



Survey Results: Behavioral Health Patient Care Survey for Kaiser Southern California

Survey Summary: In June and July of 2024, the National Union of Healthcare Workers (NUHW) administered an electronic survey to NUHW members throughout Southern California who are employed by Kaiser Permanente as behavioral health professionals. This includes Psychologists, Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, Psychiatric Nurses and Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors who work across various departments including Psychiatry, Addiction Medicine, Social Medicine, Care at Home, among others. The survey focused on assessing the challenges these professionals face in providing timely, appropriate care and the challenges patients face in getting that care. This summary encapsulates approximately 1,600 responses from behavioral health professionals in Southern California at the region's largest healthcare provider.

All Departments:

- 62 percent of Kaiser's behavioral health professionals surveyed said there wasn't enough staff in their department to provide appropriate and timely care to patients
- 71 percent of Kaiser behavioral health professionals responded that they have to work beyond their regular working hours at least once a week because they don't have time to complete all of their daily tasks.
- 51 percent of behavioral health professionals reported that they've considered leaving Kaiser during the past six months due to working conditions
- 86 percent of behavioral health professionals responded that Kaiser does not have the capacity to treat its growing Medi-Cal patient population.

Psychiatry: Psychologists and Therapists (1070 Respondents)

- 58 percent of therapists and psychologists in the Psychiatry department reported that they can't see their patients every two weeks as required by state law.
- More than twice as many therapists reported that appointment wait times had increased for their patients over the past year than those reporting that wait times had decreased.
- 65 percent reported that their departments lacked enough staff to provide timely and appropriate care to patients.
- 81 percent responded that they don't have enough time in the day for critical patient care duties that can't be done during therapy sessions.
- 68 percent reported that weekly individual therapy appointments at their clinic were not available to those who needed it.

- Two thirds of therapists said they were forced to schedule visits further into the future than clinically appropriate at least once a week.
- 86 percent of therapists reported that Kaiser hadn't trained them to use state-mandated criteria for determining whether patients require treatment.

Addiction Medicine:

- Over 50 percent of Kaiser's addiction medicine counselors reported that they have to schedule appointments further into the future than clinically appropriate at least once a week with 28 percent reporting that they have to do so at least once a day.
- Nearly two-thirds of addiction medicine counselors responded that Kaiser had eliminated or curtailed group therapy sessions or classes that had been helpful for patients.

Social Medicine:

- Medical social workers were six times more likely to report that wait times for their patients have increased over the last year than decreased.

Care at Home:

- Over 70 percent of homecare providers reported that wait times for their patients have increased in the last year.
- Almost 85 percent of providers said that they are forced to schedule return visits further into the future than they believe is clinically appropriate.

These findings indicate that despite agreeing to undertake "transformational change" in the wake of a state investigation that cited Kaiser for understaffing its mental health services, the HMO still does not have the capacity to provide the clinically appropriate behavioral healthcare that patients need and are entitled to under state law. Nearly a year after state investigation was completed, Kaiser mental health professionals report that appointment wait times have gotten longer and understaffing has left clinicians overburdened and unable to provide the care their patients need.

Survey Instrument & Methodology: The survey was distributed electronically via Google forms to each Kaiser behavioral health professional that works in Southern California for whom NUHW has a valid personal email address. The majority of the questions were presented in multiple choice form. While some questions were asked to all survey respondents, certain questions were tailored to specific departments in accordance with the specific services they provide. The survey was sent to Kaiser behavioral health professionals practicing at dozens of clinics, call centers, hospitals, and other facilities across Kaiser Permanente's Southern California region. Responses were received from 65% of the caregivers (1,598 responses).