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Hit by pandemic, opioid epidemic, and soaring need, Ohio's behavioral health system now faces critical staff shortage

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The combination of rising demand for services and a severe shortage of mental health and addiction treatment staff is stressing Ohio's behavioral health system to its breaking point and creating obstacles to people seeking help, according to data compiled by The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers in a [recent workforce report](#).

Based on a statewide survey of private and non-profit behavioral health care organizations conducted last fall, The Ohio Council's "[Breaking Point](#)" report shows that clinicians and specialized medical staff are becoming more difficult to find, easier to lose to competing industries, and harder to replace when they leave. These challenges have been worsened by the pandemic, which has driven more Ohioans to seek treatment.

"Providers were experiencing workforce shortages before the pandemic, but COVID-19 and the resurgent opioid overdose epidemic have demonstrated that behavioral health care is essential health care, and demand is reaching all-time highs," said Teresa Lampl, CEO of The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers. "It's a perfect storm that's turned these workforce trends into a full-blown crisis that's affecting providers' ability to care for Ohioans in need."

More than 98% of responding behavioral health agencies said staff recruitment was "somewhat" or "very" difficult, and more than 88% reported difficulty keeping staff despite the use of recruitment and retention incentives. Provider organizations also reported increased demand for adult and child mental health care, substance use disorder treatment, and urgent stabilization care for patients in crisis. Together, these factors can cause delays in access to care. Details are included in the report and executive summary.

"Breaking Point" also explores the beginnings of these challenges and provides policy suggestions for tackling the workforce shortage's causes. Recommendations include using already designated state-federal relief funds for provider support, actively enforcing existing laws that would require equitable coverage of behavioral health services by commercial insurance plans, encouraging new service models to boost the efficiency of care, and updating credentialing requirements to create more career opportunities for behavioral health professionals.

Learn more and download the report and executive summary at www.TheOhioCouncil.org/BreakingPoint.

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***About The Ohio Council:** The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services is a statewide trade and advocacy association representing more than 160 community-based, private businesses that provide prevention, addiction treatment, mental health, and family services. For more information, visit www.TheOhioCouncil.org.*