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WKU announces \$2 million grant award for boosting mental health care capacity

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Western Kentucky University announced Thursday that it will use nearly \$2 million in federal grant funding to help boost the region's workforce of mental health professionals, including by expanding opportunities for student internships over the next four years, along with training and professional development for faculty.

Corinne Murphy, dean of WKU's College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, said the federal grant from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration comes at a pivotal time in the wake of the receding coronavirus pandemic.

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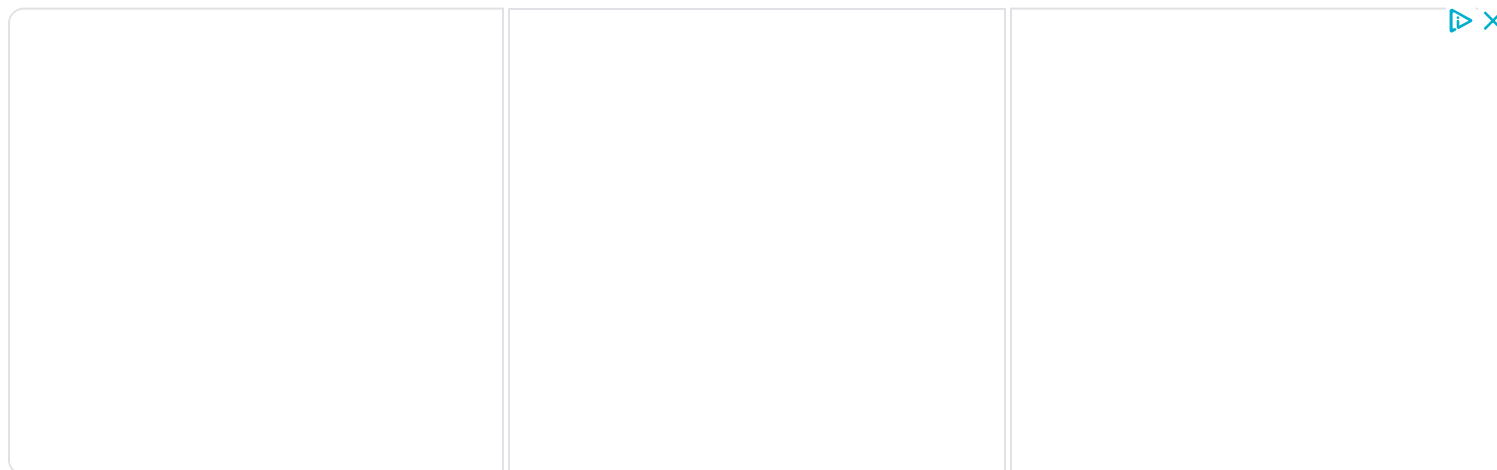
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Recovering from the fallout wrought by the pandemic will be a central focus of counselors in the years ahead, she said in a news release.

Murphy called the grant an “enormous benefit for WKU, the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences and the Department of Counseling and Student Affairs,” and also a boon for the region.

“We are now entering an era in which our counseling workforce will serve people managing the unknown impacts of the pandemic,” Murphy said. “The grant provides \$10,000 stipends for up to 29 interns each year for the next four years, site supervisor stipends, as well as funds for interprofessional training and faculty professional development largely focused on serving the needs of our rural communities. This funding will significantly and positively impact our ability to recruit, retain and support our students as they grow into counseling professionals.”



WKU is among 56 grant recipients as part of the Behavioral Health Workforce and Education Training Program for Professionals. The broader, \$22 million project aims to

“increase the supply of behavioral health professionals while also improving distribution of a quality behavioral health workforce and thereby increasing access to behavioral health services.”

The federal program lists its special focus as building “knowledge and understanding of children, adolescents and transitional-aged youth at risk for behavioral health disorders.”

Beginning July 1, WKU will receive \$480,000 a year, the release said.

Cheryl Pence, the counseling and student affairs professor who is personally overseeing the grant project, believes it will go a long way in boosting the region’s capacity for counseling services.

“Some of our most pressing community needs include issues around college and career readiness, trauma, abuse and addictions in a rural and partially rural region with a culturally diverse population where more than one quarter of the residents are under the age of 18,” she said in the release.

“There is a need to expand the number of trainees who graduate from our counseling programs and serve our region as well as provide quality professional training in evidence-based practices.”

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