

# Supporting behavioral health workforce development in rural Oklahoma



HEALTHY MINDS  
POLICY INITIATIVE

Rural clinics in Oklahoma struggle to recruit and retain behavioral health providers and have few ways to financially support students completing internships at their sites.

HB 2947 would allow clinical interns in accredited behavioral health graduate programs to bill for Medicaid services they provide under supervision. This funding stream would **strengthen efforts to recruit and retain rural providers-in-training** while bringing in additional income for rural clinics.

## Rural workforce recruitment and retention challenges

- Behavioral health workforce shortages are even more acute in rural Oklahoma
- Rural communities often struggle to attract behavioral health providers because of less robust infrastructure, as well as limited housing, employment, and educational opportunities for providers' families
- **But students who train in rural areas often go on to work in rural areas:** studies show graduates of rural track programs are recruited to rural practices at rates between 30 and 65%

## Reimbursing for services provided by clinical interns

- HB 2947 would reimburse clinical interns in accredited behavioral health training programs for Medicaid services at reduced rates
- Oklahoma has several university programs that are accredited (or pending accreditation) for behavioral health careers: for example, social work programs at Oklahoma State University, the University of Oklahoma, and Northeastern State University; programs for licensed professional counselors at OU, OSU, NSU, and East Central University; and marriage and family therapy programs at OSU and Oklahoma Christian
- Behavioral health clinical interns already conduct at least 300 clinical visits before graduating — being able to bill Medicaid for these visits would **create a small income stream for rural clinics**
- Rural clinics could then offer students mileage reimbursement or small stipends — and could also support clinic staff who supervise interns



**HB 2947 would apply to clinical interns in accredited graduate programs that prepare students for these Oklahoma licensure types:**

- Licensed marriage and family therapists
- Licensed clinical social workers
- Licensed professional counselors
- Licensed alcohol and drug counselors
- Psychologists

## Benefits for rural communities

- The more students who train in rural communities, the **better equipped future behavioral health providers** will be to work in rural communities
- HB 2947 would also defray the high cost of graduate education by allowing sites to financially support clinical interns, who typically work lengthy hours for no pay
- Oklahoma currently allows 3rd and 4th year dental students under supervision to bill for Medicaid services, and similar efforts for behavioral health providers-in-training have been successful in other states