

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 5884

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As of January 20, 2022

**Title:** An act relating to establishing behavioral health support specialists.

**Brief Description:** Establishing behavioral health support specialists.

**Sponsors:** Senators Trudeau, Dhingra, Hasegawa, Kuderer, Lovick, Nguyen, Nobles, Saldaña and Wilson, C..

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Health & Long Term Care: 1/19/22 [w/oRec-BH].

Behavioral Health Subcommittee to Health & Long Term Care: 1/21/22.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Requires the Department of Health to partner with the University of Washington to develop rules for the certification for behavioral health support specialists by January 1, 2023.
- Defines behavioral health support specialists as paraprofessionals with at least a bachelor's degree level of education who practice in partnership with a licensed behavioral health professional who has behavioral health in their scope of practice.
- Requires the Health Care Authority and Office of the Insurance Commissioner to take actions that promote or require insurance coverage for the services of behavioral health support specialists.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SUBCOMMITTEE TO HEALTH & LONG TERM CARE

**Staff:** Kevin Black (786-7747)

**Background:** Professional Licensure at the Department of Health. The Department of

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

Health (DOH) licenses and certifies health care professionals in a variety of fields. Licensure or certification may entail the adoption of rules, verification of educational attainment and completion of supervised training, completion of a background check and verification of good character requirements, administration of a knowledge or practical skills examination, and collection of license or certification fees. The Uniform Disciplinary Act provides laws governing the conduct and discipline of license and certification holders, with DOH acting as the disciplinary authority.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Model. In 2008, the National Health Service in England (NHS) launched a program called Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) which, according to its website, has transformed the treatment of adult anxiety disorders and depression in England. The NHS maintains that IAPT "is widely recognized as the most ambitious programme of talking therapies in the world" with over 1 million persons accessing IAPT services per year. IAPT services are characterized by evidenced-based psychological therapies delivered by trained and accredited practitioners whose level of training is matched to the intensity and expected duration of the mental health problem. The model features routine outcome monitoring and regular outcomes-focused supervision.

In May 2021, it was announced that the Ballmer Group had provided \$3.7 million to the University of Washington Department of Psychiatry to develop a program to train bachelor's degree-level practitioners as behavioral health support specialists. The grant provides support for curriculum development, training, practicum oversight, and coordination with educational partners in four-year colleges across Washington State. This behavioral health support specialist program builds on ongoing research at the University of Washington into appropriate treatment roles for bachelor's level paraprofessionals, and is based on an adaptation of the IAPT model.

**Summary of Bill:** DOH must partner with the University of Washington Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences to develop rules for the certification of behavioral health support specialists, and for the accreditation of educational programs for behavioral health support specialists, by January 1, 2023. A behavioral health support specialist is defined as a paraprofessional trained to deliver low-intensity, evidence-based behavioral health interventions for adults with mild-to-moderate behavioral health conditions in ongoing partnership with a licensed health care provider whose scope of practice includes behavioral health, using a stepped care model. A behavioral health support specialist does not have within their scope of practice the ability to make diagnoses, but may track and monitor treatment response and outcomes using measurement-based care.

An educational program for a behavioral health support specialist must include a practicum component, and may be integrated into a bachelor's degree program or structured as a continuing education program. Rules adopted by DOH must be consistent with the IAPT model. Behavioral health support specialists must graduate from a bachelor's degree program, meet educational and practicum requirements, pass an examination, and maintain an ongoing partnership with a licensed health care provider whose scope of practice

includes behavioral health. DOH may establish license, certification, and examination fees for behavioral health support specialists. Behavioral health support specialists must be governed by the Uniform Disciplinary Act under the disciplinary authority of DOH.

The Health Care Authority must ensure that the services of behavioral health support specialists are covered under the state Medicaid program. By July 1, 2023, the Office of the Insurance Commissioner must make recommendations to health carriers regarding appropriate use of behavioral health support specialists, network adequacy for behavioral health support specialists, and steps to incorporate services of these professionals into commercial provider networks.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 17, 2022.

**Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members:** No.

**Effective Date:** Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.