

Addressing the Behavioral Health Workforce Crisis

Five Strategies to Shift Organizational Culture to Center Client and Staff Experience

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Nationally, there is more demand for behavioral health treatment than workforce capacity to deliver services. In 2021, more than 97% of behavioral health agencies struggled with recruitment and 82% struggled with retention.¹ Currently, nearly 40% of Americans live in an area with mental health provider shortages, and by 2025, there will be a national shortage of more than 30,000 behavioral health practitioners.²

What was initially a workforce challenge escalated into a workforce crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, which sparked what has been called "The Great Resignation." Many people retired early, quit their jobs, and even left the public sector entirely. As retirements outpace graduations from behavioral health education and training programs, there are simply fewer applicants than needed to fill vacancies.³ These increased vacancies overwhelmed remaining staff with higher caseloads, who then experienced rising rates of both burnout and compassion fatigue. This fatigue and burnout is, in turn, leading to more departures, creating a vicious cycle of burnout and attrition. The pandemic also caused significant stress that has led to more people reporting mental health conditions and has left some with existing mental health conditions reporting worsened symptoms.^{4,5} This trifecta of pandemic-driven factors (increased vacancies, increased demand for behavioral health services, and increased acuity for some behavioral health clients) further frayed an already-strained behavioral health care system.

While there are existing and emerging funding streams to assist behavioral health agencies with this workforce crisis, Third Sector's work with more than a dozen behavioral health agencies in California, Washington state, and others, in addition to its review of available literature, has shown that **truly successful implementation of any solution is dependent upon the health of the underlying culture within the agency itself.**⁶ Literature shows when agencies invest in the overall well-being of their employees, staff are better able to deliver high-quality services and, in turn, directly impact positive client outcomes.⁷ For many agencies, this will require an **organizational paradigm shift** that centers the quality of client and staff experience by integrating meaning and purpose into the workplace, creating environments that foster psychological safety, nurturing a sense of belonging and team connectedness, and focusing on strategies that uplift staff well-being.

¹Health Management Associates & National Council for Mental Wellbeing. Behavioral Health Workforce is a National Crisis: Immediate Policy Actions for States. Health Management Associates & National Council for Mental Wellbeing. October 2021.

<https://www.healthmanagement.com/wp-content/uploads/HMA-NCMW-Issue-Brief-10-27-21.pdf>

²National Council for Mental Wellbeing. New Study: Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage Will Negatively Impact Society. National Council for Mental Wellbeing. April 2023. <https://www.thenationalcouncil.org/news/help-wanted/>

³Coffman, J., & Fix, M. Building the Future Behavioral Health Workforce: Needs Assessment. County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California (CBHDA). February 2023. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b1065c375f9ee699734d898/t/63e695d3ce73ca3e44824cf8/1676056025905/CBHDA_Needs_Assessment_FINAL_Report_2-23.pdf

⁴Hall, Andy, Boyd, Karen, Enemark, Daniel, & Connolly, Karen. Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage: A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals. San Diego Workforce Partnership. August 2022. <https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/San-Diego-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report.pdf>

⁵Coffman, J., & Fix, M. Building the Future Behavioral Health Workforce: Needs Assessment. County Behavioral Health Directors Association of California (CBHDA). February 2023. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b1065c375f9ee699734d898/t/63e695d3ce73ca3e44824cf8/1676056025905/CBHDA_Needs_Assessment_FINAL_Report_2-23.pdf

⁶Third Sector Behavioral Health Practice Area <https://www.thirdsectorcap.org/behavioral-health/>

⁷Gallup. State of the Global Workplace 2022 Report The Voice of the World's Employees. Gallup. June 2022. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/349484/state-of-the-global-workplace-2022-report.aspx>

Meaning and Purpose

Most members of the behavioral health workforce do their work because of intrinsic motivating factors; they want to understand how their role impacts the bigger picture and feel that it makes a difference.^{8,9} Studies show that purpose is a top factor for staff recruitment and retention and that increasing a sense of meaning and purpose is a critical element in reducing burnout and improving job satisfaction.¹⁰

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety means everyone feels empowered to speak up without fear of punishment or humiliation, regardless of status or tenure. High-risk industries, such as nuclear power and aviation, have created cultures of intense vigilance and moment-to-moment learning and are still based on respect and ongoing, explicit discussion about vulnerabilities.¹¹ This type of approach is more responsive to staff needs and, in turn, fosters great innovation in the workplace.

Belonging and Team Connectedness

In response to projected health worker shortages in 2023, the U.S. Surgeon General suggests that health care systems prioritize social connection, social support, and collaboration, which is particularly important in behavioral health multidisciplinary teams that provide coordinated care to clients with complex needs.¹² Team cohesion and support are vital to enhance job fulfillment, protect against compassion fatigue and feelings of loneliness and isolation, and ultimately improve the quality of client care.¹³

Well-Being

Pandemic effects are still lingering and affecting staff health, relationships, finances, and responsibilities at home, but the percentage of employees who feel that their employer cares about their well-being has plummeted.¹⁴ To address this, leaders can check in with employees, raise awareness around burnout and vicarious trauma, provide robust and accessible mental health and other well-being benefits, and modify policies that create obstacles to staff seeking care.¹⁵

⁸ Center for Applied Research Solutions. 2021 California Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment. Center for Applied Research Solutions. April 2022. <https://www.workforcebuildingcalhhs.com/media/331/download?inline>.

⁹ DeHaas, Deborah, Bachus, Brett, & Horn, Eliza. *Unleashing the power of inclusion: Attracting and engaging the evolving workforce*. Deloitte University. 2017.

¹⁰ Morse, G., Salyers, M. P., Rollins, A. L., Monroe-DeVita, M., & Pfahler, C. Burnout in Mental Health Services: A Review of the Problem and Its Remediation. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*. September 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-011-0352-1>

¹¹ Redford, Gabrielle. Amy Edmondson: Psychological Safety is Critically Important in Medicine. *AAMC News*. November 2019. <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/amy-edmondson-psychological-safety-critically-important-medicine>

¹² Murthy, Vivek. *New Surgeon General Advisory Sounds Alarm on Health Worker Burnout and Resignation*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. May 2022. <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2022/05/23/new-surgeon-general-advisory-sounds-alarm-on-health-worker-burnout-and-resignation.html>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Pendell, R. Why Leaders Must Address the Employee Wellbeing Deficit. *Gallup*. June 2022. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/393524/why-leaders-address-employee-wellbeing-deficit.aspx>.

¹⁵ Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022.

<https://aet.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-G0R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SOMH-Report.pdf>.

Though dire, the behavioral health workforce crisis provides agencies with an opportunity to think more holistically about a positive and sustainable approach to workforce recruitment and retention. A successful workforce approach must focus every facet of the strategy on the experiences of clients and staff to enhance their engagement with the agency and its mission and empower them to be a part of organizational decisionmaking. This paradigm shift is particularly important in health care settings as a primary challenge of effectively managing complex health care organizations is shrinking the distance between administrative decisions and the point of service to the client.

An analysis of three years of data from 150 Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers showed that stronger employee engagement was associated with improved business outcomes, namely higher patient satisfaction, lower nurse turnover, and more responsive call center performance.¹⁶ Another review of national hospital data showed that when patient experience or employee engagement improved, so did hospital ratings, safety records, patient outcomes, and financial performance. When hospitals improved patient experience and employee engagement, they were able to exponentially improve performance overall.¹⁷ Making these shifts has the potential to dramatically increase agencies' overall efficacy and transform relationships with entire communities.

Five Workplace Strategies to Center Client and Staff Experience

This policy brief will outline five key strategies that behavioral health departments across the country should implement to realize the promise of this paradigmatic shift. Successful implementation of these strategies requires agencies to maintain a focus on client and staff experience by uplifting meaning and purpose, psychological safety, belonging, and well-being. Centering client and staff voices, values, and motivations will further help retain staff, create a more attractive work environment for potential employees, and ultimately improve client outcomes. Many jurisdictions are currently researching, recommending, and piloting some of these strategies. While this report does not include all initiatives, there are several examples highlighted throughout that are meant to share ideas and inspire innovation.

- **Workplace Strategy 1:** Maximize Staff Capacity to Support Client Recovery
- **Workplace Strategy 2:** Incentivize the Behavioral Health Workforce Pipeline
- **Workplace Strategy 3:** Establish Responsive Policies and Practices
- **Workplace Strategy 4:** Promote Role Clarity and Team Efficacy
- **Workplace Strategy 5:** Prepare Supportive Managers

¹⁶ Boston Consulting Group. A Prescription for Better Performance: Engaging Employees at VA Medical Centers. Partnership for Public Service. March 2019.

https://ourpublicservice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BPTW18_VA-issue-brief.pdf.

¹⁷ Buhman, Nell, & Lee, Thomas. When Patient Experience and Employee Engagement Both Improve, Hospitals' Ratings and Profits Climb. Harvard Business Review. May 2019.



Workplace Strategy 1: Maximize Staff Capacity to Support Client Recovery

Staff want to know they are positively impacting clients and that their organizational structure supports them in those efforts. As such, behavioral health agencies must take a holistic approach to service delivery to direct clients to the level of care and staffing that best meets their needs. One strategy identified in the literature and by subject matter experts is to take better advantage of peer support staff and other paraprofessionals with excellent engagement and client support skills, who do not require clinical credentials, but provide critical social support and connections to needed community resources, such as housing, financial aid, socialization, transportation, and cultural connections.^{18,19}

Example Interventions

- **Emphasize and Expand Peer Roles:** Work with peers to co-design expanded peer career opportunities and service delivery responsibilities. Including peers and their perspectives in these processes both improves the design of peer roles and service delivery approaches and conveys the agency's value for peers and their lived experiences. To support this, agencies should also provide training to staff about the effectiveness of peers on teams.²⁰ Engaging non-peer staff in learning processes around the value and effectiveness of peers and the peer approach is another way to communicate to peers that the organization values their experience and expertise. Colorado, through SB 22-181, is exploring opportunities to strengthen the peer support workforce throughout the state by allowing for tiered entry into the workforce, reducing traditional barriers, and expanding the pool of prospective employees.²¹
- **Hire Additional Paraprofessional Staff:** Increase existing paraprofessional roles and assess the option and impact of filling open clinical positions with paraprofessional staff. Beyond peer staff, there is strong evidence that other paraprofessionals, including community health workers (CHWs) and social services assistants, enable team maximization and client engagement, social needs, well-being, and provider relationships.²² For example, in Alaska, Behavioral Health Aides (BHAs) are counselors, health educators, and advocates who come from and have connections to the community where they work. The Certified Behavioral Health Aide program works with partners across the state to increase access to BHA training and certification to grow these positions, especially in rural geographies.²³
- **Implement Strengths-Based Staffing:** Listen to what drains and fulfills staff and then shift responsibilities where possible. Matching staff strengths and motivators helps to develop a relationship of care and belonging between a supervisor, staff, and the team.²⁴

¹⁸Pietras, Stefanie, & Wishon, Allison. Workforce Implications of Behavioral Health Care Models: Final Report. Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE). April 2021.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/reports/workforce-implications-behavioral-health-care-models-final-report>.

¹⁹Coffman, Janet, Ornelas, Irene, & Quan, Amy. Paraprofessionals in California's Behavioral Health Workforce. Healthforce Center at UCSF. February 2023.

<https://healthforce.ucsf.edu/sites/healthforce.ucsf.edu/files/publication-pdf/Paraprofessionals%20in%20California%E2%80%99s%20Behavioral%20Health%20Workforce%20Feb.2023%20revised.pdf>.

²⁰Center for Applied Research Solutions. 2021 California Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment. Center for Applied Research Solutions. April 2022.

<https://www.workforce.buildingcalhhs.com/media/331/download?inline>.

²¹Colorado Behavioral Health Administration. Investing in the Peer Support Workforce: Lived Experience and Whole-Person Care for Colorado. Colorado Behavioral Health Administration. February 2023.

²²Coffman, Janet, Ornelas, Irene, & Quan, Amy. Paraprofessionals in California's Behavioral Health Workforce. Healthforce Center at UCSF. February 2023.

<https://healthforce.ucsf.edu/sites/healthforce.ucsf.edu/files/publication-pdf/Paraprofessionals%20in%20California%E2%80%99s%20Behavioral%20Health%20Workforce%20Feb.2023%20revised.pdf>.

²³Alaska Community Health Aide Program. About the Behavioral Health Aide Program. Alaska Community Health Aide Program. <https://akchap.org/behavioral-health-aide/about/>

²⁴Halsey, Vicki. Combat The Great Resignation With a Culture of Learning. Training Industry. May 2022.

<https://trainingindustry.com/articles/strategy-alignment-and-planning/combat-the-great-resignation-with-a-culture-of-learning>.



Workplace Strategy 2: Incentivize the Behavioral Health Workforce Pipeline

While offering a more competitive salary than other employers is one strategy to recruit and retain staff, compensation alone does not incentivize staff, nor will competition solve the workforce crisis. Rather than competing, behavioral health agencies should collaborate with one another to design innovative solutions to shared constraints in the workforce pipeline while simultaneously working internally to address the factors within their control that influence recruitment and retention.

Example Interventions

- **Enhance Applicant Engagement:** Take the time to understand what might motivate potential applicants by asking existing staff why they initially chose to work at the organization. This information can help organizations better understand what might incentivize potential applicants. Agencies can then consistently connect with applicants through those motivations throughout the recruitment and hiring process. Recruitment is the first step of onboarding a staff member to an agency, and engaging applicants throughout the hiring process shows the applicant that the agency will value and care for them as an employee.²⁵
- **Offer Flexible Employment Options:** Address team and client needs with flexible or less-than-full-time employment options. Due to changes related to technology, demographics, and the pandemic, more people are looking for work across the employment continuum, including full-time, part-time, contract, and freelance arrangements.
- **Collaborate with Regional Education Institutions:** Partner with education institutions to prepare students for rural and public sector behavioral health work. Many subject experts agree that students are often unprepared to work in the public sector and must be retrained. Partnerships with higher education institutions could shape a training center for students, community members, and other stakeholders to address the lack of preparation for work in and with public behavioral health specifically.²⁶

²⁵Hyman, Mikayla, Powder, Maddie, & Pietsch, Paul. Retaining My Generation: Strategies for Generation X and Generation Z Federal Employees. Partnership for Public Service. November 2022. <https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/retaining-my-generation-retention-strategies-for-generation-x-and-generation-z-federal-employees/>.

²⁶Hall, Andy, Boyd, Karen, Enemark, Daniel, & Connolly, Karen. Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage: A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals. San Diego Workforce Partnership. August 2022. <https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/San-Diego-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report.pdf>.



Workplace Strategy 3: Establish Responsive Policies and Practices

Employers typically rate themselves as better at supporting employees than their employees rate their employers.²⁷ Identifying the policies that best support staff requires engagement with factors that impact overall staff experience, including generational differences, tenure of service, family status, and work styles. Current and future employees cite flexible benefits and policies as a top factor in job choices so they can meet their own unique needs.²⁸ To successfully recruit and retain a diverse staff, behavioral health agencies must implement responsive policies, including providing staff greater autonomy in their day-to-day work and practices that support work-life balance.^{29,30}

Example Interventions

- **Offer Flexible Scheduling and Work Location Options:** Due to the pandemic, U.S. government agencies and employers are grappling with how to provide workers greater flexibility. Behavioral health departments should offer schedules such as four 10-hour shifts that accommodate evening and weekend flexibility and create remote and hybrid options for positions that typically have flexible working locations across similar industries, such as IT specialists, research analysts, and administrative support. Nearly 70% of employees surveyed for the Lyra Health 2022 State of Mental Health report ranked flexible work location as "very important," the second most popular after health, dental, and vision plans.³¹ In Tennessee, for example, the Public Behavioral Health Workforce Workgroup specifically identified flexible schedules and remote work as strategies that local, state, and institutional entities should pursue to address recruitment and retention.³²
- **Train Staff to Reduce Bias and Promote Understanding for Flexible Care Needs:** Especially given that people of different races, backgrounds, and circumstances will be using leave or benefits at different levels, agencies must train staff to identify and reduce bias in how policies are enforced, such as between people who work remotely more often than they work in the office.³³ Ingraining employee care in agency culture will also involve day-to-day practices of modeling the use of benefits and other forms of self-care, recognizing and respecting breaks, and promoting the use of leave time for mental health care.^{34,35,36}
- **Regularly Assess Staff Well-Being and Engagement:** Agencies can measure and track staff well-being through consistent surveys and listening sessions.³⁷ Once this data is assessed, leaders in the agency can create strategies to improve staff well-being and engagement and host planning sessions with staff to receive staff input and guidance on their identified strategies. Additionally, tracking this data (and improvements implemented as a result of analyzing that data) can begin to identify connections between well-being and performance outcomes.³⁸

²⁷Gallup. The 2022 Guide to Employee Engagement. Gallup. January 2022.

<https://www.gallup.com/file/workplace/388697/Guide%20to%20Employee%20Engagement%20in%202022%20-%20Gallup.pdf>.

²⁸Myers, Elizabeth, Carlton, Melissa, Belfer, Bret. Seven Generations in the Workforce? How to Realistically Support Them All. Bright Horizons. December 2022.

<https://www.brighthouse.com/resources/webinar/seven-generations-in-workforce>.

²⁹Hall, Andy, Boyd, Karen, Enemark, Daniel, & Connolly, Karen. Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage: A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals. San Diego Workforce Partnership. August 2022. <https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/San-Diego-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report.pdf>.

³⁰Reddipalli, Rekha. How Employee-centered Programs Can Improve Workforce Retention. Training Industry. August 2022.

<https://trainingindustry.com/articles/strategy-alignment-and-planning/how-employee-centered-programs-can-improve-workforce-retention>.

³¹Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://get.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-60R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SQMH-Report.pdf>.

³²Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. Report Public Behavioral Health Workforce Workgroup: Strategies for Meeting the Need in our Communities. Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. December 2021.

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/mentalhealth/documents/2021_Public_Behavioral_Health_Workforce_Workgroup_Report.pdf#:~:text=To%20generate%20both%20short-term%20and%20long-term%20strategies%20to,Public%20Behavioral%20Health%20Workforce%20Workgroup%20in%20June%202022.

³³Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://get.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-60R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SQMH-Report.pdf>.

³⁴Pendell, R. Why Leaders Must Address the Employee Wellbeing Deficit. Gallup. June 2022. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/393524/why-leaders-address-employee-wellbeing-deficit.aspx>.

³⁵Center for Applied Research Solutions. 2021 California Behavioral Health Workforce Assessment. Center for Applied Research Solutions. April 2022.

<https://www.workforce.buildincahhs.com/media/331/download?inline>.

³⁶Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://get.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-60R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SQMH-Report.pdf>.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Pendell, R. Why Leaders Must Address the Employee Wellbeing Deficit. Gallup. June 2022. <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/393524/why-leaders-address-employee-wellbeing-deficit.aspx>.



Workplace Strategy 4: Promote Role Clarity and Team Efficacy

Agencies that clearly set expectations, prepare staff for their roles, and explain how their role impacts the bigger picture are more likely to retain their employees while delivering higher-quality services to clients.^{39,40,41,42} Effective behavioral health teams meet regularly, understand the roles of each team member, share responsibility for measuring and advancing client progress, and become resource experts for one another. Since behavioral health is a constantly growing field, agencies should also assess training needs regularly and partner with staff to implement system changes.

Example Interventions

- **Create Opportunities for Administrative and Documentation Relief:** Reduce the frequency of data collection and the duplication of data entry while giving clear direction on which data are the highest priority to collect. Even a small change or minor reduction in the need for duplicated data entry can make a difference for already overburdened staff. When possible, shift data documentation tasks to administrative staff and/or staff who excel at data entry. San Diego County, for example, identified documentation burden as the primary driver of behavioral health staff turnover and dissatisfaction and is committed to advancing documentation reform under the California Advancing and Innovating Medi-Cal (CalAIM) Act.⁴³ CalAIM's Behavioral Health Administration Integration initiative aims to reduce administrative burden for beneficiaries, counties, providers, and the state by aligning program requirements for specialty mental health services (SMHS) and substance use disorder services (SUD).⁴⁴
- **Provide Onboarding for Role Transitions:** For any promotion or significant shift in an employee's role, provide ample onboarding structure to help the employee clearly understand their role, their relation to others, their impact on the big picture, and team and agency expectations.^{45,46} Staff want to know they are having an impact, and effective onboarding helps individuals and teams be successful.^{47,48}

³⁹Beidas, Rinad, Marcus, Steven, Wolk, Courtney Benjamin, Powell, Byron, Aarons, Gregory, Evans, Arthur, Hurford, Matthew, Hadley, Trevor, Adams, Danielle, Walsh, Lucia, Babbar, Shaili, Barg, Frances, Mandell, David. A prospective examination of clinician and supervisor turnover within the context of implementation of evidence-based practices in a publicly-funded mental health system. Administration and Policy in Mental Health. September 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-015-0673-6>.

⁴⁰Hall, Andy, Boyd, Karen, Enemark, Daniel, & Connolly, Karen. Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage: A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals. San Diego Workforce Partnership. August 2022. <https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/San-Diego-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report.pdf>.

⁴¹Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://get.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-G0R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SOMH-Report.pdf>.

⁴²Morse, G., Salyers, M. P., Rollins, A. L., Monroe-DeVita, M., & Pfahler, C. Burnout in Mental Health Services: A Review of the Problem and Its Remediation. Administration and Policy in Mental Health. September 2012. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-011-0352-1>.

⁴³Hall, Andy, Boyd, Karen, Enemark, Daniel, & Connolly, Karen. Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage: A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals. San Diego Workforce Partnership. August 2022. <https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/San-Diego-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report.pdf>.

⁴⁴Department of Healthcare Services (DHCS), California. CalAIM Behavioral Health Administration Integration: DHCS Concept Paper. Department of Healthcare Services (DHCS), California. January 2023. <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/Concept-Paper-for-Behavioral-Health-Administrative-Integration-January.pdf>.

⁴⁵Ritterbush, Elizabeth. Importance of Onboarding: Best Practices to Ensure Your Employees Stay. DDI. November 2020. <https://www.ddiworld.com/blog/importance-of-onboarding>.

⁴⁶Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://get.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-G0R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SOMH-Report.pdf>.

⁴⁷Ritterbush, Elizabeth. Importance of Onboarding: Best Practices to Ensure Your Employees Stay. DDI. November 2020. <https://www.ddiworld.com/blog/importance-of-onboarding-f>.

⁴⁸Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://get.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-G0R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SOMH-Report.pdf>.



Workplace Strategy 5: Prepare Supportive Managers

Managers are the key translators of organizational culture and policy. They set the tone for organizational culture and model work practices for employees. Equipping managers with the right resources and training to promote a sustainable and fulfilling work environment for staff is a crucial component of a successful workforce strategy.^{49,50}

Example Interventions

- **Practice Employee Recognition:** Spend time getting to know staff members and learn about them as both an individual and a professional. Supervisors should directly and regularly recognize staff efforts and offer recognition in line with the values that are important for the team.⁵¹ Leading with this practice in manager spaces provides a model for managers to practice this with their teams.
- **Provide Onboarding, Coaching, and Training to Managers for Staff Success:** New managers may already be familiar with the agency, but they still need the same onboarding treatment that new hires receive. Managers need onboarding to prepare for their new role, especially concerning evolving team structures, culture, and policies.^{52,53} In addition to onboarding, ongoing training and coaching support for supervisors, including on topics like inclusion and recognizing burnout, can lead to further staff and client success.
- **Connect Team Members to One Another for Ongoing Mentorship and Learning.** Opportunities for two-way mentorship can be supportive and motivating and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for employees and the communities they serve.^{54,55,56} Managers should give space to team members to talk about their ideas, ask for help, and share what they are learning. Providing this space recognizes the expertise of team members while promoting belonging, cultivating psychological safety, and potentially improving service delivery for clients.⁵⁷ Investing in professional development, such as coaching, for clinical and non-clinical skills that staff want to develop can also be a way to recognize staff.⁵⁸ Clarifying and codifying the responsibilities of mentorship for managers and learning and development for team members within job descriptions is also essential to ensuring improved outcomes for employees and their work.

⁴⁹Hall, Andy, Boyd, Karen, Enemark, Daniel, & Connolly, Karen. Addressing San Diego's Behavioral Health Worker Shortage: A needs assessment and vision to attract and retain essential behavioral health professionals. San Diego Workforce Partnership. August 2022. <https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/San-Diego-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report.pdf>.

⁵⁰Gallup. The 2022 Guide to Employee Engagement. Gallup. January 2022.

<https://www.gallup.com/file/workplace/388697/Guide%20to%20Employee%20Engagement%20in%202022%20-%20Gallup.pdf>.

⁵¹Central Square. Embracing Best Practices to Recruiting and Retention in the Public Sector. Central Square. April 2022.

<https://www.centralsquare.com/resources/articles/embracing-best-practices-recruiting-and-retention-public-sector>.

⁵²DeHaas, Deborah, Bachus, Brett, & Horn, Eliza. [Unleashing the power of inclusion: Attracting and engaging the evolving workforce](https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/about-deloitte/us-about-deloitte-unleashing-power-of-inclusion.pdf). Deloitte University. 2017.

<https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/about-deloitte/us-about-deloitte-unleashing-power-of-inclusion.pdf>

⁵³Lyra Health. 2022 State of Workforce Mental Health. Lyra Health. February 2022. <https://net.lyrahealth.com/rs/359-G0R-502/images/CT-2022-02-23-SOMH-Report.pdf>.

⁵⁴Pickup, Oliver. Gen Z workers are not tech-savvy in the workplace – and it's a growing problem. WorkLife. December 2022.

<https://www.worklife.news/technology/myth-buster-young-workers-are-not-tech-savvy-in-the-workplace-and-its-a-growing-problem/#/>.

⁵⁵Hyman, Mikayla, Powder, Maddie, & Pietsch, Paul. Retaining My Generation: Strategies for Generation X and Generation Z Federal Employees. Partnership for Public Service. November 2022.

<https://ourpublicservice.org/publications/retaining-my-generation-retention-strategies-for-generation-x-and-generation-z-federal-employees/>.

⁵⁶Myers, Elizabeth, Carlton, Melissa, Belfer, Bret. Seven Generations in the Workforce? How to Realistically Support Them All. Bright Horizons. December 2022.

<https://www.brighthorizons.com/resources/webinar/seven-generations-in-workforce>.

⁵⁷Halsey, Vicki. Combat The Great Resignation With a Culture of Learning. Training Industry. May 2022.

<https://trainingindustry.com/articles/strategy-alignment-and-planning/combat-the-great-resignation-with-a-culture-of-learning>.

⁵⁸Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. Report Public Behavioral Health Workforce Workgroup: Strategies for Meeting the Need in our Communities. Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services. December 2021.

https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/mentalhealth/documents/2021_Public_Behavioral_Health_Workforce_Workgroup_Report.pdf#:~:text=To%20generate%20both%20short-term%20and%20long-term%20strategies%20to,Public%20Behavioral%20Health%20Workforce%20Workgroup%20in%20June%202021.

Conclusion

This unprecedented behavioral health workforce crisis brings with it an invitation to make the crucial connection that caring for staff is also caring for clients. Government agencies are being presented with an opportunity to think holistically about their culture and how to transform it in a way that best responds to both staff and client needs. To be effective, these five workforce strategies must be nested within an overall organizational paradigm shift that uplifts meaning, belonging, psychological safety, and well-being. This approach will attract new talent and improve retention while creating an environment for staff and, in turn, clients to thrive.