



HIGH ROAD LABOR MARKET ANALYSIS | BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICES SECTOR LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

December 2021

OVERVIEW

The behavioral health services sector in California, including Los Angeles, is facing worker shortages that negatively impact health outcomes. At the same time, workers with barriers to employment – many with lived experience and expertise that could play a vital role in supporting positive health outcomes – remain disconnected from quality jobs.

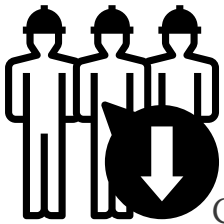
To help address these urgent needs, the Worker Education and Resource Center, Inc. (WERC) conducted a labor market analysis of the behavioral health services sector in greater Los Angeles utilizing a High Road Training Partnerships framework. Between August and November 2021, WERC conducted over 170 online surveys with both employer leaders and entry-level workers in behavioral health services, as well as 10 interviews with leaders and one online focus group with workers. The purpose of the high road labor market analysis was to better understand:

Employer Demand

**Entry-level
Occupations**

Entry-level Workers

KEY FINDINGS



Worker shortages exist across entry-level positions, especially substance use disorder and mental health Counselors and Case Managers

Employers want to improve the onboarding experience by making it more structured and comprehensive, including experiential learning



Wages for entry-level workers vary from the \$15 minimum wage to \$22 per hour or more; employers recognize that low wages impact recruitment and retention and cite funding constraints as a key barrier

Training needs for both workers and employers include mental health, substance use disorder, peer-led training and mentoring, and technology



Career advancement opportunities exist, but workers need concrete support to pursue education

Additional training priorities include trauma-informed care, a priority for workers, and workplace professionalism, a priority for employers



Both soft skills such as working well with others on a team and operations-related skills such as maintaining accurate records and time management are important to success

Finally, both workers and employers identified cultural competence and humility as critical to behavioral health outcomes and an ongoing training need



RECOMMENDATIONS

01

EXPAND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

Expand trauma-informed training (i.e., secondary trauma, self-care, mindfulness, trauma-informed supervision), increase peer-led training and mentoring, modify entry-level and promotional job requirements to better recognize lived experience as expertise, and engage policymakers and funders upstream about designing grants, policies, and contracts that support more inclusive hiring and promotion practices and increase retention

02

INCREASE ACCESS TO QUALITY JOBS

Increase access to quality entry-level jobs by continuing to increase starting wages, offering concrete support (i.e., financial support, paid time off) for workers who want to pursue additional education, better connecting professional development to career advancement, expanding from mentoring to sponsoring, and collaborating on a High Road Jobs Quality Assessment tool in behavioral health

03

STRATEGIC CAPACITY BUILDING

Concentrate capacity-building resources where workers and employers identify the greatest needs, including – in addition to trauma-informed practices and peer-led training – mental health, substance use disorder, onboarding gaps, workplace professionalism, and technology

04

CAPITALIZE ON COVID-19 INVESTMENTS

Capitalize on COVID-19 investments to help meet needs in the behavioral health services sector, including transitioning interested service-workers hired as Community Health Workers and Contact Tracers during the pandemic into permanent, entry-level jobs in behavioral health and continuing and expanding hybrid professional development systems

05

COLLABORATIVE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH

Implement an ecosystem approach that promotes collaboration, rather than competition, to help meet the increasing demand for behavioral health services effectively and efficiently, which may include pooling crisis workers to be able to deploy quickly and sharing training and professional development offerings across providers