

# **University of Nebraska Medical Center Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska: Fiscal Year 2022- 2023 Executive Summary**

## **Program Team**

Jessica Buche, MPH, MA: BHECN ARPA Program Director

Caitlyn Wayment, MPH: BHECN ARPA Program Manager

Erin Schneider, EdD, MSW: Associate Director of External Relations

Marley Doyle, MD: BHECN Director

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## **Program Overview**

In July 2022, the Nebraska legislature passed Legislative Bill 1014 (LB1014), which allocated ARPA funding to various entities across Nebraska. In LB1014, the University of Nebraska Medical Center's (UNMC) Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN) was allocated \$25.5 million to address the shortage of behavioral health professionals in Nebraska. The pandemic caused a dramatic increase in the need for behavioral health services, and with providers already in short supply, many people experienced long wait times or a complete inability to access behavioral healthcare. This has become a crisis for many areas of the state, particularly in rural and frontier areas.

This one-time ARPA funding has been disbursed through a competitive request for proposal process based on the four major areas outlined in LB1014; 1) Behavioral health training opportunities, 2) Telebehavioral health expansion in rural areas, 3) Funding for projects related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and 4) Funding for supervision of provisionally licensed providers. Any organization/provider in Nebraska was eligible to apply. Awards were allocated until funding was exhausted in June 2023, after two cycles of applications.

## **Use of Funds**

The BHECN ARPA Awards Program supports the public health emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The entities impacted by this ARPA funding are behavioral health providers and organizations, such as nonprofits and small businesses. The program aims to:

- Increase training opportunities for behavioral health trainees, including internships/fellowships post-graduate training, and fellowships, to grow the workforce of trained behavioral health professionals within three years (2023-2025).
- Expand access to telebehavioral health services in rural areas to address increased mental health needs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Recruit, retain, and build resilience among the behavioral health workforce, and support projects for students and behavioral health providers that address or research behavioral health effects caused or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Expand support for behavioral health organizations or behavioral health providers that supervise provisionally licensed behavioral health providers to increase the number of licensed behavioral health providers within three years (2023-2025).

Requests for proposals, review of proposals, and award dissemination processes occurred over two award cycles. Independent review committees evaluated all applications, and applications were ranked based on a predetermined criterion. Highest-ranking applications were awarded funding. Organizations could apply for multiple funding categories and re-apply if their application were not initially awarded.

BHECN provided administrative oversight to the award process but did not function as the decision-makers in the selection of projects. BHECN managed the request for proposal (RFP) solicitation, administered the RFP process and online award management platform, communicated with the awardees, collaborated with review committee chairs and committee members, disseminated and tracked award funds, provided training and technical assistance for awardees, and collected and analyzed evaluation, performance, and fiscal data from awardees for state and federal reporting. BHECN

worked closely with UNMC compliance and business and finance offices to ensure the overall project complies with ARPA and state guidelines and for fiscal monitoring and compliance.

### **Promoting Equitable Outcomes**

The BHECN ARPA Awards Program strived to promote equitable outcomes among underserved Nebraskans who receive, seek, or need care and underserved Nebraska behavioral healthcare workers. To achieve equitable outcomes, the BHECN ARPA Awards Program was promoted to organizations and individuals across Nebraska through a variety of modalities, including social media posts, informational webinars, press and news releases, and direct outreach to numerous organizational networks. Grant writing webinars and toolkits outlining the request for proposal process were also made available on the BHECN ARPA website. Targeting potential organizations and individuals through these various methods extended the promotional reach of the BHECN ARPA Awards Program and ensured individuals and organizations had numerous opportunities to learn, design, and complete an application.

Beyond the promotional reach, it was important the BHECN ARPA Awards Program was accessible and inclusive of all types of organizations and individuals serving various populations. The application was designed in a structured, straightforward way to ensure all organizations could complete the application, regardless of grant-writing experience. The application was also open to all organizations or private practices in Nebraska. The BHECN ARPA team hosted eight two-hour “Office Hours” across the two award cycles. During these office hours, applicants could ask questions, seek technical assistance, or confirm that their application was submitted.

The BHECN ARPA Awards Program was designed to ensure the scoring and review process were equitable for all applicants. Applications were not scored based on budget, evaluation methods, or sustainability plans. Both Technical Reviewers and ARPA Review Committee Members were instructed to score applications based on a predetermined set of criteria and guidelines and all completed the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity’s implicit bias training. Moreover, the BHECN Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion chair attended all meetings to oversee the process.

### **Technical Assistance**

The BHECN ARPA Award program utilized feedback from the Review Committees to determine which organizations would benefit from ongoing technical assistance. BHECN ARPA Awards Program staff provides support to organizations with less experience in grants management, smaller organizations, and/or those with limited experience in program implementation. Half of all awardees are receiving assistance from BHECN ARPA Awards Program staff with setting evaluation measures, invoicing monthly payments, and program implementation. Those organizations identified as needing technical assistance are required to submit itemized invoices monthly to BHECN ARPA and UNMC Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) while the remaining awardees submit their invoices at least quarterly. The BHECN ARPA team also provided evaluation and invoicing tools for all awarded projects. This ensures organizations with less experience or capacity can properly implement their project and helps standardize the process for awardees.

### **Program Evaluation and Fiscal Reporting**

The BHECN ARPA Awards Team is responsible for completing program evaluation of the BHECN ARPA Awards Program. This is done through a mixed methods approach. The primary component of the



program evaluation includes baseline and annual follow-up surveys for each project. Each awardee will submit annual follow-up surveys with the final survey being submitted within six months of project completion. Information from the baseline and follow-up surveys will be compared to determine the impact of the ARPA awards. Also, qualitative methods will be used to further evaluate and highlight the BHECN ARPA Awards' impact. This will include awardee spotlight conversations and presentations, site visits, focus groups, and key informant interviews. This mixed-methods approach allows the BHECN ARPA Awards Team to conduct extensive evaluation on the awarded projects and their impacts.

The BHECN ARPA Award Program team, in concert with members of the post-award UNMC SPA, collects financial reports quarterly from all awardees, per federal requirements. Operating and administrative financial reports are submitted at the same frequency. Progress and annual reports highlighting project and fiscal activities for each award are collected semi-annually.

### Performance Report

In total, we received 344 applications requesting approximately \$74,276,000.00 in funding from Cycles 1 and 2 and awarded \$22,754,000.00 to 110 applications; of the 110 awarded projects, 55 are from urban organizations and 55 are from rural organizations.

### BHECN ARPA Awards Application and Funding Breakdowns for Cycles 1 and 2

Category	Applications Submitted in Cycles 1 and 2	Applications Awarded in Cycles 1 and 2	Amount of Funds Requested in Cycles 1 and 2	Amount of Funds Awarded in Cycles 1 and 2
Behavioral Health Training and Education Opportunities	131	38	\$32,454,00	\$11,750,000
Telebehavioral Health in Rural Areas	59	19	\$28,833,000	\$6,975,000
Behavioral Health Workforce COVID-19 Projects	87	31	\$7,109,000	\$2,191,000
Funding for Supervision of Provisionally Licensed Providers	67	22	\$5,880,000	\$1,838,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>\$74,276,000</b>	<b>\$22,754,000</b>

### BHECN ARPA Award Program Fiscal Year 1 Expenditures

Category	Cumulative Expenditures to Date
Administrative and Operating	\$496,593.94
Project Subcontracts	\$859,258.33
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$1,355,852.27</b>

The 83 projects awarded in January 2023 have all executed their subcontract agreements and many have begun project activities and submitting invoices. Project expenditure amounts noted in the table are approximate. While all projects have begun activities, that is not directly reflected in this table, as many projects are required to submit invoices quarterly and have not yet done so. The remaining 27 projects were awarded in late June 2023 and have yet to establish subcontract agreements.