

Mental Health Professional Shortage Designation Tool: Helping Los Angeles County Obtain Quality Mental Health Professionals in High Need Areas

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INTRODUCTION

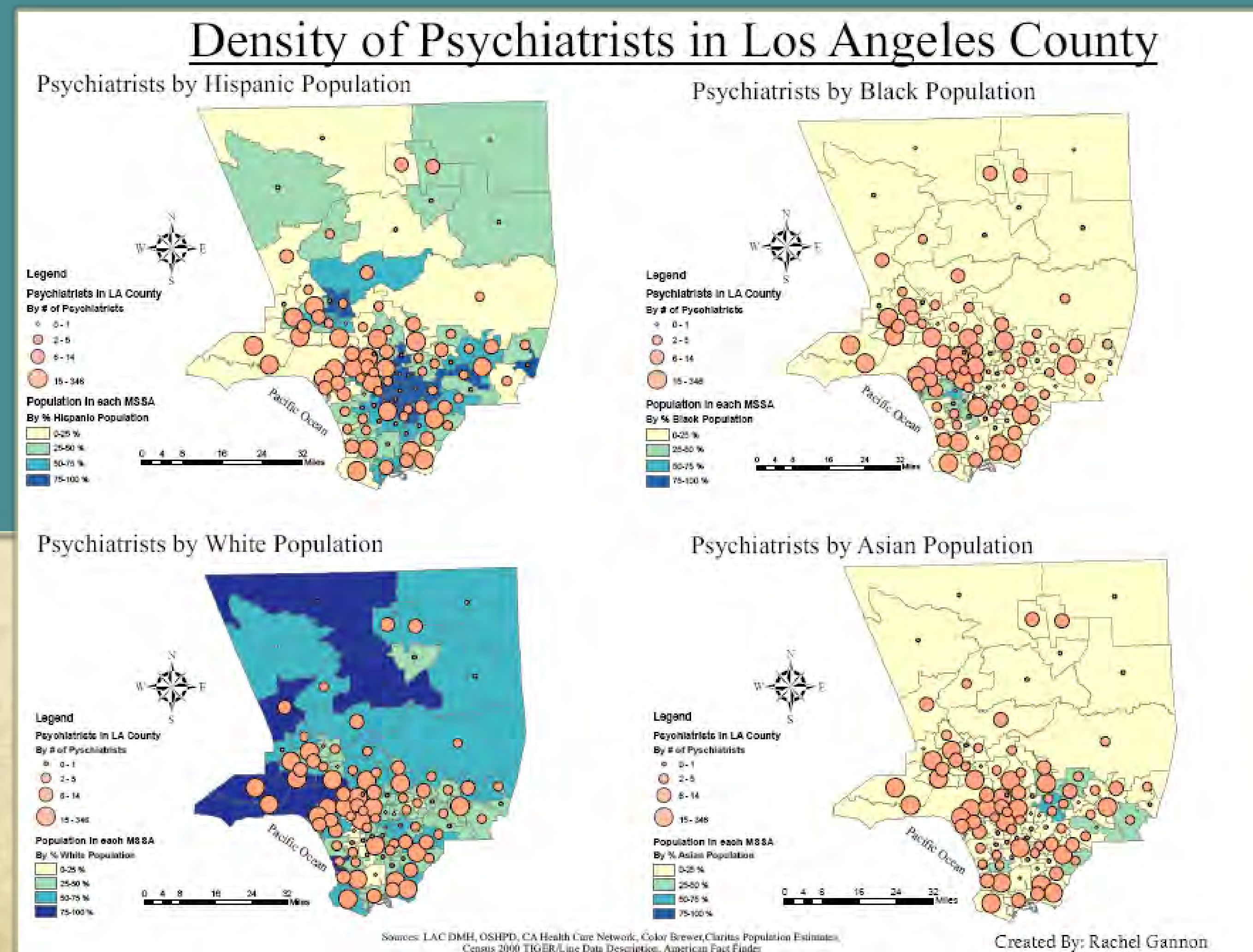
The U.S. Surgeon General's 2001 report discovered there are disparities in accessing medical, dental and mental health resources throughout the country (DHHS, 2001). The report found that in areas with large percentages of persons of color availability and access to these health services were extremely scarce. Specifically, minority populations living in poverty lack local mental health services. The report ascertained that minorities do not have more severe or more of a prevalent of mental illness than White populations, but minorities receive less care and less quality of care than their White counterparts. To address this problem, the State of California and the United States Federal Health and Human Services Department have developed loan repayment programs in order to attract mental health professionals to these areas of need: the State Loan Forgiveness and National Health Services Corp Loan Forgiveness Programs. The programs repay mental health professionals' student loans if they agree to work in Mental Health Professional Shortage Designated Areas (MHPSAs) upon graduation.

BACKGROUND MHPSA

The areas involved in the MHPSA designated process are called Medical Study Service Areas (MSSAs). MSSAs are determined by population and Los Angeles County (LAC) has 100 of them. Surveys are completed by the psychiatrists* (who provide services in the MSSA) which are then submitted to the state/federal programs for review. Once the MSSA can prove that it is an area of mental health need (by measuring disparities in service through surveys and analyzing demographic data), the MSSA can be awarded an MHPSA designation. The Workforce, Education and Training (WET) division in the LAC Department of Mental Health (DMH) is currently involved in helping agencies apply for this designation and loan repayment programs.

Shortages of Psychiatrists in Los Angeles County

This map shows the density of psychiatrists in LAC in relation to four racial/ethnic groups: Hispanic, Black, White and Asian. Psychiatrists are most populous in MSSAs with large White populations. Almost half of the MSSAs in LAC are 50% or more Hispanic where psychiatrists are especially scarce. Nine of these MSSAs have six or fewer psychiatrists. Only one of 16 most heavily populated Hispanic MSSAs has more than six psychiatrists. The scarcity of psychiatrists in MSSAs with non-White populations shows that people of color cannot receive mental health services where they live and have to travel farther for service than their White counterparts.



Note: Psychiatrists are surveyed and not all mental health professionals because of the large size and population of Los Angeles County. More rural and smaller populated counties must survey all mental health professionals. If any MSSA is designated MHPSA in Los Angeles County by surveying psychiatrists only, all clinically licensed mental health professionals (Psychologists, MFTs, and Social Workers) are still eligible for to apply for the loan repayment program at their approved site.

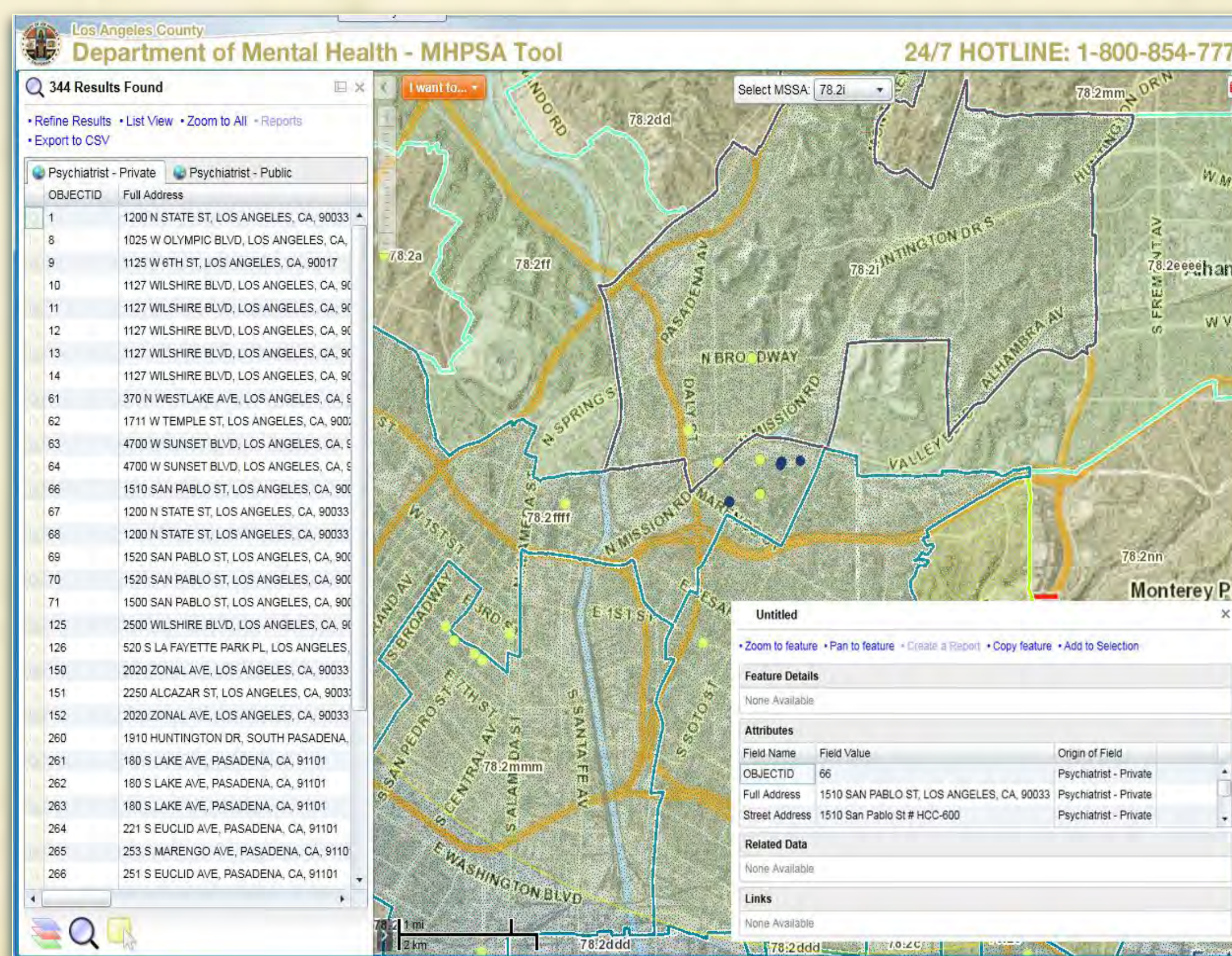
POLICY QUESTION

How can Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health help identify areas of need and attract highly qualified mental health professionals?

MHPSA web-based application

Solution: <http://ogis3.lacounty.gov/mhpsa/00assess.html?view=LACountyMSSA>

The web-based MHPSA application tool was developed with the Mental Health Services Act Data Team from DMH, Latitude Services and myself. This ESRI-based, geo-cortex technology tool allows individual agencies to select their MSSA and export psychiatrist information to Excel files (psychiatrist name, address and telephone number). The tool also has a feature to select individual psychiatrists to access their contact information with the click of the mouse. The tool will be expanded to include agencies that have received the designation and the time frame the designation is valid.



CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATION

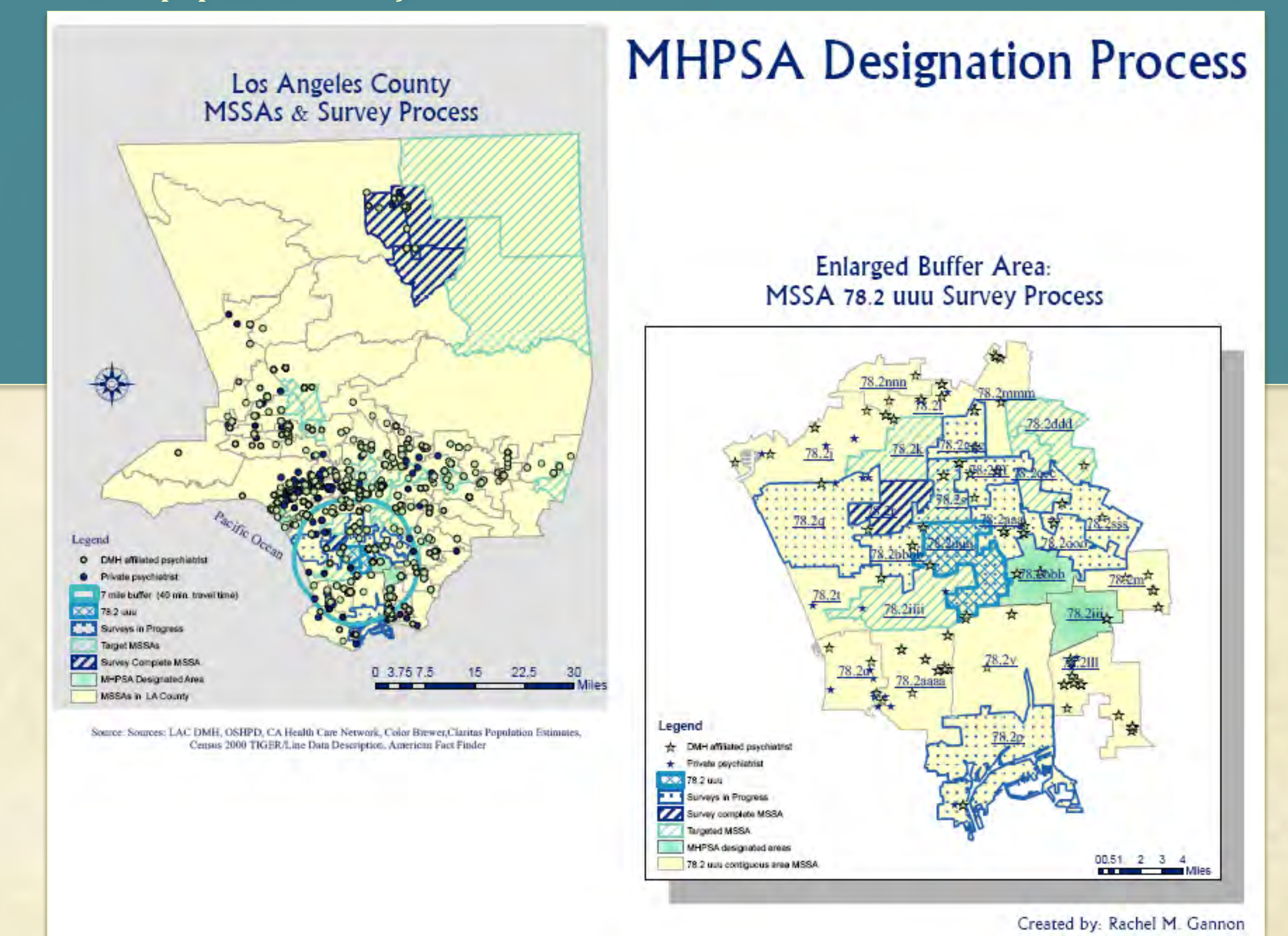
The maps have explored the issue of disparity of mental health services in populations of color and poverty and have identified areas that are underserved. These maps help providers identify whether or not they qualify as a part of educational loan repayment programs for mental health professionals. In particular, the web-based GIS application offers a solution to the problem by helping agencies to qualify for designation for federal and state loan repayment programs and it increases the number qualified mental health professionals. The application can assist LAC DMH's future multi-million dollar WET funding and mental health professional recruitment. The GIS tool can also help to drive planning and implementation of future agency placement to address unmet needs throughout Los Angeles County.

REFERENCE

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2001). *Mental Health: Culture, Race, and Ethnicity—A Supplement to Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.

Organizational Surveying Strategy of MSSAs

This map shows the progress of the surveys. An agency must survey every psychiatrist in their agency, all agencies in their MSSA, and all psychiatrists in a 7-mile radius (denotes 40 minute travel time) as part of the MHPSA application. This map shows the location of all private and DMH-affiliated psychiatrists in LA County. One can see the status of each MSSA (i.e. which MSSAs have been surveyed, are actively completing surveys, and have received the MHPSA designation). These different statuses are colored, shaded and labeled separately. The map also includes mathematical formulas to help determine which MSSAs should be surveyed because they have an easier chance at designation. There are 18 MSSAs that meet this criteria (30% + population living below the Federal Poverty Line & 1:20,000 psychiatrist to population ratio).



Asian Language Disparities in the Delivery of Mental Health Services

Another important factor in mental health services is language use of the mental health provider. This map below examines mental health services in seven of the most Asian populated MSSAs in LA County. It lists agencies that may want to hire mental health professionals who speak Asian Languages since only 11 of 37 agencies in these areas provide some type of Asian language support. A chart is also included that lists specific Asian languages spoken by mental health agencies in the largely populated Asian MSSAs. The most common languages spoken are Mandarin, Japanese and Korean. This map can assist LAC DMH to identify the specific needs of each MSSA by using mental health Cultural Competency policies. Specifically, this map can help place qualified mental health professionals who provide services in the spoken languages of the area. Consumer utilization of services and quality of care may increase when language services are provided.

