

**The shortage of child  
psychiatrists in Pennsylvania  
serving the public sector**

## About PCCYFS

The Pennsylvania Council for Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCYFS) is the collective voice for private agencies that serve Pennsylvania's most vulnerable children and their families. PCCYFS represents nearly 100 private agencies employing more than 10,000 professionals statewide. Services

include foster care/kinship care, adoption, residential treatment, behavioral health services, education, counseling, independent living/transitional living services and others.

## Summary

Providers should be able to refer or provide Medication Management to youth from a variety of qualified professionals in the most timely and effective manner for the youth to gain access to appropriate treatment and ultimately promote recovery.

Given Pennsylvania's dire psychiatrist shortage, PCCYFS recommends the use of physician extenders as stand-alone entities to assist with prescription and medication management to be able to serve youth, thereby precluding further trauma by expediently meeting their needs.

Balancing the need for safeguards with reasonable access, Pennsylvania should consider physician extenders such as Certified Registered Nurse Practitioners (CRNP), Certified Nurse Practitioners (CNP), Psychiatric Mental Health – Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (PMH-APRN), Physician Assistants (PA), and/or Psychologists.

## Background

The workforce shortage across the human services field has become an overarching crisis. Specific to behavioral health, psychiatric resources continue to be a challenge with providers unable to neither recruit nor retain psychiatrists. With an increased social emphasis on well-being, reducing stigma, and renewed emphasis on taking care of one's mental health, there have been improvements in screening for mental health in many areas such as primary care physician offices, educational institutions, and employers. Demand continues to increase as stigma about seeking treatment fades.<sup>1</sup> While it is a notable movement, it has caused an unintended strain on the mental health system's capacity, thereby exacerbating access. COVID-19 has also increased the need for psychiatric interventions. The United States is suffering from a dramatic shortage of psychiatrists and other

mental health providers.<sup>2</sup> The shortfall is particularly dire in rural regions, many urban neighborhoods, and community mental health centers that often treat the most severe mental illnesses. In Pennsylvania, psychiatrists are at a premium, and in the public sector, scarce.

The public sector plays an essential role in providing children and families with a wide array of community-based children's mental health services, many of which have psychiatric involvement not available through private insurance. These services include Intensive Behavioral Health Services, Family Based Mental Health Services, School Based and Acute Partial Hospitalization Programs, and Community Residential Rehabilitation Host Home. The goal of the system is to have youth remain in the community utilizing community-based services while having

access to other psychiatric services they may require or refer youth to timely psychiatric services upon being discharged from a higher level of care. The limited availability for psychiatrists results in months-long waiting lists and challenges the public sector's ability to achieve these goals.

In recent years, there has been some progress in strategies to retain and recruit psychiatrists in Pennsylvania:

- The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) has reduced the amount of time for psychiatric supervision in an Outpatient Clinic as codified in 55 Pa. Code Chapter 5200, Psychiatric Outpatient Clinic Regulations. This regulatory chapter<sup>3</sup> states that at a minimum psychiatrists need to assist with establishing standards for treatment and prescribing, be involved in quality management, participate in clinical staff meetings two times per month, and provide consultation to clinical staff.
- The Penn State Health Children's Hospital Child and Psychiatry Behavioral Health Department created the Telephonic Psychiatric Services (TiPS<sup>4</sup>) program for youth that have Medicaid up to age 21. TiPS offers a psychiatric consultation contract to provide additional access through pediatricians who were previously hesitant to

serve children and youth with behavioral health needs without expert consultation.

- The increased use of telepsychiatry has proven to be an effective tool in increasing access.

These efforts to mitigate, although helpful, have not significantly reduced the challenges agencies are having in recruiting and retaining competent psychiatrists.

Challenges regarding recruiting and retaining psychiatrists include an aging workforce, burnout, low rates of reimbursement, excessive documentation requirements, restrictive regulations, limited collaboration opportunities with other members of the youths team, and inability to conduct in-depth assessments due to short 15 minute appointments: an attempt to increase the volume of patients psychiatrists can see. Psychiatry-related wait times in both the private and public sectors still exceed months.

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<sup>1</sup>Huff, Charlotte (2018). Shrinking the Psychiatrist Shortage. Managed Care Mag. <https://www.managedcaremag.com/archives/2018/1/shrinking-psychiatrist-shortage/>

<sup>2</sup>Weinder, Stacy (2018). Addressing the Escalating Psychiatrist Shortage. Association of American Medical Colleges <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/addressing-escalating-psychiatrist-shortage>

## Recommendations

Providers and agencies have had to manage staff and funding shortages in addition to retaining/ recruiting psychiatrists for quite some time. Expanding to include the use of physician extenders to prescribe medication will help lessen some struggles for agencies and providers. This flexibility will assist them with meeting regulatory requirements that require follow-up appointments for youth within a specified timeframe. It will also be more financially sustainable as the average salaries of CRNPs, CNPs, PAs, PMH-APRNs, are lower than Psychiatrists. Ultimately, this will help increase access to medication management for youth, reduce youth/family trauma and crises that may have been elicited due to unavailability of psychiatrists, and help create an environment where providers and agencies will not needlessly expend resources searching for psychiatrists. Developing a sense of consistency is what providers and especially youth and families need to emphasize the focus on recovery.

At times, providers and agencies are forced to share psychiatric resources through a practice called locum tenens with other agencies to meet licensing standards. According to the U.S Department of Health and Human Services, the current workforce of about 45,580 psychiatrists must increase by 2,800 to meet today's demands for psychiatric care.<sup>5</sup> This works out to a 6.4 percent shortage. By 2025, that shortage could be as high as 6,090 psychiatrists. Psychiatrist schooling is extensive as they must obtain a Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO), participate in an internship and residency in psychiatry, have their state license, and American Board of Psychiatry and

Neurology (ABPN) certification<sup>6</sup>. The average salary for a Pennsylvania Psychiatrist is \$242,082.<sup>7</sup>

**Nurse Practitioner (also known as a CRNP or CNP):** Pennsylvania Senate Bill 25<sup>8</sup> and companion House Bill 100<sup>9</sup> would allow a CNP to practice without a written agreement with a physician if the CNP:

- Has a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree or doctorate
- Earns national certification
- Complies with guidance and oversight of the State Board of Nursing
- Completes 3,600 hours and three years under the existing collaborative agreement mandate before being eligible for full practice authority

If passed,<sup>10</sup> this legislation would position Pennsylvania to join 22 other states plus the District of Columbia in allowing CNPs to practice to the full scope of their license meaning, "State practice and licensure laws permit all NP's to evaluate patients; diagnose, order and interpret diagnostic tests; and initiate and manage treatments, including prescribing medications and controlled substances, under the exclusive licensure authority of the state and board of nursing."<sup>11</sup> Keeping costs in mind, the average Pennsylvania CNPs earns \$99,045<sup>12</sup> a year, which would result in significant cost savings to agencies that are operating in a financially challenged system.

**PMH-APRN:** (Some states may title this specialty classification NP): PMH-APRNs are licensed and credentialed to practice psychiatric mental health nursing as their specialty. This title is granted prescriptive authority and can provide therapeutic

interventions (such as assessment, diagnosis, treatment) due to their education (Masters or Doctoral level), license and national certification they hold. They must also be re-certified every 5 years and meet a combination of specified clinical hours and continuing education hours. Considering the qualifications of these nurses, they have the aptitude and fitness to serve as an independent prescribing entity. A PMH-APRM average salary in Pennsylvania is \$112,293.<sup>13</sup>

**Physician Assistant (PA):** PAs must obtain a master's degree, certifications (if desired) and license<sup>14</sup>. In Pennsylvania for PAs to maintain certification, they need to take continuing education credits every two years and pass the recertifying exam every tenth year. PAs can also specialize in psychiatry with having taken specific courses or participate in specific psychiatric clinical rotations<sup>15</sup>. PAs average salary in Pennsylvania is \$95,599<sup>16</sup>, which is much lower than that of a psychiatrist. PA's however they must still be under the supervision of a Physician or Psychiatrist to prescribe medication in Pennsylvania, and there are certain medications they cannot prescribe<sup>17</sup>. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics as of May 2020, there were 1,240 Psychiatrists employed in Pennsylvania<sup>18</sup> compared to 7,300 PAs employed in Pennsylvania<sup>19</sup>.

**Psychologists:** Psychologists have a Doctorate degree, license, and board certification. Clinical

Psychologists average salary in Pennsylvania is \$90,028.<sup>20</sup>

Although the requirements to prescribe medications differ from state to state, they can currently prescribe medications in Louisiana, New Mexico, Illinois, Iowa, Idaho, Indian Health Services, among other areas. The rights to prescribe medication are different in all the above listed states/entities per American Psychological Association.<sup>15</sup> Some states require a post-doctoral master's degree in clinical psychopharmacology, further instruction and supervised practicum, specialized trainings, supervised clinical rotations in various settings. All Psychologists that prescribe medication must pass a psychopharmacology certification, must coordinate with the patient's primary care physician, and know when to refer patients to other healthcare providers.

Psychologists can work at several different healthcare settings and their primary therapeutic intervention is talk therapy/psychotherapy. This therapeutic talk therapy intervention may not be provided by a psychiatrist and may be able to provide the intervention that is needed to support a youth and avoid medication all together. Offering prescribing authority to Psychologists would be ideal as they would also be able to offer therapy and medication management from the same person. This would help alleviate the burden on Psychiatrists and give youth and families more options for treatment.

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<sup>355</sup> Pa. Code 5200.23. Psychiatric Supervision. Pennsylvania Code Title 55. (2019). <http://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?file=/secure/pacode/data/055/chapter5200/s5200.23.html&d=>

<sup>4</sup>PennState Health Children's Hospital. Telephonic Psychiatric Services (TIPS). (2021). <https://www.pennstatehealth.org/childrens/services-treatments/child-adolescent-psychiatry/telephonic-psychiatric-services>

<sup>5</sup>Why There is a Psychiatrist Shortage – and What to Do About It. Adaptive Medical Partners. <https://adaptivemedicalpartners.com/why-there-is-a-psychiatrist-shortage-and-what-to-do-about-it/>

<sup>6</sup>Psychiatrist Education Requirements, Prerequisites and Career Info. Study.com. (2021). <https://study.com/psychiatrist.html>

<sup>7</sup>Psychiatrist Salary in Pennsylvania. ZipRecruiter. (2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Psychiatrist-Salary--in-Pennsylvania>

<sup>8</sup>Regular Session 2021-2011. Senate Bill 25. Pennsylvania General Assembly. (2021). <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/billInfo.cfm?sYear=2021&slnd=0&body=S&type=B&bn=25>

<sup>9</sup>Regular Session 2019-2020. House Bill 100. Pennsylvania General Assembly. (2020). <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billInfo/billInfo.cfm?sYear=2019&slnd=0&body=H&type=B&bn=100>

<sup>10</sup> As of the date of publishing this paper, the Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee passed Senate Bill 25 and the Senate agreed to the bill on first consideration on June 16, 2021.

<sup>11</sup>Fact Sheet: Senate Bill 25 Allowing CNP's to Practice to Their Full Training. HAP - The Hospital + Health System Association of Pennsylvania – Resource Center. (2019)<https://www.haponline.org/Resource-Center?resourceid=86>

<sup>12</sup>Nurse Practitioner Salary in Pennsylvania. ZipRecruiter. (2021). <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Nurse-Practitioner-Salary--in-Pennsylvania>

<sup>13</sup>Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Salary in Pennsylvania. ZipRecruiter. (2021). <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Psychiatric-Mental-Health-Nurse-Practitioner-Salary--in-Pennsylvania>

<sup>14</sup>Become a PA. (2021). <https://www.aapa.org/career-central/become-a-pa/>

## Conclusion

PCCYFS believes that Pennsylvania's children and youth would directly benefit from expanding the authority of CRNPs, CNPs, NPs, PMH-APRNs, PAs, and Psychologists to prescribe medication.

These parties should have psychiatric prescription rights independent of a written agreement with a physician and after completing supervision and training in psychiatry. This expansion would help youth gain access to

medication management in a timelier fashion, prevent potential crises, offer youth more time and opportunity to consult with a prescribing professional, alleviate the strain on psychiatrists, help the public mental health system see a cost savings, and allow for professionals to be able to serve patients with persistent and severe mental health diagnoses based on their expertise.

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<sup>15</sup>How to Become a PA Specialized in Psychiatry/Mental Health. (2021). <https://www.physicianassistantedu.org/psychiatry-mental-health/>

<sup>16</sup>Physician Assistant Salary in Pennsylvania, ZipRecruiter (2021), <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Physician-Assistant-Salary--in-Pennsylvania>

<sup>17</sup>Summary of PA Regulations, Pennsylvania Society of Physician Assistants. (2021). <https://pspa.net/career-center/resources/summary-of-pa-regulations/>

<sup>18</sup>Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, (May 2020). <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291223.htm>

<sup>19</sup>Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, US Bureau of Labor Statistics, (May 2020). <https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291071.htm>

<sup>20</sup>Clinical Psychologist Salary in Pennsylvania. ZipRecruiter. (2021). <https://www.ziprecruiter.com/Salaries/Clinical-Psychologist-Salary--in-Pennsylvania>

<sup>21</sup>About Prescribing Psychologists. American Psychological Association. (2014). <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/advocacy/authority/prescribing-psychologists>

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