

### Quick Facts

- The median age of agency staff is 48.
- 63% of treatment staff are in recovery.
- The greatest perceived barrier to improved treatment services are limited budgets for staff training.

### CONTENTS

Workforce Demographics	2
Professional Experience and Compensation	2
Educational Background	3
Needs and Barriers	3
Highlights	4



## California's Substance Abuse Workforce

### Background and Overview

According to estimates from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, approximately 8.5% of the population of California, representing more than 3 million individuals, are in need of treatment for alcohol abuse or illicit drug use but do not receive it.

One of the main factors contributing to the treatment gap is the severe shortage of trained and credentialed substance abuse counselors. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, California employs 2.54 substance abuse counselors per 10,000 people—slightly more than the national average of 2.2 substance abuse counselors per 10,000 people. The increasing emphasis by state licensing entities and credentialing bodies on requirements for individuals working as substance abuse counselors may exacerbate this problem due to a shortage of educational programs available at community colleges and universities to provide specialized programming and coursework on substance abuse treatment. Other challenges facing the substance abuse workforce include the poor working conditions in many agencies, the lack of competitive salaries and opportunities for advancement, and the heavy caseloads and paperwork requirements in the field.

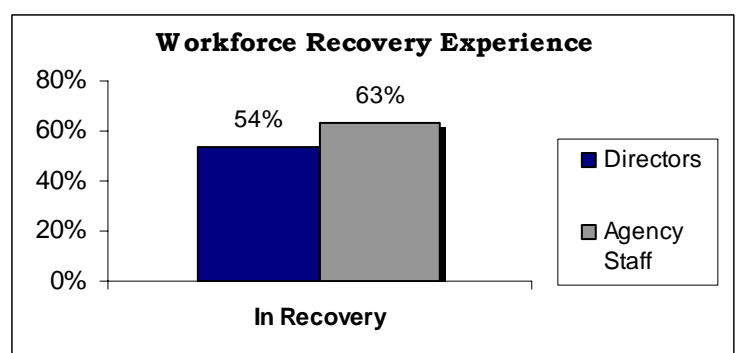
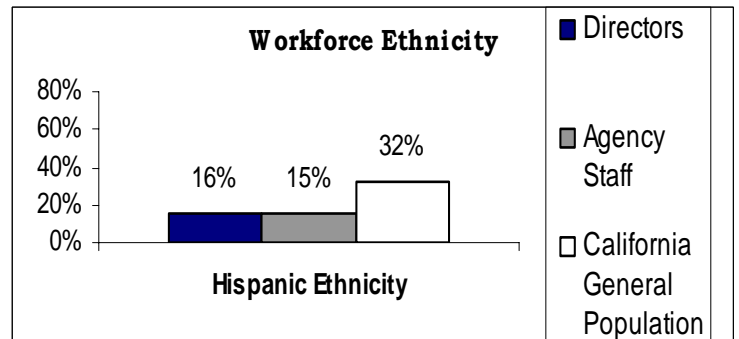
In an effort to better understand the conditions and the needs of the Substance Abuse Treatment Workforce in California, the Pacific Southwest Addiction Technology Transfer Center (PSATTC) conducted a survey of both substance abuse counselors and their supervisors. The survey was designed to provide the PSATTC with information on the background of the workforce, their working conditions, training and technical assistance needs, and information regarding factors associated with their job tenure and turnover.

This report provides a summary of the results for the California sample. A list of agencies in the region was compiled from the SAMHSA Treatment Locator Database and a sample of 190 California agencies were randomly selected for participation. Letters were sent to agency directors in advance of the survey and surveys were mailed two weeks later to agency directors and staff, followed by reminder letters to non-responding agencies. The response rate among directors was 19 percent.

For more information about the project, contact the Pacific Southwest Addiction Technology Transfer Center.

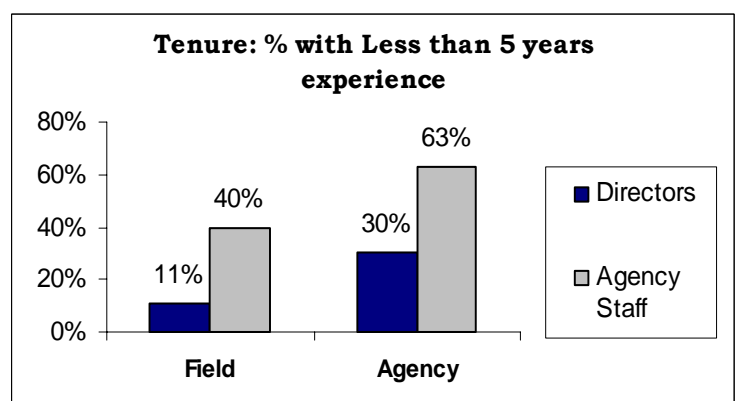
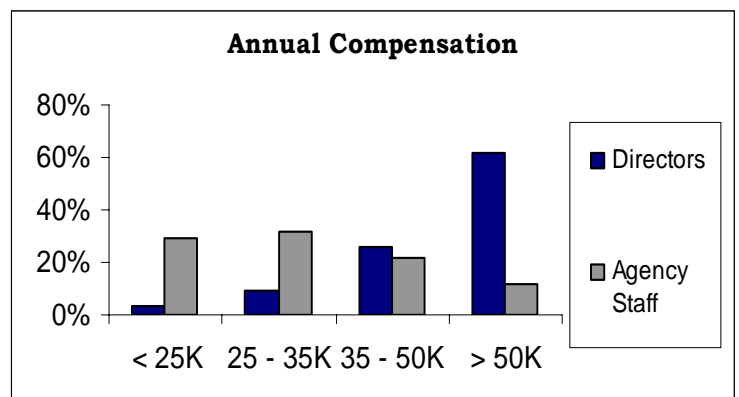
## Who is in the California Substance Abuse Workforce?

- 89 percent of directors and over 70 percent of staff are over 40 years old. The median age of substance abuse counselors is 48 (compared to a median age of 40 for the total U.S. workforce).
- Women predominate the substance abuse treatment workforce of California at both the direct care level (60% of all respondents) and administration (63%).
- Persons of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are significantly under-represented in the workforce. This disparity poses challenges for substance abuse agencies in the provision of culturally competent treatment for Hispanic and Latino clients.
- A significant proportion of the substance abuse treatment workforce is in recovery. *See graphic.*



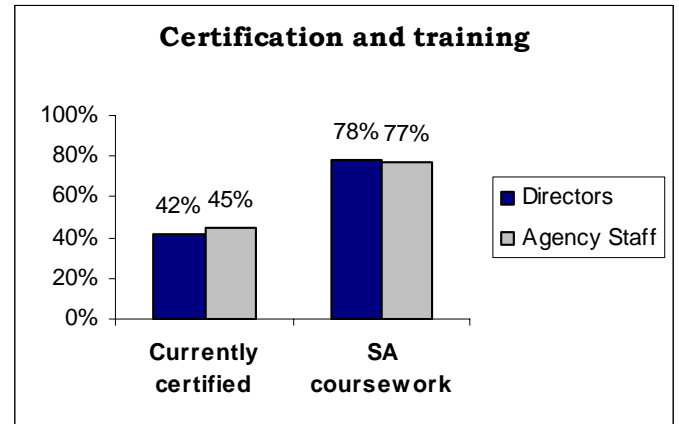
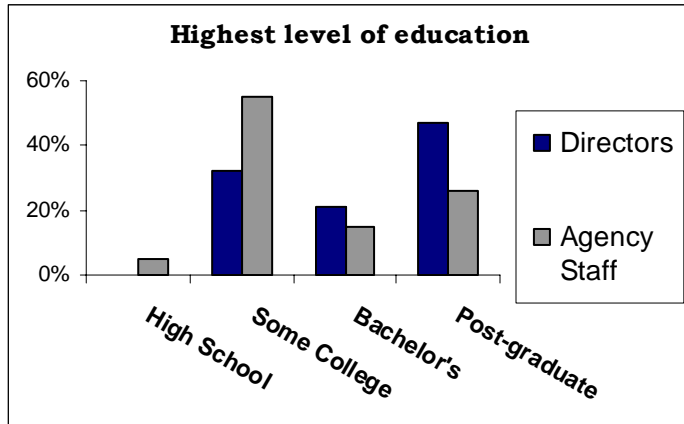
## Professional Experience and Compensation

- Compared to the other states in the region, compensation for agency directors is higher than for the CA workforce in general, while compensation for agency staff is in the lower to middle range despite their higher education attainment.
- More than 1/3 of all respondents do not receive retirement contributions while nearly 10% do not receive health insurance benefits.
- Substance abuse treatment is a second career for nearly half (47%) of both direct care and administrative personnel.
- People in the substance abuse field tend to stay in the field, but change place of employment and position frequently. Only 11% of directors and 40% of staff have been in the substance abuse field less than five years, while 30% of directors and 63% of staff have been with their current agency for less than 5 years.
- About 13% of agency staff say it is very likely that they will leave their place of employment within the next two years, but only about 8% say it is likely that they will leave the field.



## Educational and Training Background of the Workforce

- The California substance abuse workforce is relatively educated with over 2/3 of all agency directors in reported having at least a Bachelor's degree, while 44% of direct care staff also reported at least a Bachelor's degree level of educational preparation.
- Over three-quarters of directors and staff have received specialized substance abuse training, but less than half of agency staff are currently certified.



## Educational Needs & Barriers of the Workforce

- Directors are more concerned that trainings may take away staff time for service delivery than are staff. Over half of directors and staff think that budget limitations for conference attendance is a significant barrier. Neither group thinks that the poor quality of trainers is a significant barrier.
- Directors place a greater importance on managing clinical, financial and outcome data. Staff place a greater importance on documenting service needs. Directors are more concerned with recruiting qualified staff, while staff are more concerned with retaining qualified staff.
- According to both agency directors and agency staff the most significant perceived barriers to improving treatment services are: (1) budgets that do not allow for staff training (51%), (2) workload pressures that limit motivation for training (32%), (3) limited resources for adoption of new treatments (29%), (4) limited training interests of staff (29%), and (5) training activities take too much time (24%).
- Off-site workshops and on-site live training are the two most commonly utilized forms of training.
- Both agency directors and staff prefer live training (on-site or off-site) to other methods. Over 90% identify off-site workshops as a preferred approach and over 80% cite on-site training as a preferred approach. Only a third report that videotape or DVD is a preferred approach, less than a quarter prefer Internet and web-based approaches, and less than 10% prefer telemedicine or satellite training.

Top Counseling Staff Needs	
Improving Client Problem Solving Skills	56%
Improving Clients' Cognitive Focus During Group Counseling	52%
Improving Client Thinking Skills	50%
Providing Trauma Informed or Trauma sensitive services	48%
Providing Clients with Integrated Treatment Services	46%
Top Agency Technical Assistance Needs	
Accessing Effective Training Programs and Resources	54%
Selecting New Treatments and Strategies for Staff Training	51%
Obtaining Information to Document	49%
Evaluating and Tracking Client Performance Over Time	46%
Recruiting Qualified Staff	45%

**Survey Highlights**

- The California substance abuse workforce is significantly older than the U.S. workforce as a whole.
- Hispanics and Latinos are under-represented in the California substance abuse workforce.
- Over half of California substance abuse counselors are in recovery.
- There is significant variability of general educational levels in the California substance abuse workforce. A third of agency directors and staff have not completed a bachelors degree, while over 50 percent of directors and over 30 percent of staff have completed a post-graduate degree.
- Over three-quarters of the workforce has had some specialized training in substance abuse, but less than half of staff are currently certified.
- The majority of the substance abuse workforce enters the field due to previous experience or personal interest.
- Directors are paid considerably more than staff. Twelve percent of directors but more than half of staff earn less than \$35,000 annually.
- One-fifth of counselors intend to leave their place of employment within the next two years.
- Live training is the most commonly utilized form of training and most preferred.
- The greatest agency need is accessing effective training programs and resources.
- The greatest training need is improving client participation in treatment.
- The biggest barrier to improving treatment is that budgets do not allow staff to attend training.

For more information,  
visit our website at:

<http://www.psattc.org>

UCLA Integrated Substance Abuse Programs  
1640 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Ste. 200  
Los Angeles, CA 90025