

For Immediate Release - January 11th, 2022

The Washington State Psychological Association is excited to announce that HB1863, Creating a New Prescribing Psychologist Credential, sponsored by Rep. Nicole Macri- D-43, has been introduced for consideration in the 2022 legislative session. HB1863 creates a new credential for Washington's psychologists and creates a pathway for any licensed psychologist to become a prescribing psychologist.

A Prescribing psychologist is a fully independent, licensed psychologist who has a specialized Masters of Psychopharmacology degree and is credentialed to prescribe psychotropic medication. Prescribing psychologists have been safely prescribing in other jurisdictions for almost 30 years, including the Department of Defense, the US Public Health Service, Indian Health Service, and the states of New Mexico, Louisiana, Illinois Iowa, and Idaho.

"Lack of providers, including psychiatric prescribers, continues to be one of the most common complaints we get," according to Lauren Simonds, the Executive Director of NAMI Washington, "it is particularly challenging for individuals with a serious mental health condition or complex medical histories to find a doctor willing and able to prescribe. We are excited to support HB 1863, creating a new prescribing psychologist credential in Washington State. This is a long-term solution to a growing problem, and we hope Washington will join the five other states who have made similar improvements to access".

Washington ranks sixth in the country for percentage of adults with a diagnosable mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder with 22.2% of adults experiencing such issues^[1]. Almost 1.3 million adults in our state have a diagnosable mental health condition, and 300,000 adults have a serious mental illness. Youth are also facing behavioral health challenges with an estimated 82,000 Washingtonians aged 12 to 17 experiencing depression.^[2]

Behavioral health issues facing many Washingtonians were a growing concern prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health emergency has only further exacerbated both the behavioral health issues themselves as well as the insufficiencies in the system, resulting in people not getting adequate help when and where they need it. "In recent months, I have heard from patients across the state who have struggled to receive timely mental health prescriptions," noted Stated Rep. Nicole Macri (D-43). " I am confident that appropriately trained and credentialed prescribing psychologists can help provide high quality mental health care for Washingtonians. The Covid-19 pandemic has weighed heavily on all our neighbors and exacerbated deficiencies in mental health care here. We need to continue doing everything we can to grow our behavioral health workforce to make it easier for people to access the care they need."

A member of the Washington State Psychological Association, Dr. David Shearer, a clinical and prescribing psychologist, has been prescribing psychotropic medications for the past 11 years at Madigan Army Medical Center, a hospital at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, Washington. Dr. Shearer prescribes psychotropic medication for active-duty service men and women, military retirees, and their dependents. Dr. Shearer stated, "It is an honor and a privilege to be a member of a team that provides comprehensive behavioral health care to some of our nations' most deserving patients. It is my hope that we can bring these same services to our neighbors across the state of Washington by expanding access to safe and effective psychotropic medication treatment."*

While behavioral health concerns are pervasive across the state, Washingtonians are struggling to access the help and treatment they need. In the last year, an estimated 410,000 adults in Washington did not receive the mental health care they needed, 1,252 lives were lost to suicide, and 52% of youth experiencing depression did not receive any care.^[3]

Dr. Steve Curtis is a member of the Washington State Psychological Association and an Affiliate Faculty member of the Clinical Psychology doctoral program at Antioch University in Seattle. As a child clinical psychologist in Washington State, and prescribing psychologist in New Mexico, Dr. Curtis has specialized in the assessment and follow-up services with neurodiverse children for over 30 years. "I am full of joy

when my pediatric patients and their parents express gratitude for the comprehensive psychological, and prescribing, services I provided. I would love to provide these services for children in Washington State as well. My ultimate dream is to train other pediatric psychologists to provide these services in their own communities throughout the state. Just imagine how many kids can be helped!"

For more information, contact the WSPA office at WSPA@WSPApsych.org

[1] The State of Mental Health in America. Mental Health America. 2021. https://mhanational.org/sites/default/files/2021%20State%20of%20Mental%20Health%20in%20America_0.pdf

[2] Mental Health in Washington. NAMI Washington. Based on data available in February 2021. <https://www.nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/StateFactSheets/WashingtonStateFactSheet.pdf>

[3] Ibid.

*The views expressed are those of Dr. Shearer and do not reflect the official policy of the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government