

Behavioral Health Provider Tiered System

Developing an agreed upon working definition for what constitutes the behavioral health workforce is vital for establishing a base of workforce research and informing future planning efforts. Determining what should be included in the behavioral health workforce can be challenging due to the various educational degrees, scopes of practice, and responsibility regarding roles in the behavioral health field. The broadest definition of behavioral health workforce includes not only providers of substance abuse and mental health services, but also providers who deliver behavioral health services in a supportive role in various settings. In North Dakota, a simple method for defining the behavioral health workforce is to utilize the tiered classification system established in 2017 by the North Dakota Legislature. This classification system for mental health professionals was based on a thorough review of education and statutory guidelines to ensure that professionals are fully utilized within their scope of practice.

Figure 1. Tiered System of Behavioral Health Providers

Tier 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1a - Psychiatrist, psychologist • 1b - Physician, physician assistant, advanced practice registered nurse
Tier 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2a - Licensed independent clinical social worker, licensed professional clinical counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist • 2b - Licensed addiction counselor, registered nurse
Tier 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Licensed professional counselor, licensed associate professional counselor, licensed certified social worker, licensed associate marriage and family therapist, occupational therapist, license practical nurse, behavior analyst, vocational rehabilitation counselor, school psychologist, human relations counselor
Tier 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Direct care associates, technicians

Tier 1

Tier 1 are providers who have the greatest level of responsibility and risk. The professionals included in this tier have the highest level of broad-based, comprehensive training and the capacity to practice autonomously in those areas. Tier 1a is reserved for professionals with advanced responsibility and additional specific areas of expertise in behavioral health. This includes licensed psychiatrists and licensed psychologists. Tier 1b is made up of advanced responsibility providers who do not have additional behavioral health training. Tier 1b contains physicians,

physician assistants (PAs), and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). Physicians and APRNs can prescribe medication just like a psychiatrist. However, these three professionals (physicians, PAs, and APRNs) are not required to have specialized training in behavioral health so long as they meet the education and training requirements for their specific licensure. These professions are based in the medical field but may work in different aspects of the behavioral health field or interact with patients who have behavioral health conditions.

Tier 2

Tier 2 are behavioral health professionals who can work as independent clinicians. Tier 2a is reserved for professionals who have comprehensive training in the diagnosis and treatment of a broad range of behavioral health conditions; including licensed independent clinical social workers (LICSW), licensed professional clinical counselors (LPCCs), and licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFTs). Tier 2b includes independent clinicians whose area of expertise is limited to a specific population. This tier includes licensed addiction counselors (LACs) and registered nurses (RNs).

Tier 3

Tier 3 includes providers who provide clinical direction under the supervision of a more advanced provider or can enact a treatment plan with comprehensive training in specific areas. Tier 3 has the largest variety of behavioral health professionals including licensed associate professional counselors (LAPCs), licensed professional counselors (LPCs), licensed certified social workers (LCSWs), licensed associate marriage and family therapists (LAMFTs), occupational therapists (OTs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), licensed (independent level) or registered (supervised level) behavior analysts, school psychologists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and human resource counselors.

Tier 4

Tier 4 is the narrowest scope of practice and includes direct care assistants and technicians that must work under other behavioral health professionals. Currently, there are no North Dakota Century Code requirements for tier 4. Instead, these are regulated by state or national certificates. Mental health technicians and case aides must be certified as mental health technicians by the North Dakota Department of Human

Services. Behavior Technicians and Assistant Behavior Analysts must have the relevant certificates from the National Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB).

Providers with No Tier

Several provider types are missing from the tiered system that could be included. These provider types have a capacity and scope of work that is not identified in the current tiered system. The first is a Licensed Social Worker (LSW). LSWs must possess a baccalaureate degree in social work from an accredited college or university, a passing score on the ASWB Bachelor's level exam, and must agree to adhere to the code of social work ethics adopted by the North Dakota Board of Social Work Examiners.

The second provider type is a peer support specialist (PSS). PSS are individuals with lived experience in behavioral health who have had training in how to use that lived experience to work within the behavioral health field. As North Dakota moves forward with developing a minimum standard for education and establishing a certification process, peer support specialists should be added to the existing tier system.

Conclusion

There are several ways to define what makes up the behavioral health workforce. In North Dakota, utilizing the Century Code established a classification system for mental health professionals is a practical method for defining the behavioral health workforce that will provide consensus for planning and research efforts. This classification system is a tiered system with Tier 1 representing the highest level, and Tier 4 being the lowest.

Data

- Information from the North Dakota Century Code was used to develop this Fact Sheet in relation to the tiered system.