

Talking Points for AB 427 & The Social Work Licensure Compact

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Mental Health Landscape in the U.S. & California:

- 1 in 5 American adults and 2 in 5 high school students experience mental health symptoms (CDC, 2023).¹
- Over 284,000 youth are diagnosed with major depression, and 66% do not receive care.²
- 40% of U.S. high school students report persistent sadness or hopelessness.³
- In California, severe mental illness affects racial and ethnic minorities at higher rates (American Indians: 6.8%, Black or African American: 5.3%, Multiracial: 4.9%) compared to White populations (4.2%).⁴
- Low-income individuals and people of color face significant barriers to accessing care and often receive lower quality services.⁵

The Need for Telehealth & Interstate Licensure:

- **Expanding Access:** 81% of Californians overall say it's "extremely" or "very" important to increase access to mental health treatment, making it one of Californians' highest health priorities for state government. And 46% of Californians think their community does not have enough mental health care providers, including psychologists and therapists, to serve the needs of residents.⁶
- **Utilization Trends:** While telehealth usage has decreased from pandemic peaks, it remains higher than pre-2020 levels, with 12.6% of Medicare beneficiaries using telehealth services by late 2023.⁷
- **Supporting High-Need Populations:** Telehealth extends psychiatric care and substance use disorder treatment to underserved areas.⁸
- **Regulatory Barriers:** Licensure restrictions prevent qualified social workers from providing care across state lines via telehealth.

California's Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage:

- **Provider Gaps:** California has just 2.35 social workers per 1,000 residents, well below the necessary threshold to meet increasing demands.⁹
- **Projected Shortages:** Demand for Medi-Cal behavioral health services outpaces provider availability, leaving thousands without adequate care.¹⁰



- **Geographic Disparities:** Rural and low-income communities face the highest shortages, exacerbating health inequities.
- **Military Families:** Spouses and transient populations face challenges obtaining new licenses, disrupting continuous mental health care.

Benefits of AB 427 & The Social Work Licensure Compact:

- **Increased Mobility:** Social workers licensed in compact states can practice in California without redundant applications.
- **Expanded Access:** Increases the number of available qualified professionals, addressing shortages in mental health services.
- **Streamlined Licensing:** Reduces licensing barriers by providing a framework for multi-state practice while maintaining California's social work standards.
- **Supports Telehealth:** Allows providers to offer virtual care across state lines, improving access for underserved populations.
- **Regulatory Oversight:** Maintains California's regulatory control over the practice of social work while promoting interstate mobility.

Additional Benefits of the Compact:

1. **Increased Workforce Mobility:** Social workers can practice across states without needing new licenses, increasing flexibility for relocation and job opportunities.
2. **Streamlined Licensing Process:** Simplifies the process for social workers to practice in multiple states, saving time and reducing administrative costs.
3. **Access to More Job Opportunities:** By removing licensing barriers, social workers can access jobs across states, particularly during workforce shortages.
4. **Professional Development:** Social workers can gain diverse experiences by working in different states, enhancing their skills.
5. **Crisis Response:** The compact enables rapid deployment of social workers to areas in need during national or regional crises.
6. **Enhanced Client Services:** Ensures continuity of care for clients moving between states, particularly in border areas.
7. **Cost Savings:** Social workers save money by reducing the need for multiple licensing fees and paperwork.



8. **Increased Professional Recognition:** The compact promotes uniform standards for licensure, raising the profile of the social work profession.
9. **Better Workforce Retention:** The compact offers more job opportunities, reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction.
10. **Enhanced Consumer Protection:** Maintains high standards of practice and ethics across participating states, ensuring quality care and accountability.

In Solidarity, NASW-CA Chapter

End Notes:

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). What CDC is doing to improve the nation's mental health. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.
<https://www.cdc.gov/mental-health/about/what-cdc-is-doing.html>

² Office of Governor Gavin Newsom. (2022, August 18). Master Plan for Kids' Mental Health.
https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/KidsMentalHealthMasterPlan_8.18.22.pdf

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) data summary & trends report. <https://www.cdc.gov/yrbs/dstr/>

⁴ California Health Care Foundation. (2022, July). 2022 California mental health almanac.
<https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MentalHealthAlmanac2022.pdf>

⁵ California Department of Public Health. (2023). Demographic report on health and mental health equity, 2023.
https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OHE/CDPH%20Document%20Library/HERSS/Demographic_Report_on_Health_and_Mental_Health_Equity_2023_ADA.pdf

⁶ California Health Care Foundation. (2024, January). 2024 California health policy survey.
<https://www.chcf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024CHCFCAHealthPolicySurvey.pdf>

⁷ Cubanski, J., Neuman, T., & Damico, A. (2024, January 29). What to know about Medicare coverage of telehealth. KFF. <https://www.kff.org/medicare/issue-brief/what-to-know-about-medicare-coverage-of-telehealth/>

⁸ American Medical Association. (2023, March 3). New rules enable telemedicine treatment of opioid use disorder. <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/overdose-epidemic/new-rules-enable-telemedicine-treatment-opioid-use-disorder>



⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2024, March 29). Occupational employment and wage statistics: California. https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes_ca.htm

¹⁰ California Health Care Foundation. (2023, November). Medi-Cal behavioral health services: Demand exceeds supply despite expansions. <https://www.chcf.org/publication/medi-cal-behavioral-health-services-demand-exceeds-supply-despite-expansions/>

Other Resources:

California Budget & Policy Center. (n.d.). Californians and mental health: What we know about poverty and race. <https://calbudgetcenter.org/resources/californians-and-mental-health-what-we-know-about-poverty-and-race/>

Ibarra, A. (2022, September 27). California is short thousands of mental health workers. Who's going to fill the gap? CalMatters. <https://calmatters.org/health/2022/09/california-shortage-mental-health-workers/>

California Department of Public Health. (2024). California State of Public Health: Full report 2024. Office of Policy and Planning. <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/OPP/CDPH%20Document%20Library/California-State-of-Public-Health-Full-Report-2024.pdf>