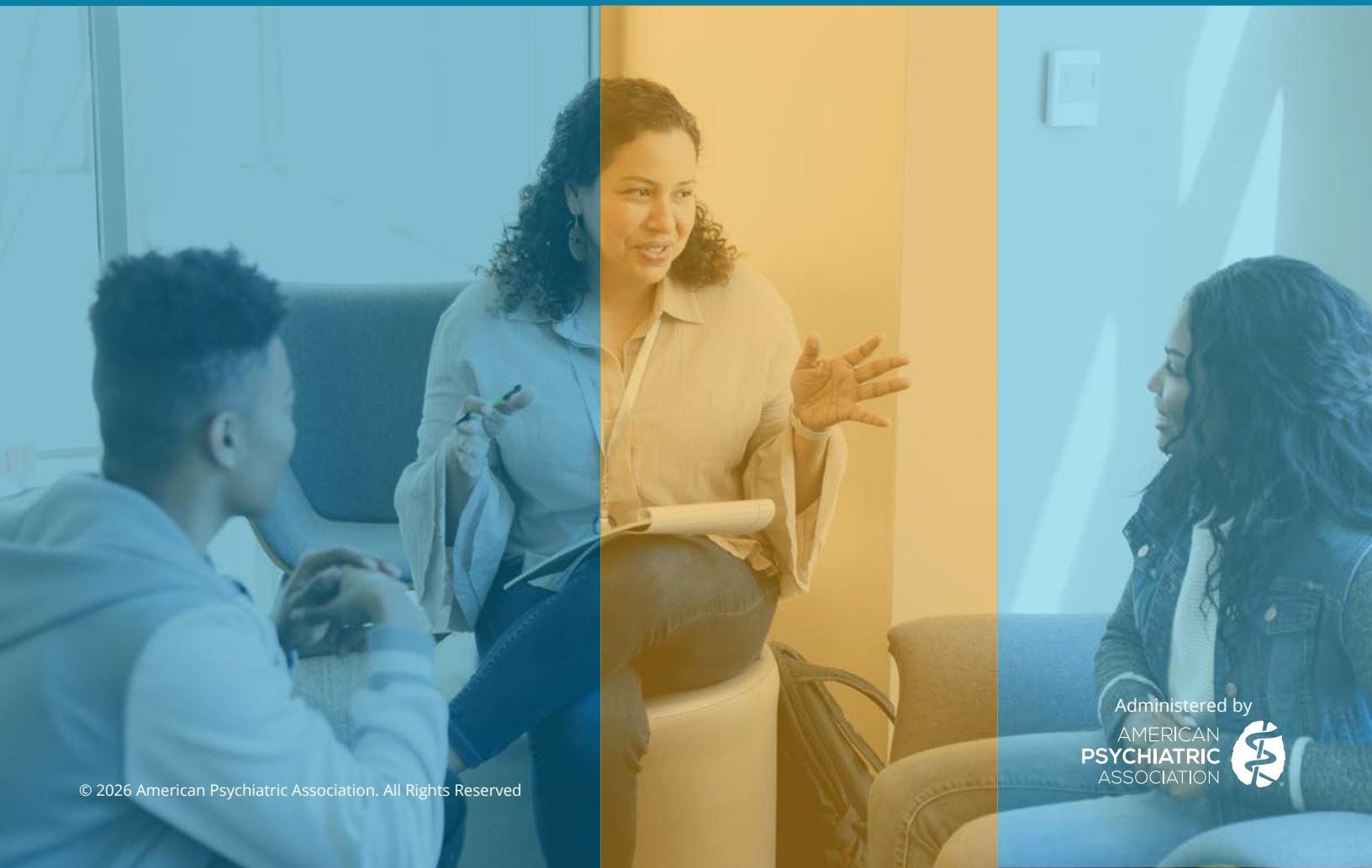




How to Address Burnout

in Clinicians Who Provide Care to People with Serious Mental Illness (SMI)



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Six organizational factors linked to burnout are workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. Administrators and supervisors need to be aware of these factors and implement strategies to prevent or manage burnout. This is especially true in behavioral health workforces that provide treatment to people who have SMI.

Interventions that reduce burnout support the overall health and wellbeing of staff, reduce attrition, and improve safety and quality of care. Plus, when the organization addresses burnout, it may signal a commitment to the health of staff and clients.

This brief guide offers practical tips and suggestions on how to address the six key factors that contribute to burnout in the behavioral health workforce.

Workload

There are a number of stressors related to workload that contribute to burnout. This includes excessive caseloads, too much administrative work, staffing shortages, working overtime, and lack of administrative support. To support clinicians in providing high-quality care, organizations must actively work to de-sludge the clinical workflow.

Recommendations

- Identify existing staff workloads and increase staffing levels as appropriate.
- Improve efficiency by reviewing organizational policies, workflows, and administrative tasks.
- Eliminate processes that are either obsolete or whose original purpose is no longer aligned with the current values and mission of the organization.
- To ensure sustained relevance, make this review and elimination process a regular, ongoing practice that evolves with the times.
- Support and model healthy work/life balance (i.e., taking time off).
- Implement programs and services that support physical and mental health (i.e., employee wellness rooms, fitness opportunities, yoga/mindfulness).
- Implement clinical scribing support through human or AI-powered scribes.
- Audit and consolidate documentation by minimizing the number of different forms required for a single clinical process.
- Optimize meetings to reduce the total number and duration of non-essential meetings.

Control

Stressors may arise when staff lack control over their workflow, decision-making, or the resources needed to perform their jobs. This can impact motivation, connection to the organization, and overall well-being.

Recommendations

- Maximize staff autonomy and control by supporting flexible staff schedules whenever possible. This helps accommodate different working styles and circumstances.
- Ensure that staff have the necessary resources and support to provide high-quality care. This includes access to ongoing education, specialized training, quality clinical supervision, teaching, and mentorship opportunities.
- Empower and provide choice wherever possible.

Reward

Rewards/recognition, pay, and benefits contribute to staff well-being. So it is key to make sure that rewards and/or recognition are not inconsistent or inequitable. When that is the case, it can cause staff to feel that their work is undervalued or underappreciated.

Recommendations

- Document and adhere to clear policies for promotions and raises. This helps convey a sense of transparency, equity, and fairness.
- Promotion ladders are crucial for staff retention. They should be offered for all clinical and non-clinical staff.
- Offer opportunities for staff to lead small or medium-sized projects, giving them a sense of ownership.
- Develop ongoing mechanisms for staff recognition that do not rely solely on individual managers to nominate employees.
- Consider offering added benefits to help mitigate staff stressors beyond work (e.g., subsidized care and education programs).



Community

A shared sense of community fosters a supportive staff environment. Organizations should strive to create a culture where every role is valued and respected.

Recommendations

- Create chances for collegiality and build a shared community during work hours.
- Encourage teamwork by utilizing team-based care models.
- Create a culture that promotes inclusion and a sense of belonging.
- Reflect the organization's diversity in the physical environment, signage, and messaging.

Fairness

Challenges to fairness often arise when staff feel that decision-making is not transparent. It can also occur when they are not engaged in decision-making that affects their roles.

Recommendations

- Ensure that decisions related to hiring, salaries, promotions, and policy changes are transparent.
- Create ongoing opportunities for direct communication between leadership and staff at all levels.
- Create regular ways for staff to provide input before enacting practice or policy changes.

Values

Staff may feel less connected to their work and the culture of the organization when their values are misaligned with the organization's values.

Recommendations

- Match organizational changes with the organization's mission. This can help mobilize staff motivation for change.



This brief guide is meant to serve as a starting point for supervisors and administrators. When you use the recommendations in it, it is crucial to factor in local resources and needs.

Citations

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2022). *Addressing Burnout in the Behavioral Health Workforce Through Organizational Strategies*. SAMHSA Publication No. PEP22-06-02-005. Rockville, MD: National Mental Health and Substance Use Policy Laboratory.



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