

# Federal Grants to Expand Mental Health and Substance Abuse Training Opportunities in North Carolina

May 15, 2012

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2011  
SESSION LAW 2011-185  
SENATE BILL 597

AN ACT TO ENSURE THAT THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NEEDS OF MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE MET.

SECTION 7.(a) The University of North Carolina, the North Carolina Community Colleges System Office, and other institutions of higher education in this State shall, in conjunction with the Area Health Education Center of The University of North Carolina and the Governor's Institute on Substance Abuse, seek and apply for federal grants that may be available to expand mental health and substance abuse training opportunities in this State in order to increase the number of mental health and substance abuse providers in this State.

SECTION 7.(b) On or before July 1, 2012, the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina shall report to the Joint Legislative Health Care Oversight Committee, the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Health and Human Services, and the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Military, and Veterans Affairs on the amount of funds obtained pursuant to Section 7(a) of this act. This report shall also include recommendations about whether those are sufficient to meet the following goals or whether additional support from the General Fund is needed:

- (1) To ensure that the curriculum of public and private institutions of higher education in this State includes information that educates health professionals about the unique behavioral health needs of the active duty and reserve components of the Armed Forces of the United States and their families.
- (2) To provide grants to people seeking knowledge or training related to the provision of mental health or substance abuse services at public or private institutions of higher education in this State or who are undertaking the hours of supervised training needed in order to obtain a license in one of these fields. Priority shall be given to individuals who have served in the active or reserve components of the Armed Forces of the United States or who are willing to work with such individuals and their families.

SECTION 7.(c) Each institution of higher education in this State shall provide to the Board of Governors any information the Board requires in order to comply with the reporting requirement of Section 7(b) of this act.

Consistent with Session Law 2011-185, Senate Bill 597, Section 7, the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina submits the following report to the Joint Legislative Health Care Oversight Committee, the House of Representatives and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Health and Human Services, and the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, Military and Veterans Affairs.

**The North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (NCAHEC) is the lead state agency for health provider continuing education, practice-based quality improvement, health science student support, and information sharing.** Further, NCAHEC is taking the lead to integrate training and education for North Carolina health professionals with regard to the unique behavioral health needs of the active duty and reserve components of the Armed Forces of the United States and their families. The North Carolina health professions community relies upon NCAHEC to lead this effort. NCAHEC will continue to seek federal grants in support of their work to improve training and education on behavioral health needs of service members and their families.

The mission of the NCAHEC Program is to meet the state's health and health workforce needs by providing educational programs in partnership with academic institutions, health care agencies, and other organizations committed to improving the health of the people of North Carolina.

AHEC educational programs and information services are targeted toward:

- Improving the distribution and retention of healthcare providers, with a special emphasis on primary care and prevention;
- Improving the diversity and cultural competence of the health care workforce in all health disciplines;
- Enhancing the quality of care and improving health care outcomes; and
- Addressing the health care needs of underserved communities and populations.

The NC AHEC Health Careers Pipeline provides support to individuals in all stages of professional growth in the health care sector with public (UNC and Community College) and private academic partners. Health science students studying allied health, dentistry, medicine, nursing, public health, and pharmacy at many North Carolina colleges and universities receive part of their training under AHEC auspices in community hospitals, physicians' offices, rural health centers, public health departments, mental health centers, and other health-related settings. Each of the nine regional AHECs facilitate quality community-based health science education at more than 1,300 community sites. In 2010-2011, health science students completed 10,558 student months of training through AHEC supported community-based rotations. AHEC staff assist in identifying high quality community teaching sites, provide housing in 54 counties in approximately 70 locations across the state, and provide library services and other support to students while they are on rotation.

## **Examples of Efforts to Expand Mental Health and Substance Abuse Training in North Carolina**

### *North Carolina Area Health Education Centers*

NCAHEC received one federal grant and several non-federal grants related to veteran's mental health. NCAHEC has focused on increasing its external funding to expand training on mental health issues, especially as it relates to veterans. NCAHEC received a \$170,000 federal HRSA grant, in partnership with the National AHEC Organization to build upon the training provided in North Carolina and then expand it to the rest of the country. Attached to this report is a summary of the training provided by NC AHEC. NCAHEC faculty led this training and used on-line modules developed in partnership with the Citizen Soldier Support Program, an affiliated program of The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Although the focus of the grant was to train AHEC staff across the country, untrained staff in North Carolina also participated in the training.

NCAHEC continues to focus on training mental health professionals and primary care providers in the civilian sector to better diagnose, treat and refer veterans and their families. As part of the Joining Forces initiative at the national level, the American Nurses Association announced a commitment to train roughly 3 million nurses nationwide on how to better serve the health and mental health needs of veterans. NCAHEC personnel are involved in the Joining Forces initiative and will provide curricular materials to assist with this national effort. NCAHEC will lead North Carolina-based training through face-to-face and on-line courses with the hope that over 20,000 nurses will be trained over the next 3-5 years.

Finally, although not a federal grant, Eastern NCAHEC received a Duke Endowment grant through its local churches division to develop a series of trainings for clergy and other members of the faith community in supporting and working with veterans and their families. This series has been highly successful and was recently featured on a national webinar for the National AHEC Organization.

### *Citizen Soldier Support Program*

The Citizen Soldier Support Program, an affiliated program of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill secured a grant from the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation to develop online training aimed at Employee Assistance Program (EAP) staff. Training assisted EAP staff in dealing with deployment and post-deployment behavioral health problems and aimed to reduce the high unemployment rate among veterans. The goal of the grant was to better inform employers, ensuring that veterans either enter or return to the civilian workforce as valuable and productive employees with unique skills and real world experiences.

The Citizen Soldier Support Program currently lacks a sustainable funding source and may close in the fall of 2012.

### **Federal Grant Opportunities**

Currently, the following federal agencies and programs offer funding opportunities for mental health services enhancement to eligible entities:

*The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA):* SAMHSA is a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is charged with improving the quality and availability of prevention, treatment, and rehabilitative services in order to reduce illness, death, disability, and cost to society resulting from substance abuse and mental illnesses.

SAMHSA has identified eight Strategic Initiatives to focus its resources on areas of urgency and opportunity. They also will enable SAMHSA to respond to National, State, Territorial, Tribal, and local trends and support implementation of the Affordable Care Act and the Mental Health Parity and Addictions Equity Act. One of its strategic initiatives is to target Military Families: Supporting America's service men and women—Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve, and Veteran—together with their families and communities by leading efforts to ensure that needed behavioral health services are accessible and that outcomes are positive.

*Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)*

HRSA training grants received by schools of medicine, nursing and allied health can have some focus in strengthening curricula in mental health topics but is not required by the federal agency.

### **Recommendation**

Consistent with the requirement in Section 7(b), the Board recommends additional support from the General Fund to the North Carolina AHEC for the purposes of enhancing health professional services to serve active duty and reserve components of the Armed Forces of the United States and their families.