

A Strategic Plan to Increase the Flow of Minority, Multi-Lingual and Culturally Competent Professional Social Workers into California's Mental Health System

Project Description

University of California, Berkeley
School of Social Welfare



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The primary objective of this project is to develop a Strategic Plan to recruit culturally competent professional social workers to practice in community mental health programs in the State of California. The Strategic Plan will outline a recruitment strategy that will attract and increase the flow of minority, multi-lingual, and culturally competent professionals into the mental health services field by pursuing an appropriate curriculum and internships at the state's professional schools of social work. An important element of this plan is to identify funding sources that create incentives for young people to enter the field of social work and to practice in the State's community mental health programs. Students benefiting from these incentives will be expected to serve for a defined period of time in a county operated or county contracted community mental health program in California. The two-year project, funded by the California Endowment, is headed by James Midgley, Ph.D., Dean of the School of Social Welfare at U.C. Berkeley.

Recent reports and hearings about the mental health workforce have pointed to serious shortages of social workers in many areas of the human services. In particular, community mental health services are challenged by shortages of well trained staff from minority groups who are equipped to respond to the growing diversity of the state's population. This Strategic Plan effort is compatible with other concurrent activities and initiatives:

1. In 2003 the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) embarked on an initiative to develop appropriate curriculum offerings and internship training in mental health. These competencies have been finalized by committees with representatives from education, county and state mental health agencies, community based organizations, and consumer advocacy.
2. The recently passed Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) promises to infuse the state's community mental health system with new tax revenue for innovative services in the areas of prevention, children, transition-age youth, and adults/older adults. Counties and their contracted provider agencies will require additional staff for newly developed services targeted towards underserved populations, which include minority consumers and those with limited or no English language ability.

The Strategic Plan will address the following domains:

1. An assessment of the current deployment of professional social workers in California's community mental health system
2. An assessment of the future need for culturally competent professional social workers to staff California's community mental health system
3. Identification of potential funding streams to provide stipends as incentives to

students, and
4. Identification of recruitment strategies.

Project activities and methods include a) literature reviews of research and relevant state and national reports; b) focus groups with representatives from education (community colleges, undergraduate programs in human services) and community-based mental health organizations, and c) interviews with key informants from government, policy planners, advocacy, the provider community, and education.

Staffing for the project includes Ed Cohen, PhD (Project Coordinator), Graduate Student Researchers, and support staff from the School's Center for Social Services Research. Potential products of the study will also include regular progress reports and policy briefs addressing the major domains of the project. The Strategic Plan is scheduled for completion by January 2007.