

California Behavioral Health Planning Council

Workforce and Employment Committee

Meeting Minutes
Interim Meeting – May 21, 2026

Committee Members present: Susie Baker, Dave Cortright, John Black, Janet Frank, Jessica Grove, Don Morrison, Maria Sierra, Bill Stewart, Arden Tucker

WET Steering Committee Members Present: Abby Alvarez, Kristin Dempsey, Shanti Ezrine, Randall Hagar, Sierra Smith, Karen Vicari, Carli Stelzer, Danny Thirakul, Chad Costello, Robert McCarron, Steve Sodergren, Theresa Comstock, Tara Gamboa-Eastman

Staff present: Ashneek Nanua, Simon Vue, Naomi Ramirez

Meeting commenced at 9:00 p.m.

Quorum Established: 9 out of 16 members

**Item #1 Committee Review and Development of Feedback for the Draft
2026-2030 Workforce Education and Training (WET) Five-Year
Plan**

Committee members and Workforce Education and Training (WET) Steering Committee members engaged in a focused discussion on the draft 2026-2030 WET Five-Year Plan. The purpose of the discussion was to identify the committee’s priority feedback and organize it clearly with the purpose of submitting a recommendation letter to the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) for the WET Plan public comment period through Friday, May 29, 2026.

Key points discussed included the following:

- There were concerns about the core competencies for Objective 1. Meeting participants suggested that the competencies be defined and differentiate between clinical competencies and competency-based skills to prevent role confusion. The committee and WET Steering Committee also provided suggestions for organizations that HCAI may reference as they investigate data and/or analysis for the core competencies.
- There is a need to train and equip individuals in graduate programs with knowledge and experience to work in the specialty behavioral health system. Committee and WET Steering Committee members emphasized that the WET Plan should support students with clinical placements and financial assistance to work in public safety net settings.

California Behavioral Health Planning Council

- A WET Steering Committee member stated that small organizations that are not county-contracted face more difficulties with their operations now and suggested that the WET Plan includes incubation programs to support these programs.
- Concerns were raised about recent federal guidance that impacts students who pursue behavioral health degrees and the potential of increased program costs and financial burden for students. It was recommended that HCAI explore alternative strategies to address training gaps outside of graduate program curricula such as continuing education.
- It was suggested to include a recommendation to offer on-demand mental health and addiction medicine video training to non-licensed frontline staff who work in behavioral health settings.
- Committee members strongly recommended the inclusion of language in the WET Plan to encourage organizations to raise salaries for their staff to support recruitment and retention efforts.
- It was recommended that HCAI explore options to support the non-licensed workforce with Medi-Cal billing via administrative assistants.
- There was a suggestion for HCAI to ensure that the WET Plan place emphasis to recruit individuals with lived experience with the public behavioral health system and individuals from black and brown communities. A committee member expressed that it is crucial to call out the disparities in the system and conduct outreach that successfully recruits individuals from these communities as early as primary education and high-school level students.
- It was recommended that the evaluation timeline for the Medi-Cal Behavioral Health Recruitment and Retention Program be shortened to allow HCAI to scale successes from the program with Behavioral Health Services Act dollars.
- It was suggested that HCAI provide updates to stakeholders after a year of implementation. Committee staff indicated that HCAI will provide updates at the WET Council Meetings hosted by HCAI and at future Workforce and Employment Committee Quarterly Meetings.

Action/Resolution

The committee staff will consolidate the submitted recommendations into a letter, which will be reviewed by the Council's Officer team prior to submission to HCAI.

Responsible for Action-Due Date

Ashneek Nanua – May 2026

Item #2 Public Comment

Tyler Rinde from the American Psychological Association (APA) stated that his association plans to send a letter on behalf of APA members to the Department of

California Behavioral Health Planning Council

Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) and to the California Behavioral Health Planning Council for their comments for the 2026-2030 Workforce Education and Training (WET) Five-Year Plan. He expressed concerns about the establishment of a licensed substance use disorder (SUD) provider type and that there needs to be more cross-training in SUD as well as ways to recruit licensed providers into the specialty SUD system, such as the Drug Medi-Cal Organized Delivery System (DMC-ODS). Mr. Rinde also expressed concern for the lack of recruitment and retention funding. He stated that is a modest movement to look at the outcomes and evaluate the program after one year of implementation and the funding should not have been zero dollars from the start. Mr. Rinde stated that APA has concerns about the core competencies in graduate school curriculum and that the competencies are set by national bodies so there is not much that can be done to change them. He stated that there should be more focus on clinical placements at practicums, internships, and postdoctoral work to train individuals.

Action/Resolution

Staff will incorporate the public's feedback into the committee's recommendation letter for the 2026-2030 WET Plan, as appropriate.

Responsible for Action-Due Date

Ashneek Nanua – May 2026

Item #3 Meeting Wrap Up and Next Steps

Staff discussed next steps for the committee's feedback process for the draft 2026-2030 Workforce Education and Training (WET) Five-Year Plan, which include the following:

- Staff will compile the committee's feedback into a recommendation letter and submit the letter to the Department of Health Care Access and Information (HCAI) by the public comment period deadline on Friday, May 29, 2026.
- Staff will share the committee's recommendation letters and HCAI's feedback on the recommendations at the June 2026 Quarterly Meeting.
- HCAI will present the updated 2026-2030 WET Plan to the full Council at the General Session Meeting scheduled for Friday, June 19, 2026. The Council will determine if the draft WET Plan will be approved.

Action/Resolution

Committee Staff will submit a recommendation letter to HCAI and provide updates at the committee's June 2026 Quarterly Meeting.

Responsible for Action-Due Date

Ashneek Nanua – June 2026