

Trust

Alaska Mental Health
Trust Authority

Alaskan Seniors
Living Longer Growing Stronger
from the Alaska Commission on Aging



Workforce Development for Healthcare Providers

Professionals working in the health and social services fields contribute to a healthy workforce and strong Alaskan economy. Their services help “level the playing field” for Trust beneficiaries¹ so they are more likely to live normally and productively. Additionally, healthcare services provide local jobs in both rural and urban communities across the state.

Healthcare is one of Alaska’s fastest growing industries and accounts for 10% of Alaska’s workforce. It has grown 30% in the past decade, with employers in nearly every community of the state.²

What are some healthcare workforce challenges in Alaska?

- Recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals is challenging. Conditions are often stressful and sometimes dangerous, pay can be low, training and mentorship can be inadequate or non-existent. Staff who leave their jobs under duress are less likely to return to the field. Collaborations across systems are needed to address barriers and silos.
- Lack of adequate transitional case management for beneficiaries returning to the community after institutional care—such as psychiatric hospital, incarceration, juvenile detention, foster care, residential behavioral health, or nursing home care.
- Lack of adequate, livable wages for direct care providers and fewer staff to provide supervision, mentorship, and oversight, resulting in overburdened and undertrained workers affecting the stability and safety of both staff and clients.
- Rural communities report a need for adequately-trained healthcare providers or locally-available training. Urban providers report high turnover, burn-out, and early departure from employment, impacting their ability to retain staff. Expanded recruitment, training, and retention efforts are needed for rural community and behavioral health aides.
- Lack of available specialized services that assist justice-involved Trust beneficiaries during pretrial supervision, incarceration, and reentry.

What efforts are underway to improve Alaska’s healthcare workforce?

The Trust and partner advisory boards support directing resources to recruit, train, and retain healthcare professionals to better serve the expanding number of Alaskans needing treatment for addiction, mental illness, intellectual/developmental disabilities, Alzheimer’s disease and related dementia.

These professionals (*see page 2 for descriptions*) include direct care providers, behavioral health clinicians, psychiatrists, nurses, and peers, working for private, non-profit, tribal, state, and federal entities.

Healthcare professionals contribute to a robust economy while supporting seniors and people with disabilities living normally in the community and out of crisis-driven services. Some of Alaska’s efforts include:

The University of Alaska (UAA) College of Health has expanded the *Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner* program.

The Alaska Training Cooperative (AKTC), under the UAA Center for Human Development, promotes career development opportunities for direct care providers,

supervisors, and professionals engaged with Trust beneficiaries by ensuring that technical assistance and training is accessible and coordinated.

The AKTC also supports training for rural behavioral providers, behavioral health aides, and licensed behavioral health clinicians by blending evidence-based practices with traditional wisdom.

Training in the Alaska Core Competencies (AKCC) for direct care providers has expanded and the competencies are now attached to some training requirements and certification.

The Alaska Native Health Tribal Consortium (ANTHC) is collaborating with the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development (DOLWD) and the U.S. Department of Labor to promote apprenticeships through the *Behavioral Health Aid Registered Apprenticeship* program.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists

(LMFT) and peer support specialists are now Medicaid-reimbursable occupations, expanding the pool of professionals who can serve beneficiaries.

The action agenda of the *Alaska Health Workforce Coalition*³ contains systems change and capacity-building initiatives that are addressing professional development, youth engagement, workforce policies and infrastructure, recruitment and retention, and evaluation and data.

The state's SHARP loan repayment program offers incentives for medical and mental health care professionals to seek employment in Alaska.

Through the collaboration of the state, tribal, university, private stakeholders, the university, and other professionals working across the state, solutions are being developed and implemented toward an adequate and well-trained healthcare workforce.

Support efforts to address Alaska's healthcare workforce shortage through increased recruitment, training, and retention of professionals in both rural and urban areas.

Who are the healthcare professionals serving Trust beneficiaries?

- **Direct Care Providers** - *Direct Support Professionals* (DSPs) and *Personal Care Assistants* (PCAs) provide long-term services and supports that includes assistance with daily living, non-clinical rehabilitation, systems navigation, transportation, job coaching, and other services that help Trust beneficiaries stay safe, at home, and in the community.
- **Case Managers, Care Coordinators** – *Case Managers* assist beneficiaries in accessing services, advocacy, personal care, and navigating systems. *Care Coordinators* work across systems to coordinate an individual's healthcare plan, including monitoring the delivery of services and fidelity of treatment and care.
- **Community Health Aides and Behavioral Health Aides** – offer primary, emergency, and behavioral healthcare and support for beneficiaries living in rural communities.
- **Behavioral Health Clinicians** - are licensed and non-licensed professionals who provide mental health and addiction treatment, assessments, recovery support, prevention, and intervention.
- **Peer Support Specialists** – are people with a lived experience of a disability who serve as mentors, recovery support, system navigators, and more.
- **Psychiatrists, Geriatricians, Neurologists** – are physicians skilled in assessing and managing the specialized medical needs of seniors and people with disabilities, complex behaviors.

¹ Trust beneficiaries include Alaskans with mental illness, substance use disorders (SUD), Intellectual/Developmental Disorders (IDD), Alzheimer's disease and related dementia (ADRD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD).

² Alaska Health Workforce Coalition 2017-2021 Action Agenda.

³ Ibid.

For more information, go to: www.alaskamentalhealthtrust.org/jointadvocacy