

2024 CSAC CHALLENGE AWARDS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Solano County Behavioral Health Internship Program



Overview: Solano County Behavioral Health recognized a critical need to address the mental health workforce shortage expanding its Internship Program and enhancing inclusive hiring practices.

Challenge: Solano County is also the 6th most racially diverse counties in the US and has an increasing demand for mental health services, exacerbated by the pandemic with vacancy rates between 20-30% in late 2022 for overall positions, but over 69% vacancy specifically in hard to fill direct service positions. This lead to the inability to serve clients efficiently due to receiving little to no applicants during hiring requiring multiple recruitment efforts for every opening. The lack of a robust pipeline for mental health professionals, coupled with difficulties in attracting diverse candidates, threatened the department's ability to meet the needs of the community.

Solution: To be competitive with the Bay Area as a career pipeline across degrees/specialties, SCBH created staff infrastructure proposal, and a multifaceted approach aimed to expanding the internship program designed to "grow our own" workforce by providing hands-on experience and training opportunities to students and to recruit from the Solano community to reflect and support the population within their own community. In September 2022, the Board of Supervisor approved a proposal from SCBH for the use of Federal American Rescue Plan Act Funds to create new positions and offer stipends to support increasing our capacity for intern supports. In 2023, staff were hired to oversee the internship program, expanding our reach and provide support to the universities via MOU agreements and active engagement, and support intern clinical development and career goals for Fall 2023 semester students.

Innovations: Workforce Development: Retention is affected when students do not have the right tools and interventions needed by individuals served by the county, who often are unhoused, exiting jails or hospitals and have the most serious mental health and substance use conditions. Interns get exposure to the acute needs of clients we serve, and expectations of new reforms set forth by the State Behavioral Health Transformation initiatives and CalAIM. Leveraging ARPA and MHSA funding, the program now

included paid internships, practicums, and licensure hours programs for Master and Doctoral level interns, as well as hiring and stay incentives, which were instrumental in attracting new hires in critical positions. SCBH is also an approved member of the Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers. with the goal to become accredited by the American Psychological Association (APA) to take on more post-doctoral psychology students. Inclusive Hiring Practices: SCBH placed a strong emphasis on inclusive hiring practices informed by data from our annual Workforce Equity Survey which identified gaps and strategies designed to attract a diverse pool of candidates. A specific Behavioral Health Inclusion Statement, underscoring our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, was added to all job postings on our hiring platform for interested applicants.

Results: With expanding internship opportunities, Solano County Behavioral Health has been able to reduce its vacancy rate from 25% to 10% and secure a diverse workforce that reflects the population served in culturally responsive ways. The Internship Program's goal is to continue to build an on-going relationship with schools to maintain a culturally and linguistically competent workforce. Upon hiring, Interns and Staff also reference appreciating the Inclusion Statement to reinforce their interest in applying. Currently we have 19 Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with various in-state, online, and out-of-state schools. With our first cohort, we accepted 12 interns and 4 were hired and 1 more in process of applying for openings. For 2024, we have 7 new interns.

Replicability: The strategies implemented by SCBH are highly replicable and do not require significant financial investment. Through this program, we are also able to draw down revenue from Medi-Cal billing offsetting personnel costs, totaling \$637,236 for the first two years. By focusing on collaboration with schools and our county board of supervisors on the significance of these workforce gaps and need for investment, coupled with innovative thinking, other counties can adopt similar approaches to build a diverse and sustainable mental health workforce.

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Additional Materials: [Internship Program webpage](#) | [Internship Brochure](#)