

# Health Care in Texas: Critical Workforce Shortages in Mental Health

Texas faces a critical shortage of mental health professionals. Most counties in Texas are under-resourced and these shortages are most prevalent in disadvantaged urban areas and rural and border regions. The problem is compounded by a shortage in mental health professionals who are racially, culturally and linguistically diverse. These problems reduce residents' access to effective treatment, most notably in rural and border areas and in some urban cities.

Existing supply gaps in mental health providers are likely to deepen in the future. Leaders of state agencies and community health care organizations report extensive problems in recruiting and retaining mental health workers today. An aging workforce is beginning to retire, further exacerbating shortages. Under current policies regarding practice and delivery of mental health services, projected growth in mental health professions will not be sufficient to meet the growing demand for services in Texas.

## Texas' mental health workforce is insufficient to meet residents' needs.

Workforce shortages can be measured in two ways: (1) the number of counties designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas for mental health purposes, and (2) the workforce supply ratio, which is the number of mental health professionals available per 100,000 residents.

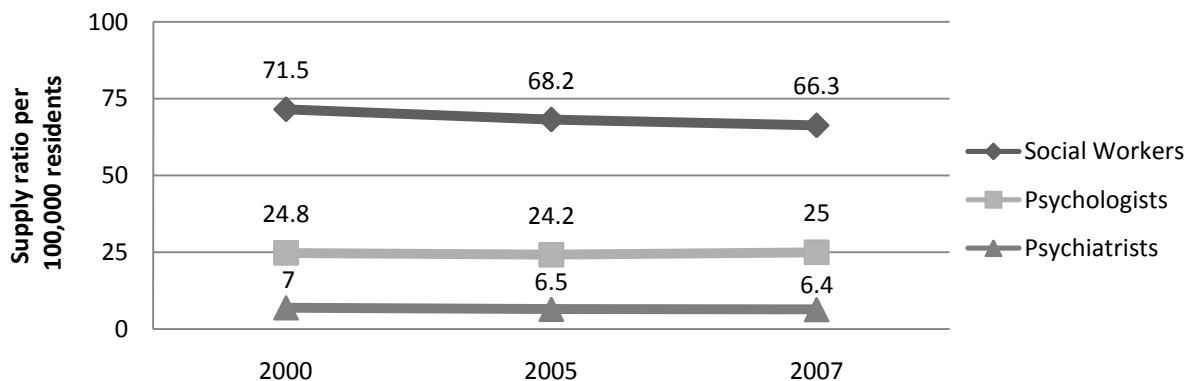
As of January 2008, 184 of the 254 counties in Texas were designated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services as Health Professional Shortage Areas for mental health purposes. This indicates that 72 percent of Texas counties have an acute shortage of licensed professionals.<sup>1</sup>

Texas workforce shortages also can be evaluated by examining workforce supply ratio trends over time and by comparing workforce supply ratios in Texas with those of other states. In 2007, Texas had:<sup>1</sup>

- 192 child psychiatrists
- 1,318 general psychiatrists
- 5,942 licensed psychologists
- 15,473 licensed social workers

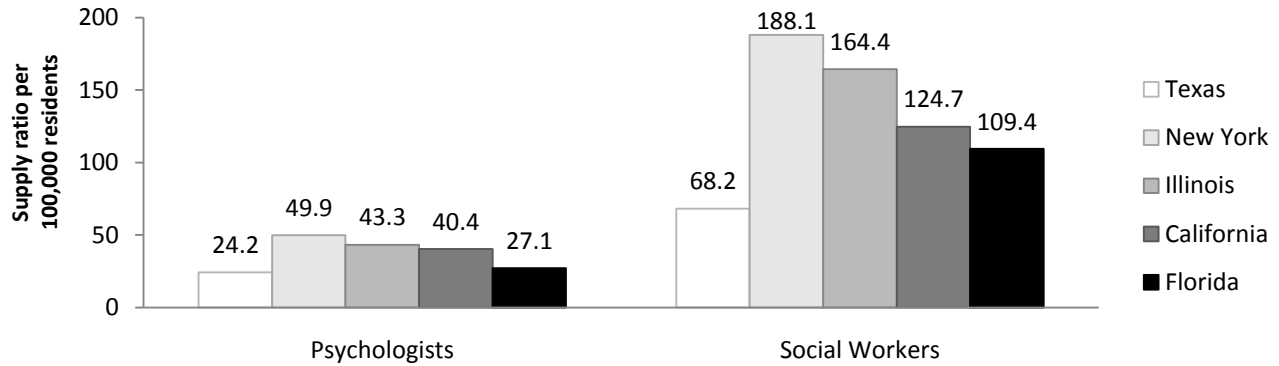
As shown in Figure 1, the workforce supply ratio for psychologists remained flat between 2000 and 2007, while the ratio for psychiatrists and social workers actually declined.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. Mental Health Workforce Supply Ratio Trends in Texas  
(2000 - 2007)**



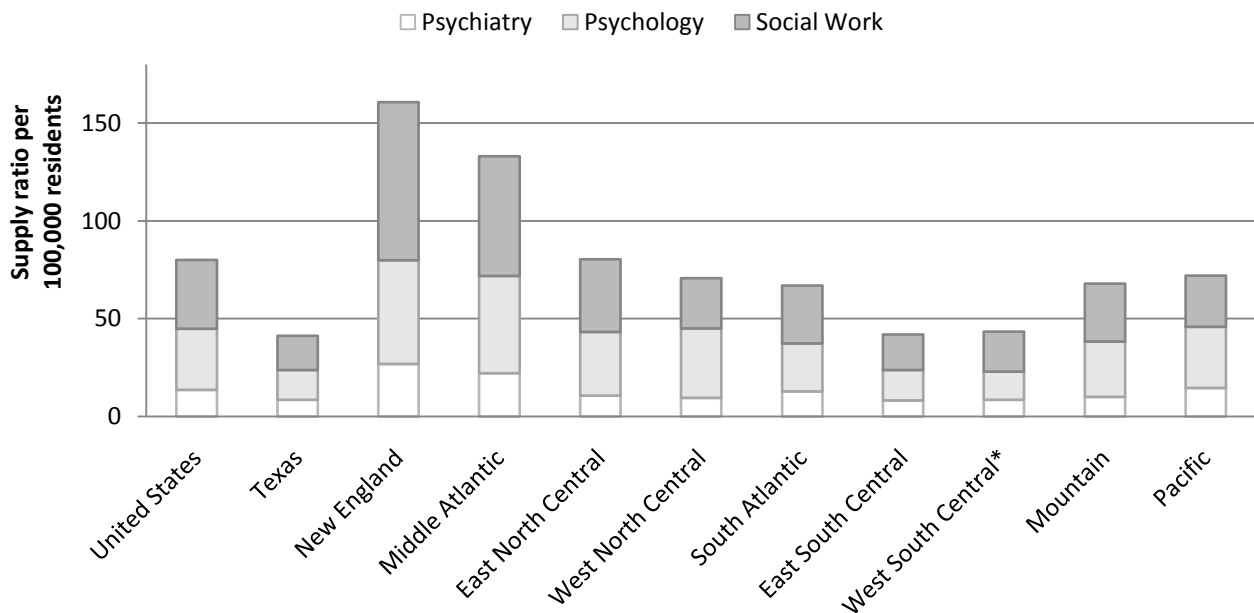
Texas' supply of psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists is the lowest compared with California, New York, Illinois and Florida, the four other most populated states in the U.S. (Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 2. Supply Ratios of Psychologists and Social Workers in Five Most-Populated States (2004)**



Furthermore, Texas' supply of psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers falls below other regions of the country and the U.S. as a whole (Figure 3).<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 3. Mental Health Workforce: U.S., Texas, Regional (2002)**

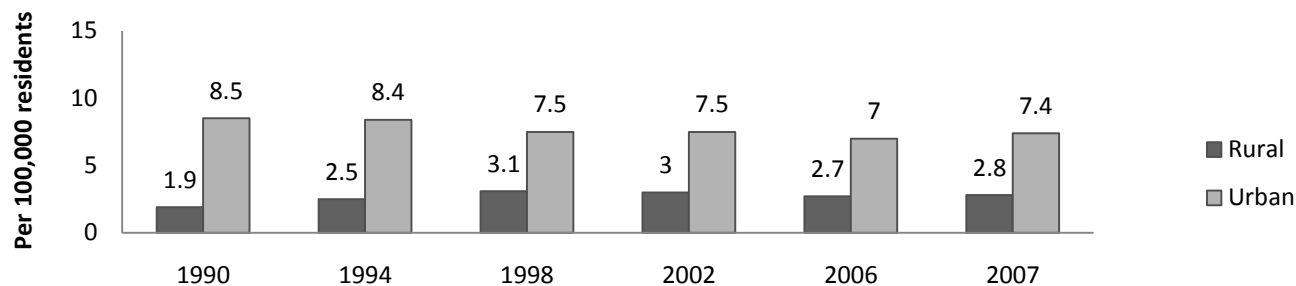


\*Texas is included in the West South Central Region.

**Rural and border areas face greater mental health workforce shortages.**

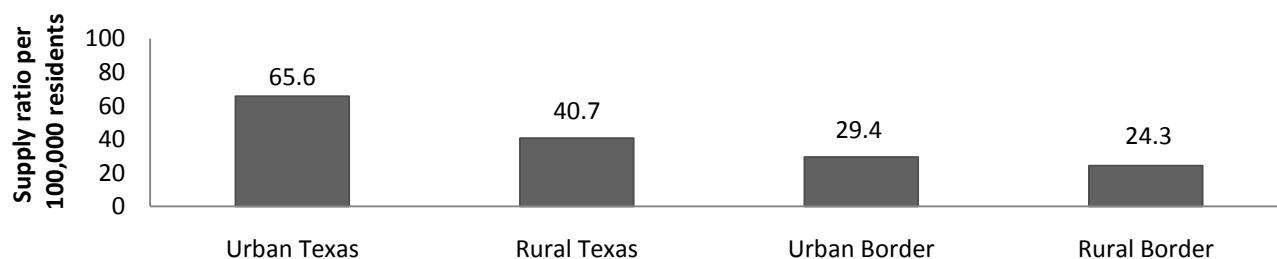
The supply of mental health providers is poorly distributed across the state but is least available in rural and border counties. Figure 4 shows the discrepancy in urban and rural distributions of psychiatrists.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 4. Psychiatrists in Urban and Rural Texas Counties (1990–2007)**



This disparity is even more apparent along the Texas border. For example, the supply rate of licensed professional counselors (LPCs) in Texas per 100,000 residents is 65.5 in urban regions and 40.7 in rural regions, but drops to only 29.4 in urban areas of the border region and is much lower in rural areas of the border (Figure 5).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 5. Border Region: Licensed Professional Counselors Supply Ratio (2007)**

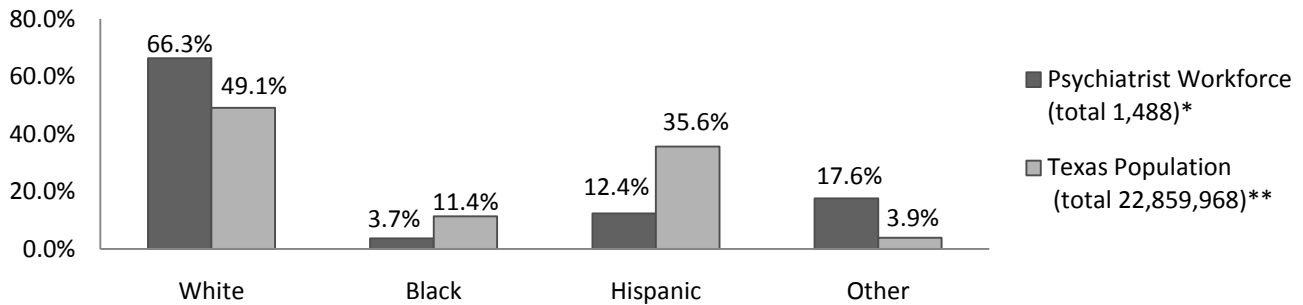


## **Texas' mental health workforce does not reflect the state's demographics.**

The disparities that racial and ethnic minorities face in accessing quality healthcare are well-documented nationally. Though many factors contribute to this problem, perhaps the most important is the lack of minority representation in professional education and training programs and in the workforce. A 2001 U.S. Surgeon General's report on mental health states that "Racial and ethnic minorities continue to be badly underrepresented, relative to their proportion of the U.S. population, within the core mental health professions – psychiatry, psychology, and social work, counseling, and psychiatric nursing."<sup>2</sup>

This problem also challenges Texas. Professional licensing boards for mental health workers in Texas are not required to collect data from licensees on race, ethnicity, gender and language(s) spoken. The absence of this data makes it difficult to assess and plan for the state's future mental health workforce needs. However, demographic data available for psychiatrists illustrates the under-representation of minority groups in the profession (Figure 6).<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 6: Psychiatrist Demographics in Texas (2005)**



\*Source: Texas Medical Board licensing database.

\*\*Source: Texas State Data Center population estimates and projections program, [soupsfin.tdh.state.tx.us/people.htm](http://soupsfin.tdh.state.tx.us/people.htm).

In addition to the need for a more diverse workforce, the existing workforce must be trained to provide culturally competent mental health services to the state's growing populations of color. In recent years, many mental health provider organizations in Texas have required employees to obtain cultural competence training. However, there are no uniform standards and few if any outcome measures for cultural competency training in Texas or nationally, so the benefit of this training to service recipients is unknown.

### **The shortage of mental health workers in Texas is projected to grow.**

The supply gap in mental health providers is likely to become even wider in the near future as the aging workforce begins to retire and fewer people enter mental health professions. With current workforce aging trends and a projected increase in demand over the next five years, the need for recruitment and retention of mental health professions is crucial. The average age of mental health professionals in Texas in 2005 is shown below:<sup>2</sup>

<b>Average Age of Mental Health Professionals in Texas (2005)</b>	
Psychiatrists	52.9
Psychologists	Unavailable
Social Workers	46.3
Licensed Professional Counselors	53.4
Marriage and Family Therapists	56.1
Psychiatric Nurses	51.8

The Texas Workforce Commission has projected growth in job demand for selected mental health-related professions between 2002 and 2012 as follows:<sup>2</sup>

<b>Projected Growth in Availability of Mental Health Jobs (2002-2012)</b>	
Psychiatrists	20%
Mental Health and Substance Abuse Social Workers	26.2%
Mental Health Counselors	22.9 %

## Texas must take steps now to recruit and retain mental health workers.

Entry to mental health professions depends on the capacity of the state's higher education programs to train students. In 2005, Texas universities graduated only 30 doctoral-level psychologists, 661 master's-level social workers, and 186 master's-level psychologists.<sup>2</sup> Only 68 physicians in Texas completed a psychiatric residency that year.<sup>2</sup>

Texas imports more psychiatrists from out of state than it graduates from its medical schools. In 2003, legislative funding for psychiatric residency training at state psychiatric facilities was eliminated. In 2004, Texas had 364 approved slots for psychiatry residencies but only 273 residency slots were filled.

Mental health employers in Texas express serious concerns regarding turnover and retention among their workers. A 2008 survey of Texas' community mental health centers revealed the following annual turnover rates in the public mental health system.<sup>4</sup>

<b>Annual Turnover Rates in Community Mental Health Centers (2008)</b>	
Psychiatrists	23%
Advanced Practice Nurses	31%
Licensed Professional Counselors	23%
Licensed Clinical Social Workers	25%

Turnover also is of concern in state psychiatric hospitals. The Department of State Health Services reported the following annual turnover rates in 2006.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Annual Turnover Rates in State Psychiatric Hospitals (2006)</b>	
Psychiatrists	13.9%
Psychiatric Nurses	20.3%
Psychologists	13.5%
Social Workers	17%

## Conclusion

Texas is not alone in facing mental health workforce challenges. The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health has examined innovative methods being used to build mental health workforce capacity in Texas and other states. For more information, please contact Deborah Berndt, program officer for the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health, at [deborah.berndt@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:deborah.berndt@austin.utexas.edu) or (512) 471-7631.

## Sources

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