

ONE HUNDREDTH LEGISLATURE  
FIRST SESSION  
LEGISLATIVE RESOLUTION 203

Introduced by Johnson, 37;

PURPOSE: In 2004, the State of Nebraska passed LB 1083 to reform behavioral health services, moving services from state regional centers to community-based sites and increasing the focus on recovery, thereby requiring providers of behavioral health services to have new competencies. LB 1083 requires the state to "promote activities in research and education to improve the quality of behavioral health services, the recruitment and retention of behavioral health professionals, and the availability of behavioral health services".

The United States Department of Health and Human Services currently designates over ninety-five percent of Nebraska's counties as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. Further, ninety of ninety-three counties are designated as Psychiatric Shortage Areas. These shortages have led to well-documented problems such as hospital and emergency rooms and jails and prisons bearing the brunt of the responsibility of care for patients needing more specialized and appropriate treatment. As the state works toward moving services from institutional to community-based care, there is a recognition that many of the professionals necessary to provide these services are difficult to hire due to this shortage.

In 2003, Senator Jim Jensen and Governor Mike Johanns requested a study of behavioral health service, education, and research issues from the academic medical centers in the state which generated "The Nebraska Academic Health Centers Plan for Excellence in Behavioral Health" which outlined numerous behavioral health issues and recommendations.

In 2004, the Nebraska Health and Human Services System established the Academic Support Workgroup in order to outline a plan to address the shortage and competency issues. The workgroup brought together many stakeholders involved in behavioral health care, including clinicians, educators, researchers, advocates, consumers, and system administrators with a wide range of educational backgrounds and institutional and academic affiliations. In 2005, the Academic Support Workgroup outlined a comprehensive plan to improve the behavioral health workforce in "A Behavioral Health Education and Research System for Nebraska." This plan includes recruitment of talented students into the field, improved undergraduate and graduate training in behavioral health, enhanced training opportunities in rural areas and increased use of telehealth technology, increased focus on recovery competencies, enhanced training in behavioral health for primary care providers, and improved continuing education in behavioral health, especially for providers in rural areas.

The purpose of this study is to examine the need for a statewide behavioral health workforce development plan and adequate funding to implement the plan.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE ONE HUNDREDTH LEGISLATURE OF NEBRASKA, FIRST SESSION:

1. That the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature shall be designated to conduct a study concerning statewide behavioral health education to address workforce shortage and delineate a range of proposals to "promote activities in research and education to improve the quality of behavioral health services, the recruitment and retention of behavioral health professionals, and the availability of behavioral health services."

2. That the committee shall upon the conclusion of its study make a report of its findings, together with its recommendations, to the Legislative Council or Legislature.