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# THE NONPROFIT WORKFORCE CRISIS

**NONPROFITS MUST BE ADEQUATELY COMPENSATED.**



Community nonprofits serve those in need, enabling people to thrive in an imperfect and discriminatory world. In 2021 human service providers, so adept at dealing with crises, are dealing with an emergency of their own.

In the wake of the pandemic, community nonprofits cannot attract and retain staff. It is no longer enough to convince potential employees that nonprofit work is noble work, employees must be adequately compensated, especially when there is competition for their services.

Afraid of the transmission of disease, those who can are dropping out of the nonprofit workforce or moving to private practice where they can be paid three times as much for the same or less difficult work.

Human services are now in competition with employers such as Amazon and Walmart that require no specialized training, are paying more and offering more hiring incentives. Nonprofits are at a disadvantage with limited support from the State, which has historically underfunded nonprofits and to date has not released critical funding which could be used to raise wages.

Community nonprofits are facing a no-win situation. They need the commitment of policymakers to help solve this crisis.

**The Alliance**  
Voice of Community Nonprofits



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# NATIONAL WORKFORCE CRISIS

Behavioral health professionals will tell you that good social support is the strongest indicator of secure mental health. In a pandemic year of isolation and loneliness, Americans faced a concurrent mental health epidemic. Nearly half (49%) of Americans between the ages of 18-29 exhibited symptoms of anxiety or depression during the pandemic, particularly in marginalized groups, which has led to increased demand on behavioral health services in a sector already dealing with a scarcity of qualified professionals to provide services.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Connecticut says that calls to their mental health concern warmlines have doubled from 2019. Even before the pandemic, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) predicted a 15% increase in demand for addiction counselors by 2030 and a 13% increase in demand for mental health counselors.

In a national poll of behavioral health organizations, 78% say the demand for their services has increased during the pandemic but 97% say it is difficult to recruit employees, especially the highly qualified. These organizations say recruitment and retention is their greatest concern mostly because they are unable to provide a competitive salary.

Career coaches are helping clients with disabilities land jobs that pay even more than the career coaches receive.

Behavioral health organizations need state funding to pay the true cost of care and address increased demand for services. This has led to a growing regional movement to hold states accountable to what they have promised.

Like their colleagues in behavioral health, community nonprofits that support those with intellectual and developmental disabilities have found

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their workforce decimated. According to a study from the American Network of Community Options and Resources (ANCOR), 92.5% of respondents said that they are struggling with hiring because employers that were never competitors in the past are now taking away potential applicants. Almost 60% of these employers surveyed said they were discontinuing programs and services. Consequently, more clients are being sent to hospitals and crisis

care, a non-solution that violates principles of commonly accepted recovery models. More than three quarters of providers have closed their doors to new clients. Some providers say they are sometimes forced to hire staff who do not meet their usual high level of qualifications.

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**3,520**

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At one behavioral health provider, 3,520 people are unable to access life-saving care as they have 120 full- and part-time positions vacant out of a workforce of 900. They might not even be able to keep their residential programs open as positions that used to get 20 applicants now get "1 or 2, if that".

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# A REGIONAL MOVEMENT: NONPROFITS “HANGING ON BY THEIR FINGERNAILS”

Connecticut providers echo many of the same workforce concerns as their regional counterparts. Funding has fallen behind inflation and the needs of providers for at least ten years. The Alliance has led the charge to uphold Connecticut’s obligation to the organizations it has promised ARPA funding. Heather Gates of Community Health Resources, said her employees are “hanging on by their fingernails” as they are having difficulty hiring at all levels, from psychiatrists and APRNs to residential staff. With clinician vacancies alone, 3,520 people are unable to access life-saving care. She reported 120 full- and part-time positions vacant out of a workforce of 900.

They might not even be able to keep their residential programs open as positions that used to get 20 applicants now get “1 or 2, if that”. Kristie Scott, CEO of Perception Programs, Inc. in Willimantic, said employees have been working multiple shifts, wearing masks and risking exposure to COVID-19. She also has 45 open positions out of a total staff of 363 -- that’s 13 percent of her workforce.

In Massachusetts, providers are abandoning the nonprofit workforce for private practices that may not even take insurance.

This is what they are forced to do to take care of their own expenses and care for their families. The Boston Globe illustrates a trend mirrored throughout the region where career coaches are helping clients with disabilities land jobs that pay even more than the career coaches receive. Human service agencies in Rhode Island, facing similar struggles, have taken direct action. Representing tens of thousands of Rhode Island workers, a coalition of 70 organizations has written a letter to the Governor calling for funding to be appropriated before session starts in January. They simply cannot wait.

Addressing this issue cannot be pushed back any longer. Policymakers should act now to ensure non-profits can continue to provide their needed work.

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# PROVIDER SPOTLIGHT

Sherry Albert, COO of Community Solutions Inc., knows that “this is not a dress rehearsal for our clients”, the wellbeing of the people she serves is on the line. Community Solutions, a community nonprofit specializing in reintegrating offenders into the community, is facing grim circumstances because of the workforce crisis. Out of 280 Connecticut-based employees at Community Solutions, there are 52 openings. Of the people who apply for jobs, there is a 20% response rate and many people don't show up even when an interview is scheduled. CSI's job listings have been up for more than a year – they're paying extra to get the job postings moved to the top of job listing websites. But finding job seekers with appropriate experience and retaining

even those who have worked for her for years is becoming a constant struggle.

Community Solutions has done everything they can to compete with retail and service industry employers. At great cost to the organization, they gave hazard pay when covid was peaking, retention bonuses, and referral bonuses to current employees with no help from the State, which has a budget surplus. Still, Community Solutions is rapidly losing employees. Sherry talks of burnout, of employees required to cover extra shifts, and spending two months trying to fill positions for a program running with 50% of the needed staff. The state needs to acknowledge the great hardship of leaders like Sherry and how it directly affects her clients and the quality of services in Connecticut.



Sherry tells of a seasoned program director leaving to work at Planet Fitness, citing more money, better benefits, and less stress.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue to implement The Alliance's \$461 million funding increase request by providing at least an eight percent Cost of Living Adjustment for Fiscal Year 2023.

Create a tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness program for critical staff who choose to spend their careers employed by community nonprofits serving Connecticut's most vulnerable residents.

Temporarily relax requirements or provide waivers for staff credentials, allowing qualified staff to begin practicing without waiting for administrative hurdles to be cleared.

Reduce or eliminate tuition for community nonprofit staff at state institutions of higher education, providing a pathway for staff to enrich their lives and careers.

## ABOUT THE ALLIANCE

The CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance) is the statewide association of community nonprofits in Connecticut. Our mission is to advance excellence in community-based nonprofits through advocacy and capacity building.

If you have questions or need more information please contact Gian-Carl Casa, President and CEO at [gcasa@ctnonprofitalliance.org](mailto:gcasa@ctnonprofitalliance.org) or Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations at [bshaiken@ctnonprofitalliance.org](mailto:bshaiken@ctnonprofitalliance.org).

