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Employment Department projects strong demand for mental health professionals to continue in Oregon

SALEM, Ore. — As Oregon celebrates National Recovery Month in September, recent research by the Oregon Employment Department finds that demand for mental health professionals has grown faster than all other occupations in the state.

In a [recent article](#), OED Employment Economist Luke Coury analyzed demand using published estimates of online job postings and found that, unlike online ad volume economy-wide, which has fallen back to pre-pandemic levels, online ad volume for mental health professionals has remained elevated in Oregon. This followed a smaller dip in ad volume for mental health professionals during the pandemic and a steeper rise during the post-recession boom.

A report from the Governor's [Behavior Health Talent Council](#) (BHTC) notes that current employment levels for mental health professionals are not meeting demand in the state, which was already on the rise before accelerating during the pandemic.

In response to the Behavioral Health Workforce shortage, Governor Kotek directed the Higher Education Coordinating Commission to consolidate that work through a Behavioral Health Talent Assessment, which informed the creation of the BHTC. The council's [final report](#) includes 74 recommendations aimed at expanding the workforce, streamlining licensing and credentialing, and improving recruitment and retention across the state. The first bill to come out of the work of the council, Cutting Red Tape for Behavioral Health Workers, was passed in 2026.

"The Behavioral Health Talent Council developed strategies to address the workforce shortage," First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson, Chair of the BHTC, said.

"Supporting the workforce and strengthening pathways into the field helps Oregon

to retain workers, attract new talent, and ensure more Oregonians can access care when they need it.”

Coury’s analysis found that demand was especially high for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors, which had the most online ads (7,190) of any mental health occupation between June 2025 and June 2026.

Demand is projected to remain strong in the state over the next decade, as well. Nearly all mental health occupations are projected to outpace the 6.4% growth that OED projects for all occupations through 2034. Psychiatric technicians, for example, have the highest projected growth rate in the industry at 28.1 percent, followed by marriage and family therapists (24.9%), and substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors (23.5%).

“For those interested in a career built around helping others, becoming a mental health professional could be a great option,” Coury said. “Demand is still high for those occupations and is projected to remain that way over the next decade.”

People in recovery and with lived experience of behavioral health conditions are an integral but often overlooked part of the workforce. By supporting them throughout their journeys, mental health and recovery professionals also play an important role in maintaining a vibrant and resilient workforce.

OED’s Workforce and Economic Research division offers several tools for students and job seekers at qualityinfo.org, including [occupation and wage data](#), a [career explorer](#), and [job postings](#).

About Workforce and Economic Research

The Workforce and Economic Research Division of the Oregon Employment Department develops and distributes quality economic and workforce information to help Oregonians make informed decisions and support a thriving economy. Staff collect data from state and federal records and surveys; analyze the available information; and share insights with the public in a variety of ways, including regular reports, publications, and the website, QualityInfo.org.

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