



AB 2703 – Expanding Behavioral Health Access in FQHCs and RHCs

SUMMARY

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) and Rural Health Centers (RHCs) provide access to the full spectrum of care including primary care, dental care, and behavioral healthcare to every Californian who walks through their doors, regardless of their ability to pay, their immigration status, health insurance status, or their individual circumstances. AB 2703 would permit highly qualified Psychological Associates to practice and be reimbursed under Medi-Cal for their services in these clinics.

BACKGROUND

In California, FQHCs and RHCs provide high-quality comprehensive care to 7.7 million people, which represents roughly 1 in 5 Californians. More than one-third of the people served by FQHCs and RHCs rely on Medi-Cal.

The state's behavioral health needs have only grown and clinics have struggled to keep up with demand due to a shortage of mental health professionals. By 2028, California will have 41 percent fewer psychiatrists and 11 percent fewer psychologists, licensed marriage, and family therapists, licensed professional clinical counselors, and licensed clinical social workers than needed. In rural counties alone, 33 of 40 rural counties were designated as having mental health professional shortages in 2021. These shortages decrease the quality of care in FQHCs and RHCs and force the existing workforce to take longer shifts, see more clients, and inevitably burn out.

PROBLEM

Despite a shortage of mental health professionals, current law does not specifically allow FQHCs or RHCs to be reimbursed for services provided by Psychological Associates. Psychological Associates are individuals registered with the Board of Psychology and who have completed their doctoral degree but must still complete 3,000 supervised clinical hours for their licensure.

This restriction limits training opportunities for associates interested in working in public health and creates a barrier to bringing more mental health professionals into the workforce.

THIS BILL

AB 2703 expands access to mental healthcare in FQHCs and RHCs by allowing Associate Psychologists to work in these clinics, and for those clinics to be reimbursed for the services they provide. To ensure quality of care, associates are registered with the Board of Psychology and supervised by a licensed psychologist. Allowing Psychological Associates to work in these settings would greatly increase training and employment opportunities and expand access to needed mental and behavioral health services for safety net patients at FQHCs and RHCs. Associates need to be registered with the Board of Psychology, supervised by a licensed psychologist and the services they provide would be billed under their supervisor.

SUPPORT

California Primary Care Association Advocates (Co-Sponsor)

California Psychological Association (Co-Sponsor)

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