

## Mental Health Regulatory Agency Michelson

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**Request:** Report on a demographic and diversity plan as directed by a budget note in House Bill 5006 (2021) from the Mental Health Regulatory Agency.

**Recommendation:** Acknowledge receipt of the report.

**Discussion:** The Mental Health Regulatory Agency (MHRA) provides administrative and regulatory oversight to two licensing boards that oversee mental health professions in Oregon, the Board of Psychology and the Board of Licensed Professional Counselors and Therapists. Due to the interest in increasing diversity in the mental health workforce, the Legislative Assembly, by means of a budget note in House Bill 5006 (2021), allocated \$300,000 General Fund to MHRA to engage a third-party consultant to study the demographics of licensees and devise a plan to increase licensee diversity.

MHRA contracted with the third-party consultant, Keen Independent Research LLC (Keen), who began the study in June 2022 and submitted the final report with recommendations on December 19, 2022. Throughout the study, Keen analyzed policies, procedures and demographic data, conducted comparative analysis, and scanned academic literature and other research for relevant information. Keen also conducted in-depth interviews, focus groups, and a virtual workshop to gather stakeholder feedback, which received input from 1,793 individuals.

After completion of the study, some of the key findings presented to MHRA include that mental health professionals in Oregon are less diverse than they are nationally and compared to Oregon's population; complaints are not always proportionate to the race, ethnicity, and gender demographics of those professionals, and practitioners reported distrust of the complaints and investigations process and outcomes.

To address the areas of concern noted in the final report, Keen recommends MHRA add safeguards around complaints, investigations, and disciplinary actions; audit and import communications and service; reconsider licensing policies and procedures to support equity; identify and advocate for influence or support changes in factors external to MHRA and the boards to foster equity; and make and sustain a visible, active commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

MHRA plays a significant role in Oregon's ability to recruit and retain highly qualified licensed mental health professionals and it has a profound impact on access to care for Oregonians in all care settings and new care models. The boards must focus on making significant progress with state and regional solutions that reduce the barriers to licensure, including the timeline to license, and retention of a diverse licensed workforce. MHRA should consider licensing policies and procedures to support equity, as recommended by Keen, and further develop solutions to address the barriers to licensure in Oregon.