completed residency from 2012 to 2021 are still practicing in the state today.
- Expand the use of cohort models to build intentional and supportive learning communities.
- Develop capacity for rigorous training, competitive recruitment to attract the best talent, and more staff in residency programs qualified to supervise.