

POLICY BRIEF

Integrating Public Health and Behavioral Health Care



Project Team

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Background

Behavioral health (BH) and public health (PH) systems share many common goals, workforce members, practice settings, and missions, yet their respective workforces are often siloed in research and in practice. Both the BH and PH workforces are seeing high rates of burnout, decreasing workforce sizes, and disparate impacts on BH and PH workers of color and those with the lowest wages. Despite overlapping occupations, missions, and practice settings, research investigating the actual and potential synergies and intersections between the BH and PH workforces is limited.

Methods

The University of Michigan BH Workforce Research Center characterized and created a typology of the BH and PH workforces using literature gathered through an environmental scan. These included occupations held by, settings of, and services delivered by the BH and PH workforces were examined for overlap as well as identifying members of the PH workforce receiving BH training through PH Training Centers and mental health first aid courses. The typology of the BH and PH workforces included key sources of publicly available national- and state-level data.

Findings

This study identified overlap between the BH workforce and PH workforce. Comparison of studies investigating the composition of these respective workforces revealed similar occupations in both worker populations. Examples of overlapping occupations included paraprofessional workers, PH nurses, social workers, and substance abuse counselors. Overlap was highlighted through occupational titles, services, employment settings, and licensure/certification requirements of these professionals. The development of the online training compendium found commonalities in both PH and BH training. Training topics with overlap included BH, training for health workforce members, mental health, social determinants of health, substance use disorder, and crisis management.

Conclusions

Collaboration across BH and PH systems holds promise for enhancing the capacity of the PH workforce to better address provider shortages. Evidence exists for the value of incorporating BH education into PH training to supplement and aid in workforce understaffing. BH training for PH workers creates opportunities to broaden knowledge of signs, symptoms, and risk factors for mental health issues and connect people in need to professional and self-help resources.

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