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## **Kentucky Nonprofits Ring Alarm Bell on Workforce Crisis Putting Kentuckians At Risk**

(LEXINGTON, Ky.) - On January 5, 2022, five nonprofit leaders representing a [coalition of more than 70 health and human services providers](#) serving the most vulnerable populations in Kentucky came together to discuss how workforce shortages are affecting their ability to meet individual and community needs – putting Kentuckians at risk. Through the [Kentucky Nonprofit Network](#), Kentucky's state association of nonprofits, the press conference highlighted the workforce crisis and the funding desperately needed by organizations caring for Kentucky's critically ill, elderly, disabled, and abused.

Nonprofit organizations serve as vital partners with government to provide these, often legally mandated, services on behalf of the commonwealth. Many of these organizations are seeing their workforce leave for higher paying jobs in for-profit businesses and are unable to fill vacancies. Unlike a for-profit business, a nonprofit provider cannot simply increase its prices or fee for services because most are bound by set governmental contracts and reimbursement rates that are making it difficult, if not impossible, to compete in a strained job market. Nonprofits need to be able to compete for employees, not just to keep nonprofit doors open,

but because services and programs are essential for our most vulnerable Kentuckians – our family members in nursing homes, our spouse in substance use treatment, our niece in a mental health facility, our uncle with developmental disabilities, our neighbor seeking services as a result of domestic abuse or sexual assault.

The impact of the workforce crisis on Kentuckians means scaled-back services, long waiting lists to access critical programs, and in some cases - closures. "To be clear, when any business must close its doors, it's a loss – a loss of a dream, a loss of wages, a loss to the economy. When a nonprofit must close its doors, close programs, or limit services, lives are at risk. The consequences are dire. It's simply not the same," said Danielle Clore, CEO of [Kentucky Nonprofit Network](#).

The stories shared by the nonprofit leaders provide real-life examples of how the workforce shortages are affecting their mission. Suspending admissions to programs, waitlists as long as six to eight months, low staff at nursing homes causing overwhelmed hospitals, and higher levels of trauma and emergencies are all results of this crisis.

"The worst is already happening," said Amy Staed, CEO of the [Kentucky Association of Private Providers](#). "Because providers are closing their doors or forced to scale back services, individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities are having to leave the homes where they were thriving for sometimes over 20 years because the providers who support them cannot afford to stay in business. Without community-based services, institutionalization is the only option, and it's an inappropriate and very expensive option," explained Staed.

Speakers noted that the decades-long issues have reach a critical breaking-point because contract and reimbursement rates do not cover the full cost of services. Dr. Sheila Schuster, Executive Director of [Advocacy Action Network](#) noted that funding has not been increased for community mental health centers since 1999. "How many businesses could survive on the same amount of income coming in for over 20 years," asked Schuster.

The impact on young people was also highlighted. "While the Surgeon General reports that mental health issues facing our children, such as depression, anxiety, and even suicide, are widespread, the most important thing to note is that they are treatable and often times preventable," said Michelle Sanborn, President of the [Children's Alliance](#). "But they are only treatable and preventable with services and access to services," Sanborn emphasized.

[The coalition is asking the Kentucky legislature](#) to immediately direct funds to these organizations and work with them on systemic changes to rates and other contracting issues in the new fiscal year starting July 1. With American Rescue Plan Act funds, a record-level rainy day fund, and growing budget surplus, Kentucky is in a position to protect the most vulnerable residents and ensure that Kentuckians have access to quality care with the highest skilled employees for years to come. The funding investments also ensure a living wage for these employees and increases impacted Kentuckians ability to participate in the workforce. The coalition asks for:

- Bridge payment via legislation passed as early as possible during this legislative session, with an emergency clause that can sustain services through June.
- Rate increases in the next biennial budget to start July 1.
- A process to ensure regular cost of living adjustments, regular wage analysis, and incentives like student loan forgiveness, childcare assistance and other support for employees that reflect the commonwealth's long-term commitment to the health and well-being of Kentuckians – especially our most vulnerable Kentuckians

The impact of the workforce crisis impacts every Kentuckian - there is no pandemic recovery without the health and human services sector. Without immediate intervention: "State-mandated services will suffer. Families of victims will suffer. The community will suffer," said Angela Yannelli, CEO of the [Kentucky Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#).

Kentuckians are asked to contact their legislators to urge them to prioritize the urgent requests of the coalition - solutions that demonstrate a commitment to serving the most vulnerable Kentuckians and are investments in strong communities that will continue to make the commonwealth a place where people want to work and live. "These stories should resonate with all of us. We call on our policymakers in Frankfort to work with us to find solutions to this crisis,"

said Betsy Johnson, President and Executive Director, [Kentucky Association of Health Care Facilities/Kentucky Center for Assisted Living](#).

We cannot afford to let the programs and services these organizations provide disappear. There's too much at stake.

[Click here for a video of the press conference.](#)

[Click here for a summary of the issues and the requested solutions.](#)

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