

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1349

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**As Passed House:**  
March 1, 2019

**Title:** An act relating to clarifying the definition of a geriatric behavioral health worker for individuals with a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, behavioral health, or other related areas.

**Brief Description:** Clarifying the definition of a geriatric behavioral health worker for individuals with a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, behavioral health, or other related areas.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Schmick, Cody, Jinkins, Doglio and Leavitt.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Health Care & Wellness: 1/29/19, 2/6/19 [DP].

**Floor Activity:**

Passed House: 3/1/19, 95-0.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Amends the definition of "geriatric behavioral health worker" to include a person who has a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, behavioral health, or other related area, in addition to a person who has received specialized training devoted to mental illness and treatment of older adults.
- Allows a geriatric behavioral health worker who has a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, behavioral health, or related areas to be included in a nursing home's minimum staffing requirements.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE & WELLNESS

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 15 members: Representatives Cody, Chair; Macri, Vice Chair; Schmick, Ranking Minority Member; Caldier, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Davis, DeBolt, Harris, Jinkins, Maycumber, Riccelli, Robinson, Stonier, Thai and Tharinger.

**Staff:** Kim Weidenaar (786-7120).

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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 a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Background:**

Nursing homes must meet certain staffing level requirements. The standards require that nursing homes maintain levels of direct care staff that are adequate to provide at least 3.4 hours of direct care per resident per day. Nursing homes may include geriatric behavioral health workers when calculating their minimum staffing requirements. "Geriatric behavioral health worker" is defined as a person who has received specialized training devoted to mental illness and treatment of older adults.

The Department of Social and Health Services must establish a rule creating an exception allowing geriatric behavioral health workers to be recognized in the minimum staffing requirements as part of the direct care service delivery to individuals who have a behavioral health condition. To qualify for the exception, the geriatric behavioral health worker must have advanced practical knowledge in aging, disability, mental illness, Alzheimer's disease, and developmental disabilities, and: (1) have at least three years of experience caring for persons with chronic mental health issues, dementia, or intellectual and developmental disabilities in a long-term care or behavioral health setting; or (2) have successfully completed a facility-based behavioral health curriculum.

If a geriatric behavioral health worker holds less than a master's degree in social work, the worker must be directly supervised by an employee who has a master's degree in social work or a registered nurse.

The recognition of hours worked by geriatric behavioral health workers as counting toward minimum staffing requirements is limited to total hours as adjusted by the proportion of resident days of clients at the nursing home with a behavioral health condition.

**Summary of Bill:**

The definition of "geriatric behavioral health worker" is amended to be a person with a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, behavioral health, or other related areas, or a person who has received specialized training devoted to mental illness and treatment of older adults.

To qualify for the exception allowing a geriatric behavioral health worker to be recognized in the minimum staffing requirements as part of the direct care service delivery to individuals who have a behavioral health condition, the worker must:

- have a bachelor's or master's degree in social work, behavioral health, or other related area; or
- have at least three years of experience caring for persons with chronic mental health issues, dementia, or intellectual and developmental disabilities in a long-term care or behavioral health setting; or
- have successfully completed a facility-based behavioral health curriculum.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) Two years ago the definition of "geriatric behavioral health care worker" was someone who had a bachelor's or master's degree in social work or a related field. The Legislature meant to add a third category to allow someone to become a geriatric behavioral health care worker without a degree if that person completed a 30 hour training program in the facility. Unfortunately, during the legislative process the reference to a bachelor's or master's degree was deleted from the bill, and so the 30 hour training requirement applied to everyone. This bill is trying to go back to the standard that was there two years ago by reinstating the reference to bachelor's or master's degree while keeping the third group, those who complete the training.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Schmick, prime sponsor; and David Knutson, Washington Health Care Association.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.