Addressing Illinois’ Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage

The Issue
An estimated 44.7 million American adults – around 18% of the population – live with some form of mental illness in any given year,¹ and there are only enough mental health care professionals available across the country to meet roughly 26% of the need for services.² Projections show that by 2025 the shortage will be astronomically worse, as six vital mental health provider types will have shortages of approximately 250,510 full-time equivalents (FTEs).³ An infusion of qualified behavioral health providers is needed to drive down avoidable hospitalization costs, reduce recidivism with justice-involved individuals, address the substance use epidemic and increase access to timely, evidence-based care.

Focus on Illinois⁴
Illinois is particularly hard-hit by the behavioral health workforce shortage. Illinois has only 13.8 behavioral health care professionals for every 10,000 residents, compared to the national average of 21.4. Over 4.8 million Illinois residents – or 38% of the population – reside in a designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Area.

The state needs to increase the current workforce over 3.5 times to meet residents’ need for services. Additionally, Illinois has seen a 215% increase in their behavioral health workforce shortage in the past years (see map), a rate that far outpaces its neighbors.

The Ask
Evidence-based treatments that serve individuals with behavioral health conditions cannot be effective without professionals to provide them. Illinois must invest in incentives for the workforce including reimbursement rates that match costs of care, the Community Behavioral Health Professional Loan Repayment Program, and more. Additionally, increasing support for telehealth across the state can help the current workforce cover more ground and reach more people, especially in rural settings.

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