



COMMISSION ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



The Honorable Governor Steve Sisolak

Office of the Governor

101 North Carson Street, Suite 1

Carson City, Nevada 89701

October 28, 2021

Dear Governor Sisolak,

The State of Nevada Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH) Psychiatric Hospitals and Aging and Disability Services Division (ADSD) Regional Centers provided their quarterly reports on September 23, 2021, during the scheduled Commission on Behavioral Health meeting. The agencies all shared that they are experiencing significant staffing shortages related to difficulties with recruiting and retaining staff.

DPBH provides direct services for individuals experiencing and requiring treatment for mental illness (MI) by operating inpatient hospitals at both ends of the state. The civil hospitals include Rawson-Neal, in Las Vegas, and Dini-Townsend, in Sparks. The forensic hospitals include Lakes Crossing Center and Stein Forensic hospital which provide evaluation and/or treatment for restoration to legal competency. Additionally, outpatient services are provided statewide including the rural and frontier communities. ADSD operates three regional centers (Desert, Sierra, and Rural Regional Center) which provide community based supportive services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) and operates one 24-hour Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) in Las Vegas.

In ADSD, Developmental Support Technicians (DST) provide direct client care in the ICF. Staff are responsible providing guidance and encouraging client independence and assisting individuals in reaching their maximum potential, duties include assistance with personal hygiene, household chores, recordkeeping, verbal intervention for clients who are escalating and as necessary, restrain or utilize appropriate behavioral and environmental controls for individuals who are a threat to themselves or others and may be hostile, combative, aggressive or assaultive, they are often exposed to verbal and physical assault by clients.

The annual starting salary for DST's ranges from \$31,403.52 (pay grade 23) to \$39,943.44 (pay grade 29) depending on years of experience. The Desert Regional Center ICF has a year-to-date turnover rate of 16%. While our contracted community providers are reporting vacancy rates of 20-40% and turnover rates on track to exceed 105%.

In DPBH, there are many clinical positions that are historically hard to recruit and retain. These positions range from our mental health technicians to nurses, psychologists, and psychiatrists. Our nursing vacancies are at 30% with an overall vacancy rate of 18% for our hospitals with many vacant for more than 90 days.

The Nevada State Human Resource Management Division (DHRM) establishes the salary rates for all state positions. The compensation schedules for the positions mentioned in this letter can be found here for reference:

https://hr.nv.gov/Sections/Compensation/2021/COMPENSATION_SCHEDULES,_JULY_12,_2021/

The onboarding time frame to hire new staff can vary and can take as long as a few weeks and up to months.

Establishing a process to breakdown state personnel human resource barriers will benefit agencies on finding, hiring, and retaining qualified candidates. State frontline clinical staff are being offered less wage than what the private sector would offer, and a more competitive salary may assist with challenges agencies are facing to hire necessary mental health and clinical frontline staff.

Our state's salary cap for front line direct support staff working with individuals with ID/DD and MI is far below salaries offered from many local government or retail industry employers. Community supported living homes have had to close due to their inability to recruit and retain staff, leaving vulnerable Nevadans without a home.

In order to support our fellow Nevadans, who have the greatest need for assistance due to their psychiatric and intellectual disability, we, the Governor's Commission on Behavioral Health, strongly urge you to raise the state salary caps for our critical front-line staff to match a living wage in accordance with Department of Labor standards, such as that provided by other local employers. In addition, we call for a class and compensation study to be performed by the State DHRM to assess competitiveness across jurisdictions throughout the State of Nevada.

Respectfully,

Commissioner Lisa Durette, M.D., Chair

Commissioner Lisa Ruiz-Lee, Vice Chair

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Commissioner Arvin Operario, RN

Commissioner Natasha Mosby

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CC:

Richard Whitley, Director, DHHS

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