

Mental Health Workforce Coalition

FY 2011 Congressional Appropriations Request: Minority Fellowship Program

Provide \$7.5 million in the FY 2011 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education Appropriations Bill for the SAMHSA Minority Fellowship Program

The **Minority Fellowship Program (MFP)** was created in 1973 to help address the severe shortfall and reverse disparities in mental health services—and the quality of those services—to minority populations. The American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Nurses Association, Council on Social Work Education, and later, in 2006, the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists were invited to submit grants aimed at training ethnic minority mental health professionals and others dedicated to working with ethnic minority populations, thus forming what is today's Minority Fellowship Program.

The Program accomplishes its mission by training minority mental health professionals to provide culturally competent, accessible mental health and substance abuse services to diverse populations. This continues to be an important program as the mental health needs of ethnic minorities in the United States have been, and continue to be, grossly underserved. Minority populations in our country continue to grow—and their mental health needs must not be ignored.

Thank you for providing nearly \$5 million for the MFP in the FY 2010 appropriations bill. However, even with this additional support, the program struggles to keep up with the demands that are plaguing our health professions. For example:

- **The need for culturally competent, accessible mental health and substance abuse services for diverse populations is staggering.** Reports of the Surgeon General, *Mental Health: Culture, Race and Ethnicity*, and the *President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health* identified the existence of health disparities in the mental health system, with minorities receiving less mental health treatment and of a lower quality. A major recommendation in these reports was to increase funding for training minority mental health professionals and to train mental health professionals to become culturally competent.
- **Severe shortages of mental health professionals often arise in underserved areas due to the difficulty of recruitment and retention in the public sector.** Studies have shown that ethnic minority mental health professionals practice in underserved areas at a higher rate than non-minorities. Furthermore, a direct positive relationship exists between the numbers of ethnic minority mental health professionals and the utilization of needed services by ethnic minorities.
- **The mental health needs of ethnic minorities in the United States have been, and continue to be, grossly underserved.** Our nation's minority population is projected to account for 40% in 2025. The cultures of ethnic minorities alter the types of mental health services needed. Communities with ethnic providers have proven to meet these needs by encouraging and increasing access to treatment.

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