NAMI Washington — National Alliance on Mental Illness | Washington State Psychological Association

SUPPORT SB-5112

INCREASE ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE BEHAVIORAL HEALTHCARE

Washington Ranks 43rd in Meeting the Psychiatric Needs of our Residents – According to this 2023 report from Milliman, Washington ranked 43rd in the country regarding access to psychiatric care. We can and must do better to ensure access to trained and qualified psychiatric prescribers.

Nationwide Shortage of Doctors – The Association of Medical Colleges predicts an overall physician shortage across the US. They estimate by 2036 the shortfall could be as high as 86,000 fewer physicians than needed countrywide. There is no plan to fix this shortage. Washington must pursue alternative solutions to address our workforce shortages and the lack of prescribers that accompanies those shortages.

Prescribing Psychology has been Proven Safe – Rigorous research into claims data and patient records of psychiatric prescribers has demonstrated that **prescribing psychology is AS SAFE as psychiatry**.

	Prescribing Psychologists	Psychiatrists	Primary Care
Reported Adverse Drug Events	1.5 – 1.7%	2.4%	1.7%
Emergency Department Visit *Related to mental health*	1.2 – 1.4%	1.6%	.03%
Drug Adherence *Took meds more than 80% of days*	17%	14%	19%
Polypharmacy *More than one psychotropic class Rx*	17%	22%	6.6%

Other States have seen Dramatic Improvements After Authorizing Prescribing Psychology – After over 20 years and hundreds of prescribing psychologists practicing across 7 states, the research is now conclusive, that **prescribing psychology improves access and outcomes for patients**.

- **Prescribing Psychology Reduces Suicide** – Research in New Mexico and Louisiana has shown that expanding prescriptive authority for appropriately trained psychologists **reduces the suicide rate between 5-7%.**
    - Hughes et al. (2023) estimated the **potential benefit of prescribing psychology in Washington State over 20 years:**
        - **65,800 fewer suicide attempts**
        - **62,800 fewer suicide deaths**
        - **Cost savings of over $1 billion**

- **Prescribing Psychology Improves Pediatric Access to a prescriber by 5.4%** – Research on access in New Mexico and Louisiana found that Prescribing Psychology reduced the probably of unmet pediatric need by 5.4%.

Our Washington Department of Health has Testified to Safety – In both 2023 and 2024, the Department of Health has stated publicly that they are confident in the safety of Prescribing Psychology as created by the current bill. The original sunrise report listed several areas for improvement, the changes made in subsequent bills satisfied their experts, as in other states, they now conclude that Washington can safely credential Prescribing Psychologist as fully independent, licensed psychologists who have completed the extensive additional training/education and been credentialed to prescribe psychotropic medication.

Prescribing Psychologists have Specialized Training in Behavioral Health - Prescribing Psychology relies on a competency-based approach to education. It builds on the underlying doctoral level Psychologist credential and adds to that training in the form of a Masters of Clinical Psychopharmacology with specialized, in-depth knowledge of behavioral health medications, substance-misuse risks, and non-pharmacological alternatives.

Unlike general practitioners who may receive only basic psychiatry training during medical school or residency, psychologists completing a clinical psychopharmacology program focus specifically on behavioral health medications, substance misuse risks, and non-pharmacological alternatives.

Comparison of Training to Non- Physician Professions is Apples to Tires – Non-physician training can only be compared to other non-physician training. Prescribing Psychologists are non-physician prescribers just like nurse practitioners, midwives, pharmacists, optometrists, and physician associates. When compared to other non-physician providers Prescribing Psychologists have equivalent or more training in behavioral health related practices (see comparison chart).

	Requires 4-year Bachelors	Post-Bachelors Classroom Education (years)	Supervised Clinical Hours	**Total Years to Full Licensure (post-bachelor)**
Psychologist	Yes	5	2 years (3000 hours)	**7 Years**
Prescribing Psychologist	**Yes**	**7**	**3 years (3580 hours) Including** - **1 year (580 clinical hours pharmacological)** - **2 years (3000 underlying doctoral level license)**	**10 Years**
Adv. Practice Psychiatric Nurse	Yes	3-4 (with RN) 4-5 (without RN)	2 years (1140 hours) (after RN) (e.g., see WSU program)	**4-5 Years**

Specialized Training in Psychopharmacology for Psychologists is Growing in Availability – There are seven Accredited Institutions of Higher Education who offer the master's in clinical Psychopharmacology. Including Alliant International University in California, the Chicago School of Professional Psychology in Illinois, New Mexico State University, Idaho State University, Drake University in Iowa, Farleigh Dickinson in New Jersey, and the University of Colorado, Denver.

Real-World Evidence of Safety - Multiple studies PROVE patient safety is maintained (Hughes et al., 2024c) when psychologists prescribe, they have a **24% lower rate of adverse drug events** (ADEs) and a **20% lower rate of prescribing multiple psychiatric medications** (polypharmacy) compared to psychiatrists.

Lower Adverse Events and Reduced Polypharmacy - Research consistently shows prescribing psychologists are **less likely** to rely on complex medication regimens. This reflects their strong grounding in psychotherapy and evidence-based interventions**.**

Limited Scope for Controlled Substances - The **only** opioid prescribing psychologists may prescribe is **buprenorphine**, a partial agonist specifically used in treating opioid use disorder. This tool is critical for **combating the opioid epidemic** and expanding access to life-saving care. Prescribing Psychologists are an important tool in the opioid epidemic. The **only opioid they can prescribe** are drugs used to **treat opioid addiction.**