

Kansas Behavioral Health Center of Excellence 2026 Policy Priorities

As a consortium of professionals in the field, the mission of the Kansas Behavioral Health Center of Excellence (KBHCoE) is to promote innovation and workforce development in mental and behavioral health and human services, fostering a high quality of statewide interprofessional care.

There continues to be a workforce shortage across the health care system, and the behavioral health system is experiencing significant challenges to meet the needs of Kansans. To that end, a variety of strategies must be implemented to both develop emerging leaders ready to enter the workforce as well as support and retain the existing workforce, including supporting efforts at the local and regional level to implement workforce initiatives.

Building Career Pathways and Supporting Workforce.

Investing Resources In Training and Education. In FY27, we are requesting flat funding of \$7.7m for continuation of existing programs, including child and adolescent psychiatry fellowships; addiction medicine fellowships; undergraduate curriculum in forensic psychology, physician assistant training with a specialization in behavioral health; and social work, nursing, and clinical mental health counselor & addiction counselor training; scholarships/stipends and paid practicums for behavioral health students; and retention bonus funding for nursing faculty at technical and community colleges.

In addition, we recommend that the Department of Health and Environment (Medicaid) update the state General Medical Education (GME) program to support KSBHCE education programs in order to further leverage that investment.

Creating Career Pathways.

Counselor Assistant Program: Kansas has a very robust peer mentoring certification program within the substance use disorder treatment system, however, there are significant limitations to the work these individuals can do, and it is also associated with a low reimbursement rate, resulting in very low pay. A counselor assistant program would build on an individual's past experience working in the substance use field and combines that with specific training and robust clinical supervision to allow them to provide basic counseling services to those with substance use disorders. Allowing this to occur would ease the workforce shortages with addiction counselors and allow addiction treatment services to be more readily available in rural areas that might not have licensed staff available. This program would create a career ladder for individuals looking to enter the field and also help to alleviate severe staffing shortages in the substance abuse treatment sector.

Strategies to Reduce Burdens and Support Existing Workforce

Decrease Barriers to Entering the Workforce. Reducing or eliminating unnecessary barriers for newly graduated professionals will help to increase the existing workforce and encourage students to stay within the state to begin their careers.

- Ensure reciprocity for licensed behavioral health care workers with appropriate credentials who are relocating to Kansas.
- Eliminate the state requirement for one-year post-doctoral training for psychology students, and make recommendations for whether this requirement is necessary or if the goals could be safely met without the required full year, as measured by competence and ability.

- Current supervision requirements differ by discipline. Other states have streamlined this process through uniform consolidated processes; Kansas should implement a policy allowing for at least 50 percent post-licensure supervision be allowed by interdisciplinary professionals mirroring other states and aligning more with practicum supervision requirements.
- In recent years, Kansas statutes have been updated to include temporary student licensure, such as the student temporary addiction counselor; however, the Kansas Medicaid program does not allow for reimbursement of services provided under these license types, which creates barriers to employment for these professionals. Medicaid policies should be updated to allow for billing/reimbursement of services provided by these licensed professionals.

Leverage Technology to Implement Innovative Practices. Rapid advances in technology are transforming the provision of health care services; taking advantage of these opportunities can improve the quality of care and aid in recruitment and retention of staff.

- Support the continued use of telehealth to enhance outreach and access to behavioral health services.
- Increase the use of educational technology to enhance the training of mental health professionals (e.g., avatar-based simulations).
- Complement the workforce by offering effective, fully vetted and rigorously tested digital interventions.

The Behavioral Health Center of Excellence is comprised of over 15 area educational and provider organizations committed to advancing the field of behavioral health as well as growing a workforce with the capacity to respond to emerging needs of the community. For additional information about the Center or any of the policy priorities or specific programs detailed in this document, please contact mponce@acmhck.org.