

Help Improve Virginians' Access to Behavioral Health Services: Become a Psych NP

Accessing behavioral health services in Virginia is a challenge! Year after year, inadequate access to behavioral health services is the most frequently cited critical service gap by nonprofit hospitals across Virginia. About 2/3 of Virginia localities are federally-designated mental health professional shortage areas, though problems accessing behavioral health services are pervasive and occur in every part of the commonwealth.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded the need and increased demand. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports an average of 37% of Virginians reporting symptoms of anxiety or depression during the COVID-19 pandemic. **This is 3.7 times more than in 2019.**

Psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioners (*Psych NPs*) play a key role in addressing the gap between demand and available behavioral health providers in Virginia. They are the only professionals besides psychiatrists trained and licensed to prescribe and manage psychotropic medicines, critical to treat behavioral health conditions.

Many Psych NPs like Virginia Nurses Association member, Jemina Liverman, DNP, APRN, FNP-C PMHNP-BC say, "I'm in my dream career."

Unfortunately, there are only 217 Psych NPs practicing in Virginia. Meanwhile, there are more than 130 Psych NP job postings in Virginia on Indeed.com (June 2021) with very attractive salaries. The need for Psych NPs will only grow – 60% of Virginia's existing Psych NPs are age 50 or older.

Interested in becoming one? The Virginia Health Care Foundation offers full scholarships for NPs to earn their post-Master's psychiatric mental-health NP Certificate. For more information, please contact the Foundation at PsychNP@vhcf.org.



Jemina Liverman

2021 Champions of Nursing Award Recipients Announced

This year the Virginia Nurses Foundation (VNF) honors Delegate Chris Hurst (D-Montgomery) and Delegate Dawn Adams (D-Henrico) with the 2021 Champion of Nursing Award for their unwavering dedication to Virginia's nurses.



Earlier this year, Delegate Hurst made it his mission to patron and pass **HB 1985**, which provides healthcare workers exposed to COVID-19 on the job with workers' compensation benefits.

Though it was evident legislators and the community wanted to honor healthcare workers for their selfless contributions during the pandemic, the bill still faced much resistance at the start of the 2021 General Assembly session. Many legislators were at an impasse regarding retroactivity dates for the bill as well as its fiscal impact on the commonwealth. Delegate Hurst worked tirelessly with his fellow legislators and VNA to ensure that healthcare workers finally got the support they deserved. This legislation went into effect July 1, 2021, and it covers any healthcare worker who got COVID-19 while diagnosing or treating COVID-19 patients from March 12, 2020 to December 21, 2021. For more information on VNA's COVID worker's compensation bill, please reference <https://lis.virginia.gov/lis.htm>.



Delegate Adams was also successful in passing legislation instrumental to the nursing profession this General Assembly session. Adams served as chief patron of **HB 1737**, which reduces the time an NP must practice under a physician-led practice agreement from five years to two years. This legislation faced a high degree of opposition and narrowly passed by a 12-10 margin in the senate.

Delegate Adams has been a champion for numerous nursing profession issues since she was first elected in 2017. In addition to other healthcare legislation she sponsored, Adams also successfully patroned **HB 1817**, which allows certified nurse midwives to practice autonomously without a collaboration agreement after 1,000 hours of practice.

The 2021 Champion of Nursing Award recipients will be honored virtually at VNA's annual Legislative Summit. This year's summit will be held virtually on Tuesday, November 9. For more information or to register, please visit www.virginiannurses.com.



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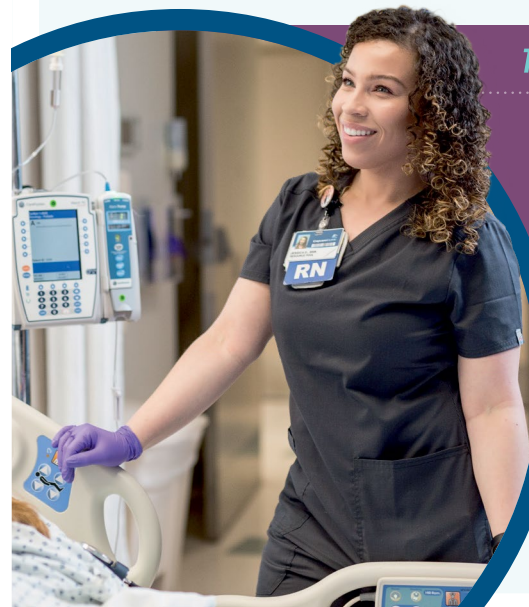
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