

## Guidance Document

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

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**June 2022**

### 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. The pandemic caused a dramatic increase in need for behavioral health services, and with providers already in short supply, many people experienced long wait times or a complete inability to access behavioral healthcare. This has become a crisis for many areas of 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 in Nebraska is eligible to apply for these awards and awards will be given on a quarterly basis (tentatively starting July 2022).

### Goals of the Project

The goals of this project include:

1. Expanding training opportunities for behavioral health trainees (including internships/practicums, post-graduate training, fellowships) to infuse the workforce with a large number of trained behavioral health professionals within three years.
2. Expanding access to telebehavioral health services in rural areas to address increased mental health needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Supporting behavioral health workforce projects for students and behavioral health providers that address or research behavioral health effects caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Expanding support for behavioral health organizations or behavioral health providers that supervise provisionally licensed behavioral health providers to increase the number of licensed behavioral health providers within three years.

## **American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Eligibility**

This project supports the public health response to the COVID-19 public health emergency by addressing behavioral healthcare. Additionally, this project also responds to the negative economic impact of the public health emergency by providing assistance to nonprofit organizations and small businesses. 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 number of cases of COVID during 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 existing behavioral health workforce, which is already experiencing stress because of the increased need for behavioral health services, thus helping to retain our current providers. 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.

## **Project Plan**

BHECN will begin the request for proposals (RFP), application review, and award dissemination process in quarter one of the first fiscal year (July 2022 – September 2022). The RFP, review, and award dissemination process will occur quarterly for all three fiscal years or until funding is completely allocated. Independent review committees will evaluate all applications and applications will be ranked based on a predetermined criteria. Highest-ranking applications will be awarded funding. Organizations can apply for more than one funding category and can re-apply if their application is not initially awarded. The following outlines the four award categories and example projects:

1. Behavioral health training opportunities. Projects in this award category will focus on providing training and clinical experience opportunities for behavioral health students, trainees and professionals. Proposed budgets will not exceed \$500,000. Projects in this category could include:
  - Psychology Internships
  - Licensed Mental Health Practitioner Internships and Practicums
  - Advanced Practice Provider Fellowships
  - Psychiatric nursing training experiences

- Psychiatry Fellowships
- Executive Fellowships
- Behavioral health Certification Programs
- Other time-limited training opportunities

2. Telebehavioral health support in rural areas. Projects in this award category will focus on increasing access to behavioral healthcare through telebehavioral services. Proposed budgets will not exceed \$1,000,000. Projects in this category could include:

- Telebehavioral health equipment
- Technical assistance
- Establishment of a state-wide telebehavioral health network
- Telebehavioral health training and certification
- Behavioral Health Consultant Network
- Other telebehavioral health support and/or programs

3. Behavioral health workforce projects for students and behavioral health professionals related to behavioral health issues caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency. Projects in this award category will focus on providing educational programs, recruitment and retention projects, and research related to the behavioral health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Proposed budgets will not exceed \$100,000. Projects could include:

- Education on behavioral health impacts of COVID-19
- Education on behavioral health workforce impacts of COVID-19
- Resiliency training
- Wellness initiatives
- Provider/caregiver burnout
- Recruitment and retention initiatives for behavioral health students and providers
- Other behavioral health educational programs related to COVID-19

4. Funding for licensed behavioral health supervisors currently employed in Nebraska. Projects in this award category will be focused on supporting supervision costs as organizations/providers supervise provisionally licensed behavioral health professionals. Proposed budgets will not exceed \$100,000. Projects could include:

- Stipends for supervision
- Support for licensure application requirements
- Other support to enhance the path to licensure

BHECN will provide administrative oversight to the award process but will *not* function as the decision-makers in the selection of projects. BHECN will manage the RFP solicitation, administering the RFP process and online award management platform, communication with the awardees, communication and collaboration with review committee chairs and committee members, award dissemination and tracking of award funds, training and technical assistance with awardees, and collecting and analyzing evaluation and performance data from awardees for state and federal reporting. BHECN will work closely with UNMC compliance and business and finance offices to ensure the overall project is compliant with ARPA and state guidelines and for

fiscal monitoring and compliance. The University is coordinating with State Accounting to establish University business units to spend directly from the Military fund at NIS.