



A PROPOSAL TO IMPLEMENT CLIMB HEALTH

Career Ladders in Mental & Behavioral Health

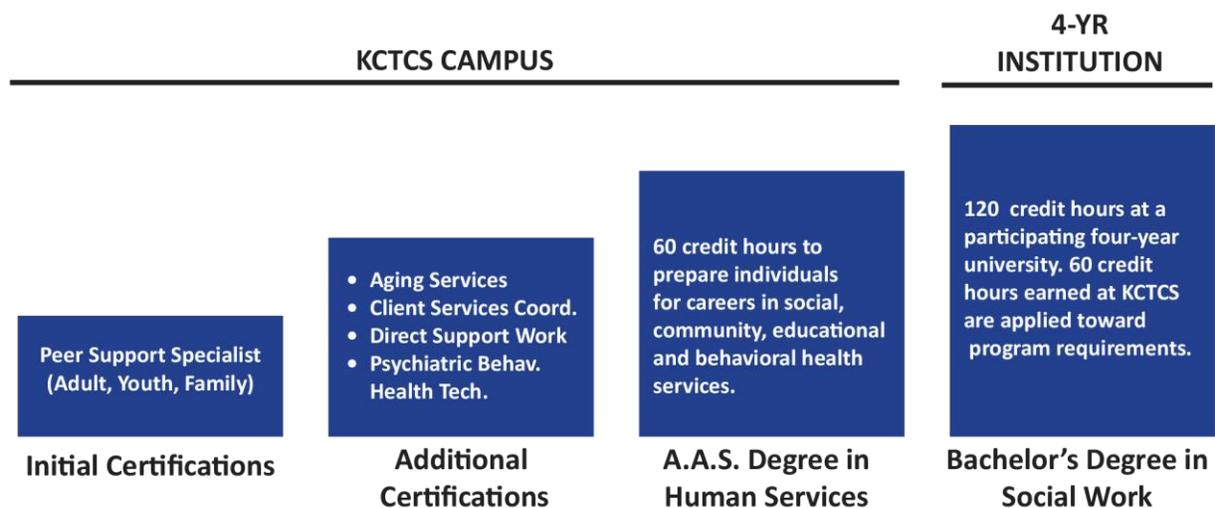
**Submitted by the Council on Postsecondary Education on Behalf of
the Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Collaborative**



PROJECT SUMMARY

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) is requesting \$1.5 million to expand the capacity of its Kentucky Healthcare Workforce Collaborative (HWC) to address state workforce shortages through increased degree and credential production in healthcare fields. More specifically, this project will fund postsecondary partnerships between KCTCS campuses and 4-year public and private institutions to launch **Career Ladders in Mental and Behavioral Health (CLIMB Health)**.

Career ladders (also called degree pathways) map out the sequence of courses students must take to earn credentials at a two-year college that transfer seamlessly to a four-year program in a related discipline. This approach accelerates time-to-degree by charting the quickest path to credential completion and maximizing the number of credits that transfer to a four-year program. **CLIMB Health features a series of stackable certifications leading to an Associate of Applied Science in Human Services at KCTCS, which can be applied toward a bachelor's degree in social work at a participating four-year university.**



This project targets individuals in recovery with a **peer support specialist certification**, a 30-hour program approved by the Kentucky Division of Behavioral health (DBH). Participating KCTCS campuses will obtain approval from DBH to provide this certification, if they are not already approved providers. KCTCS providers will seek referrals from county drug courts, Recovery Kentucky Centers (for inmates reintegrating into society), recovery job developers, employee resource network programs and other regional behavioral health providers. In this way, the program will complement the pilot behavioral health conditional dismissal program created by SB 90 by creating postsecondary opportunities for program participants.

The goal is to engage individuals who have overcome substance use disorders in meaningful behavioral health careers to transform their lives and the lives of those they serve. **As a large percentage of individuals with substance use disorders are justice-involved, low-income and from minoritized populations, this program would serve some of Kentucky's most vulnerable individuals.**

CLIMB Health is modeled on a successful program offered by Big Sandy Community and Technical College in Prestonsburg, Kentucky, and Morehead State University, developed with Title III funding from the U.S. Office of Postsecondary Education. **In just over a year of operation, over 400 individuals have become certified as adult peer support specialists, and 60 have enrolled in the associate-level behavioral health program.** This funding request will enable this program to be replicated by other KCTCS campuses across the state, as well as providing professional development resources, informational and outreach materials, and other administrative and evaluative services to assess the impact of these programs and increase their efficacy and scale.

ABOUT THE COUNCIL ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) was created in 1997 with the passage of the *Kentucky Postsecondary Education Improvement Act* (HB 1) to coordinate the state's nine public postsecondary institutions. The CPE board is appointed by the Governor and includes thirteen citizen members, one faculty member and one student member from public postsecondary institutions. (The Kentucky Commissioner of Education also serves as an ex-officio member.) The associated state agency consists of approximately fifty employees with roles related to postsecondary education finance, student success, strategic planning, diversity and inclusion, data and research, and communications and external relations.

The CPE leads Kentucky's efforts to build a strong, sustainable, and equitable economy through increased educational attainment and affordable, high-quality postsecondary programs. As the state's higher education coordinating board, CPE is charged with the following responsibilities:

- Developing and implementing a strategic agenda for public postsecondary education that includes measures of progress.
- Producing and submitting a biennial budget request for adequate public funding of postsecondary education.
- Determining tuition rates and admission criteria at public postsecondary institutions.
- Collecting and distributing data about postsecondary education performance.
- Ensuring the coordination and connectivity of technology among public institutions.
- Licensing non-public postsecondary institutions to operate in the Commonwealth.

ABOUT THE KENTUCKY WORKFORCE HEALTHCARE COLLABORATIVE

The HWC was created in 2022 as a unit of CPE with a \$10 million appropriation from the Kentucky General Assembly. **The HWC is a consortium of industry leaders, postsecondary faculty, and policy experts charged with growing the education and training pipeline of fourteen healthcare professions within Kentucky's public two- and four-year colleges and fifteen universities.** To date, HWC has awarded \$8 million to public colleges and universities to expand program capacity in nursing and provide additional student outreach and support. These grants have enabled postsecondary institutions

to eliminate some of the barriers to program expansion, including insufficient faculty, uncompetitive salaries, limited clinical sites, and a lack of modern training equipment and supplies.

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Efforts to alleviate Kentucky’s opioid crisis are hampered by critical workforce shortages in the field of behavioral health. Nationally, experts report that only a fraction of the million Americans with substance use disorders receive treatment, in part due to a scarcity of trained professionals. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this problem by dramatically increasing the incidence of substance use disorders. In 2020, an estimated 41.1 million Americans over the age of 12 suffered from substance use disorders (up from 20 million in 2018), but only 4 million received treatment¹. Kentucky mirrors this national trend.

There has been a dramatic rise in the use of peer support services within treatment and community settings to assist individuals in recovery². Active engagement in peer support groups is a key predictor of recovery in the research that currently exists. According to the National Institutes of Health, benefits include “increased treatment retention, improved relationships with treatment providers and social supports, increased satisfaction and reduced relapse rates.” Furthermore, the relationship between peer support specialists (who are often in recovery) and individuals in treatment settings has a positive effect on both parties, decreasing their likelihood of relapse.³ Implementing the CLIMB Health initiative statewide will immediately impact the number of certified peer support specialists, as well as increasing the pipeline of associate and bachelor’s level behavioral health practitioners.

As providers of the peer support specialist certification, KCTCS institutions offer distinct advantages. Individuals gain experience in a postsecondary setting, which increases their likelihood of enrolling in further postsecondary programs, including additional behavioral health certifications for aging services, client services coordination, direct support work and psychiatric behavioral health technician. The 30-hour peer specialist certification is eligible for tuition reimbursement through various job development agencies and the Ready to Work program, and the associate degree program is eligible for reimbursement by the Work Ready Kentucky Scholarship. Furthermore, KCTCS campuses provide a host of wrap-around student support services—like academic advising, tutoring, financial aid counseling and cultural competency training—that increase student retention and make graduates more attractive to employers. Finally, the Workforce Solutions arm of KCTCS has developed hundreds of partnerships with

¹ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2021). “Key substance use and mental health indicators in the United States: Results from the 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health” (HHS Publication No. PEP21-07-01-003, NSDUH Series H-56). Rockville, MD: Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Retrieved from <https://www.samhsa.gov/data/>

² Galanter, M. *Network Therapy for Alcohol and Drug Abuse*. New York City: Guilford Press, 1999.

³ Tracy K, Wallace SP. Benefits of peer support groups in the treatment of addiction. *Substance Abuse Rehabilitation*. 2016 Sept. 29, 7:143-154. doi: 10.2147/SAR.S81535. PMID: 27729825; PMCID: PMC5047716.

regional healthcare providers that can be leveraged to provide tuition reimbursement and other employment opportunities to program participants.

PROGRAM GOALS

During its initial implementation period, the CLIMB Health initiative will strive to meet the following objectives:

- To increase the number of KCTCS campuses offering the adult peer support specialist certification, both in-person and online. Part of this funding would enable upgrades to the existing certification program.
- To create two new certification programs, one for youth peer support specialists and one for family peer support specialists, which could be offered in person or online by participating KCTCS campuses.
- To target individuals in recovery, including individuals who have been involved in the justice system, and to increase the number of low-income, undereducated, minoritized or otherwise vulnerable populations who enroll in CLIMB Health.
- To encourage credit for prior learning and other competency-based approaches that accelerate time to degree and move students into the workforce sooner.
- To increase the number of behavioral health graduates in Kentucky at the certificate, associate, and bachelor's degree level.
- To increase the number of postsecondary, workforce and employer partnerships to ensure Kentucky's behavioral health workforce needs are being met.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

First 6 months:

- As a first step, the HWC will issue an RFP for KCTCS campuses, in partnership with one or more four-year universities, to implement CLIMB Health. Each applying team will be required to obtain partnership agreements with county drug courts within their service area, regional job developers/reentry or recovery employment specialists, and at least one regional behavioral health provider.
- There are four KCTCS campuses (Bluegrass CTC, Elizabethtown CTC, Hazard CTC, Madisonville CC) that have the certificate and associate-level program components in place to offer this career pathway; all that is missing are the necessary partnership and articulation agreements. Additionally, there are five KCTCS campuses with some of the necessary program components currently in place. Of the 16 KCTCS campuses statewide, we reasonably expect nine to ten could

implement this pathway within a year. All of Kentucky's public universities and many private colleges and universities offer a bachelor's degree in social work.

6 months to 12 months:

- Big Sandy CTC will upgrade its existing adult peer support specialist certification and develop certifications for youth peer support specialists and family peer support specialists. Working with KCTCS, the HWC will offer direction and/or support for rolling out the career ladder systemwide, assisting with curriculum development, DBH approvals, online course module development, articulation agreements with four-year universities, and other required program components as needed.
- The HWC at CPE will coordinate a community of practice for program participants to provide professional support, best practices, and professional development experiences throughout the implementation process. HWC will seek out state and/or national experts to provide guidance on serving justice impacted individuals, as some campuses may not have much experience with this population. Other professional development topics could include creating welcoming campus environments for diverse populations, awarding credit for prior learning and work experience, and braiding resources to meet students' basic needs. CPE offers a wealth of expertise on these topics, and more.
- The KCTCS central office in Versailles and participating KCTCS campuses will identify state and industry credentials/certifications that are precursors to healthcare career pathways to enable targeted recruitment and outreach activities. Priority will be given to underserved, underrepresented, and disadvantaged populations traditionally facing barriers to employment and reentry. The HWC will work with the KCTCS central office to brand CLIMB Health programs and create digital and print recruitment and informational materials. These materials would be shared with treatment centers, drug courts and other relevant community services.
- The HWC will work with campus partnerships and the KCTCS central office to identify performance metrics to track program outcomes for participants. Midyear and final reports will be submitted to HWC from grant recipients.

12 months to 18 months:

- It is fully anticipated that by the end of the first year, all participating KCTCS campuses will offer a minimum of one or more peer specialist certification courses, be actively engaged with local county drug court programs, have established working relationships with job development and re-entry specialists, and have created directed population in-flows into developed career pathway programs. Each participating KCTCS campus will have identified a program coordinator and academic representative dedicated to creating a sustainable program model and process.

- The HWC will assess program implementation efforts and identify needed program adjustments.
- The HWC will host a statewide convening to showcase program successes and create interest in new behavioral health partnerships and programs.
- The HWC and KCTCS will leverage their experience in developing recovery coach career pathways to identify other necessary mental and behavioral health career ladders.

KEY PARTNERSHIPS

As specified earlier, each participating KCTCS campus will ensure that three required partners are identified, letters of intent secured, and memoranda of agreements implemented and sustained throughout the program. These three partners are county drug courts, regional behavioral health providers, and regional job developers/reentry or recovery employment specialists. Additionally, the HWC and KCTCS will establish relationships with the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHDID), the Kentucky Opioid Response Effort (KORE), the Advisory Council for Recovery Ready Communities, the Department for Community-Based Services, UNSHAME KY, and other entities that could further this work.

BUDGET NARRATIVE

Campus Awards (\$1 million): The bulk of the funding will be awarded to KCTCS campuses in response to an RFP issued by CPE's HWC. We anticipate up to 10 campuses will be awarded grants of up to \$100,000 each to hire appropriate staff and execute the necessary services and partnerships to implement CLIMB Health. The RFP will outline program requirements and acceptable use of funds, including incentive funds for four-year universities to participate. Required program reports will track progress, identify needed interventions or adjustments, and outline how programs will be sustained after grant funds are spent.

Community of Practice (\$100,000): The HWC will coordinate a community of practice, which will meet regularly over the course of the project. Funds will be used to engage national and state experts to provide professional development for program participants, as well as providing for any meeting and associated costs.

Outreach/Marketing (\$100,000): The HWC will work with KCTCS central office in Versailles to create branding and print/digital informational materials for recruitment purposes (for potential students and industry partners). HWC will work with the Workforce Solutions and communications units to create and execute a communications and marketing plan.

Statewide Convening (\$100,000): The HWC will coordinate a statewide convening at the end of 18 months to showcase program successes and create interest in new career ladders in behavioral health.

HWC Personnel Stipend (\$80,000): The HWC will use these monies to support an 18-month position to coordinate the various activities related to this project.

Indirect Costs (8% or \$120,000): CPE charges an indirect cost rate of 8% to cover administrative and facilities (overhead) costs.

The HWC may shift costs from category to category, depending on the RFP response.