

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH EDUCATION CENTER OF NEBRASKA

# American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds



## Program Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified the demand for behavioral health services in Nebraska, straining a workforce already facing critical shortages. In response, the Nebraska Legislature passed LB1014 (2022), allocating \$25.5 million from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to the University of Nebraska Medical Center's (UNMC) Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN). These funds established the BHECN-ARPA Awards Program (BHECN-ARPA), designed to expand the behavioral health workforce and ensure access to behavioral health statewide.

BHECN-ARPA awarded 110 projects across 72 unique organizations. The program supports training and education experiences, expands access to telebehavioral health in rural areas, funds recruitment and retention incentives, and provides direct funding for supervision. These initiatives aim to reduce provider burnout, expand service availability, and strengthen Nebraska's behavioral health infrastructure.

### Authors:

Jessica Buche, MPH, MA

*BHECN ARPA Program Director*

Caitlyn Wayment, MPH

*BHECN ARPA Program Manager*

Melissa Tibbets, PhD, MS

*Assistant Director of Evaluation, BHECN*

Marley Doyle, MD

*BHECN Director*

## BHECN

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## Use of Funds

BHECN-ARPA awarded approximately \$23.2 million to 110 projects across Nebraska. The funding supported projects in the four key categories.

Category	Projects	Amount Awarded
Behavioral Health Training Opportunities	38	\$11,859,932.38
Telebehavioral Health Support in Rural Areas	19	\$7,075,668.91
Workforce Projects Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic	31	\$2,307,455.00
Funding for Supervision of Provisionally Licensed Providers	22	\$7,928,528.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>\$23,171,584.29</b>

## Program Goals

The initiative was structured around four categories of projects:

1. Behavioral health training opportunities: internships, fellowships, psychiatric nursing training programs, psychology practicums, clinical training, and certificate programs.
2. Telebehavioral health support in rural areas: infrastructure expansion, technical assistance, training, certifications, and consultant networks.
3. Workforce projects related to the COVID-19 pandemic: resilience training, wellness initiatives, trauma-informed care, burnout reduction, and COVID-19 research and education.
4. Funding for supervision of provisionally licensed providers: stipends for supervisors, licensing support, and administrative tolls to ease the path to full licensure.

These projects aligned with national workforce development best practices, focusing on expanding the behavioral health workforce, strengthening rural access, and sustaining long-term workforce growth.

## Community Engagement

The program was shaped by stakeholder input from a statewide advisory group and maintained strong engagement with applicants and awardees. BHECN-ARPA provided:

- Office hours and real-time application support.
- Ongoing networking via newsletters, virtual sessions, and conferences.
- Progress meetings and one-on-one consultations for financial and programmatic guidance.

These efforts fostered collaboration, knowledge sharing, and sustainability for funded projects.

## Evidence & Program Evaluation

The BHECN-ARPA team uses a mixed-methods evaluation design, including baseline and annual follow-up surveys, a conceptual framework guiding program implementation and evaluation, and mid-year progress narratives.

Evaluations showed significant progress in expanding workforce pathways, supporting supervision, and strengthening rural telebehavioral health capacity. Year 2 evaluation data was collected in July of 2025.

## Project Inventory & Expenditures

The table below highlights project expenditures through fiscal year 2025.

Category	Total Funds Awarded	Cumulative Expenses	Percent Spent Down
Behavioral Health Training Opportunities	\$11,859,932.38	\$7,699,566.80	65%
Telebehavioral Health Support in Rural Areas	\$7,075,668.91	\$5,053,566.39	71%
Workforce Projects Related to the COVID-19 Pandemic	\$2,307,455.00	\$1,665,923.68	74%
Funding for Supervision of Provisionally Licensed Providers	\$1,928,528.00	\$1,698,026.91	88%
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$23,171,584.29</b>	<b>\$16,117,073.78</b>	<b>70%</b>

## Conclusion

The BHECN-ARPA Awards Program represents a major, one-time investment in Nebraska's behavioral health workforce. By expanding training opportunities, strengthening telebehavioral health, addressing pandemic-related challenges, and reducing supervision barriers, this program has:

- Expanded workforce capacity across rural and urban communities.
- Improved behavioral health access.
- Reduced provider burnout and turnover through recruitment and retention initiatives.
- Positioned Nebraska to better respond to long-term behavioral health needs.

Sustained impacts will depend on ongoing investment, but the program created a solid foundation for a more resilient, accessible, and expansive behavioral health workforce statewide.