What Does It Take and Why:
The Business Case and Beyond

Many of you may come to this toolkit understanding DEI&J work as critical to your foundation as behavioral health providers, already making and measuring progress in your DEI&J efforts. For some this work may seem urgent, or even overwhelming with no clear starting point, and for others, DEI&J work may be primarily part of a recruiting strategy your HR office is implementing. Each organization comes to this work from a unique place and with its own perspective and experience in addressing diversity, equity, inclusion and justice within your organization. As leaders, we often turn to the business case to build buy-in for new initiatives and justify associated costs, but research shows that the benefits of DEI&J work are often challenging to quantify in the short-term.

What we do know is that many organizations experience clear benefits of DEI&J efforts in recruiting, retention, persons-served experience and outcomes that all contribute in essential ways to the bottom line, but to realize these benefits takes a commitment of openness, time, and leadership. McKinsey's[1] 2020 report demonstrated that companies with ethnic and cultural diversity outperform their counterparts by 36% in profitability. That same report also cautioned that short-term gains were hard to measure, that half-hearted measures might not bring about the desired impact and that recruiting for diversity without investing in a more equitable, and inclusive workplace would not reap the benefits most leaders were looking for: retention of top talent, increased innovation, and better overall performance.

Today, community-based providers face a shrinking workforce and increasing demand for services. According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics[2] (BLS) employment of substance use and mental health counselors is projected to grow 23 percent between 2020 and 2030—faster than the average for all occupations. BLS projects that there will be approximately 41,000 openings for substance use, and mental health counselors each year, over that decade, resulting both from the need to replace workers exiting the field as well as an increasing number of individuals seeking access to care. The toll of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as justice reform efforts aimed at diverting people from correctional facilities and into the treatment services they need will likely contribute to increases in demand.

At the same time, a recent Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation report[3] on the behavioral health needs of residents of the Commonwealth in the COVID-19 Pandemic found that over a third of Massachusetts adults reported needing behavioral health care for themselves or a close relative during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the reported need among adults crossed all demographic and socioeconomic groups, the need was significantly higher among young adults, adults who identified their race or ethnicity as other than White, and adults with lower family incomes (at or below 300% FPL). Among the adults who reported needing behavioral health care for themselves, more than half never obtained those services or had difficulty getting services when they were needed. Affordability, accessibility, and stigma/confidentiality were all named as key barriers to care. Further, adults who reported needing but not trying to get behavioral health services

also tended to be younger (ages 19-39) and racially, ethnically, or socioeconomically marginalized.

Statewide research suggests that the lack of a behavioral health workforce that reflects the demographics of those who need care adversely impacts access, particularly for individuals who are racially, ethnically, and linguistically marginalized. Culturally adapted programs across the behavioral health treatment continuum appear to support increased service use and better outcomes among historically marginalized groups including people of color[4]. Latinos in particular are 11 times more likely to stay connected to culturally specific services than conventional treatment[5].

Over a third of Massachusetts adults reported needing behavioral health care

While providers seek to recruit a more diverse workforce to better meet the needs of persons in need of care, during the pandemic behavioral health providers have been faced with unprecedented turnover rates. It is estimated that employers spend approximately 30% of each departing employee's salary to hire and onboard new staff[6]. As of December 2021, more than 56,000 Massachusetts workers had left the labor market altogether, with no intention to return to seek employment. Workers leaving employment during the "Great Resignation" cite a range of reasons for leaving, from personal pressures related to care for children and aging parents, public health concerns,

and early retirements. Others cite work related pressures such as long hours, high exposure to COVID-19, lack of remote work and flexible work opportunities, and inequitable work environments. Despite overall reduction in unemployment rates, unemployment remained highest for Black and Latinx residents, most significantly affecting women of color. As before the pandemic, unemployment rates are higher for workers of color than they are for White workers. While Latinx unemployment in Massachusetts fell significantly in Q3 and Q4, it remains twice as high as the White unemployment rate (4 percent in Q4, 2021). Meanwhile, loss of workforce during the pandemic has not been evenly distributed across sectors; service and hospitality was hardest hit losing more than 60,000 workers, followed by education and health services, which lost more than 50,000 workers, or 6.1 percent of the total workforce.

Workers with disabilities also faced significant challenges in the COVID-19 pandemic. People with certain disabilities are more likely to have an underlying medical condition that put them at increased risk of severe illness from COVID-19[7]. These risks made some workers feel unsafe engaging in direct care/service work. Additionally, some disabilities make it more difficult for people to engage in necessary COVID-19 mitigation practices including social distancing, masking and heightened hand hygiene. Further, people living with disabilities are more likely to depend on public transit[8] which has been significantly disrupted during the pandemic. For members of the LGBTQIA+ community disproportionately impacted by HIV, COVID-19 presented a range of health and safety challenges for workers with gay men, and trans individuals being most deeply affected by job losses.

Recruiting and Retention Related to DEI&J Efforts

The same McKinsey[1] report (May 2020) that demonstrated that companies with ethnic and cultural diversity outperform their counterparts by 36% in profitability, also warned against the reduction of DEI&J efforts in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and predicted that people of color and other marginalized groups in the workforce would face a disproportionate impact, and that the pandemic was likely to increase existing exclusive behaviors and unconscious biases and undermine inclusion. From unequal sharing of childcare and homeschooling responsibilities, to unequal availability of home workspace and access to broadband the McKinsey[1] report identified early in 2020 the devastating impact COVID-19 would have on women, and women of color in particular. As we introduce this toolkit, DEI&J work has never been more important as we seek to heal a workforce ravaged by the pandemic. For companies struggling to recruit and retain employees in the face of the Great Resignation, transparency and accountability is critical[9].

Research aimed at understanding what makes DEI&J efforts work, including the McKinsey report, demonstrate that companies that show a commitment to social responsibility could hold the key to employee satisfaction. According to one report, "if companies' stated values don't match their actions, they risk being perceived as hypocritical, deceptive, and out of step with the true employee experience." When mission is the primary driver for recruitment and retention rather than pay, the way people work is essential, and how they are valued at work matters in creating a culture where all employees and clients are of indiscriminate importance.

Ultimately, WETC's approach to equity work is one that encourages leaders to embrace accountability—evaluating organizational strategy and operations through an equity lens allowing each organization to make its own business case. Regardless of how you enter this work or become acquainted with this toolkit there are strategies, and resources here that can benefit your organization and help you to begin a vital learning process.

However, recently we have learned that a more thorough approach is required to ensure a workforce that can sustain, navigate, and thrive in the pressures, racial trauma, and other inequities of the daily grind of nonprofit work.

Companies with ethnic and cultural diversity outperform their counterparts by 36% in profitability

The commitment of the leaders to the DEI&J initiative is the key to its success. A leader must undertake all the work of DEI&J with clarity, dedication, and accountability to meet the goals set. If this commitment is public and communicated within the organization and within its community, buy-in from traditionally uninvolved stakeholders will increase. Participation from staff in self-assessments, self-education or attendance at DEI&J meetings will increase. Culture will grow and move if people feel their ideas, thoughts and experiences matter and will be factored into change making.

The next most vital investment needed after your own level of commitment is investing in the person responsible for coordinating this change. The best way to show commitment to DEI&J is to hire and support a person who will ensure the plan is executed.

We believe strongly all organizations need to have a leadership position dedicated to DEI&J. The Chief Diversity & Equity Officer will need to be a part of the leadership team and should represent marginalized groups that are part of the employee and client community. This position cannot be just a symbolic hire – they must have real understanding of

antiracism, systemic oppression, racial justice, LGBTQIA+ rights, disability rights and be able to reach people, listen to people and direct a clear forward path. This person will need to be able to lead, support, stay with and invigorate systemic change. This role will have a cost and that cost will re-pay itself in lowered turnover rates, in commitment to equity culture and to remarkable goals met when a culture focuses on understanding missed opportunities of the past and clear future. You can find resources on job descriptions for this role here: www.thebalancecareers.com/what-does-a-chief-diversity-officer-do-5212087.

We then recommend organizations support that position through a Leader & Builder approach – there is no question that leaders set the tone of the culture but focusing purely on leaders for change ignores other critical social dynamics in your organization. Often you can miss the way your organization already has some of who and what it wants to become.

• **Champions** – There are always a passionate group of enthusiasts who are your change cheerleaders. Ensure this energy is a catalyst for change. We have asked these folks

to lead courageous conversations and be movers and shakers in their programs.

• **Change Agents** – Once you are intent upon the change to DEI&J you will have people who already demonstrate these behaviors in middle management roles – find them and give them a voice. Some will be wanting to speak and others may be more silent. Both have skills to influence. Let them share the lessons learned and be leaders that offer grounding when things get difficult.

• **Impactors** – Outside of your formal leadership team there is a huge power base – the informal dynamic of influence, communication and "get it factor" of your organization. These people in informal roles are dedicated influencers in what they say and what they do and this flows out to others. Find ways to engage them and leverage them to help you in the change. These are the extroverts who are well known and deep in social capital, or the introverts who are deep listeners. Make sure they are on board and want to help you transform and transcend.

With this commitment, leaders, influencers, supports, and resources in place, you are ready to get to work.

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