

March 30, 2023

To the Assembly Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse Prevention:

The Wisconsin Psychological Association (WPA) applauds the Committee's work to help ensure the provision of high-quality mental health and substance abuse treatment services in Wisconsin. With a suicide rate that exceeds the national average and overdose deaths on the rise, now more than ever it is critical to do everything possible to strengthen mental health services. Doing so will benefit everyone. To this end, WPA would like to advocate for the following to be considered by the Committee.

#### Support for Psychologists-in-Training

We would advocate for initiatives that support psychologists-in-training, which would include those in graduate school and those doing their postdoctoral training hours. Within the mental health field among those who provide psychotherapy, Psychologists have the greatest amount of training. Much of this training occurs before they graduate at practicum sites where most provide supervised psychological services for zero financial compensation. *Providing funding to support paid practicum training* would support these graduate students through their training, making it more likely that they will stay in the field and help fill desperately needed Psychologist positions. Just before graduating with their doctoral degree, Psychologists complete a year-long internship that most times is paid, albeit at a low stipend rate. It would be helpful to the field to *create more accredited internships in Wisconsin, perhaps through grant funding*. This would be especially useful in areas of extreme need, such as child and adolescent as well as substance abuse services. Finally, *continuing to work with DSPS to eliminate barriers to licensing* is useful. Together, all of these initiatives could help increase the number of trained Psychologists entering our workforce.

#### Support for Practicing Psychologists

For Psychologists in practice, we would advocate for *the continuation of work to increase Medicaid reimbursement rates*. We are aware that some movement has been made on this front, and believe that continuing to increase reimbursement rates is necessary. This is particularly true when it comes to specialized psychological services including treating special populations (e.g., children and adolescents) as well as specialized evidence-based treatments for both mental health and substance abuse issues. *Funding training in these specialized areas* would help increase the number of Psychologists equipped to fill significant treatment gaps in Wisconsin. Additionally, due to the intense amount of training that Psychologists receive, they tend to enter the workforce with significant student loan debt. Thus, *establishing a mechanism for debt reduction or loan forgiveness in Wisconsin* would be extremely beneficial.

#### Support for the Community

Finally, we would advocate for *establishing scholarships or grants for Psychologists willing to work in the public sector at state or county levels*. Again, this would be beneficial in terms of filling critical treatment gaps.

WPA appreciates the steps being taken to address the critical mental health and substance abuse needs in Wisconsin. Thank you for taking the time to hear our concerns. We are very open to discussing any of these items further.

Sincerely,  
Kim Skerven, PhD, ABPP  
WPA Advocacy Cabinet Director