Payer–Provider Partnership to Identify Successful Retention Strategies for the Behavioral Health Workforce

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What Is the Purpose of This Study?

• A managed care organization and community-based providers collaborated to gain a better understanding of workforce issues.
• The result of the collaboration was actionable steps based on merging field-tested, research-backed, and provider-perceived best strategies designed to improve staff retention.

What Is the Problem?

• Annual staff turnover rates are high, ranging from 25% to 50% in mental health agencies and 19% to 33% in substance use disorder agencies.
• High turnover rates in the behavioral health workforce are a burden and associated with:
  ○ Increased cost of recruiting and training new employees;
  ○ Increased strain on remaining employees (i.e., decreased morale);
  ○ Inconsistent services, weaker therapist–client relationships; and
  ○ Decreased access to care.

What Are the Findings?

• Sources of best strategies for retention were not always consistent.
• Successfully demonstrated but less used strategies included use of exit and stay interviews, training in best practices, availability of electronic records and other technology, and flexible work schedules.
• Seventeen percent of provider responses emphasized the type of employment offered (full or part time, benefits, competitive wage), 13% ability to offer trainings and staff development, 10% using staff feedback.
• Who Should Care Most?
• Administrators of behavioral health services and those who facilitate quality care—payers, mental health officials, and advocates.
• The behavioral health workforce of psychiatrists, clinicians, social workers, and others.
• Individuals who receive behavioral health services.
Recommendations for Action

- Providers desire a vehicle for sharing ideas and problem-solving issues and should be given a routine forum for this purpose.
- Providers across systems should be given the opportunity to learn successful strategies from other providers.
- Low used, low burden and highly endorsed strategies identified by this study should be implemented by providers.