

Report to the Executive Board of the Legislative Council

University of Nebraska
University of Nebraska Medical Center
Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN)

Project Summary

In 2022, the Nebraska legislature passed LB1014, which allocated American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to various entities across Nebraska. In LB1014, the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN), which is located at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, was allocated \$25.5 million to address the shortage of behavioral health providers across the state, particularly in rural areas. This one-time funding will be disbursed through a competitive request for proposal process based on the four major categories outlined in LB1014: behavioral health training opportunities, telebehavioral health support projects, behavioral health workforce projects related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and funding for licensed behavioral health supervisors. Any organization or behavioral health provider is eligible to apply for these awards and awards will be given on a quarterly basis (tentatively starting July 2022).

Complying with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Eligibility

This project complies with American Rescue Plan Act eligibility requirements by supporting the public health response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. Specifically, this project addresses behavioral healthcare and the negative economic impact of the public health emergency. The class of individuals impacted by this ARPA funding are behavioral health providers and organizations (nonprofits and small businesses).

Behavioral health providers and organizations have experienced revenue loss because of an inability to hire positions and because of increased costs due to the pandemic (e.g., PPE for providers). BHECN and the Nebraska Association of BH Organizations (NABHO) conducted a survey of 69 providers and found that: 85% of respondents indicated the pandemic has increased the severity of issues seen in their organization/practice, 68% indicated they've seen an increase in the number of people being seen in their practice and 42% indicated they have an increased number of clients on their waitlist. The top three stressors were: behavioral health workforce shortages, increased behavioral health concerns for clients and providers, and spikes in the pandemic (fear of getting sick, stress of reduced workforce).

ARPA funding will help support internships/fellowships and supervision costs, which will increase the behavioral health workforce and reduce burden on current providers; will provide needed training and support for telebehavioral health services, an essential service people have utilized during the pandemic; and will provide needed education and outreach to recruit and retain the current workforce. This response will reduce the burden on the behavioral health workforce, which is already experiencing stress because of the increased need for behavioral health services, thus helping to retain our current behavioral health workforce. This funding will help support internships/fellowships and provisionally licensed behavioral health professionals who are unable to fully bill insurance for their services, also helping the behavioral health providers and organizations as we train the future workforce.