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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bushnell Responds to the Growing Mental Health Crisis in Lane County

Oregon Health Authority awards grant to Bushnell University for students studying clinical mental health counseling

Eugene, OR — Bushnell University is pleased to announce the receipt of an \$838,500 grant from the Oregon Health Authority (OHA). The grant is aimed at bolstering the capacity and diversity of the state's mental health workforce. Selected full-time students enrolled in Bushnell's [Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling \(CMHC\) program](#) will receive annual tuition assistance of up to \$15,000, along with stipends of up to \$1,500, over a two-year grant period.

As part of the larger [Behavioral Health Workforce Initiative](#), which received \$80 million from the Oregon legislature, Bushnell University stands out as one of eight higher education institutions chosen to receive a portion of the \$10.1 million earmarked for tuition assistance. This grant will support the University's emphasis on advancing mental health education and making a positive impact on the community.

"This generous grant from the OHA allows us to break down financial barriers that often prevent students from pursuing a graduate degree," shared Mindi Barta, Interim Program Director & Assistant Professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling. "By providing tuition assistance and stipends, we open the door for more students to receive comprehensive training and preparation to serve diverse communities with empathy and clinical expertise. Our goal is to graduate counselors who reflect the populations they serve. With the OHA's support, we will continue working to meet the growing need for licensed mental health professionals statewide."

Dr. Karla Larson, Dean of the College of Health Professions at Bushnell University, spoke to Bushnell's preparation of mental health providers who "address the social determinants of health which get at the deep-rooted inequities of many mental health clients. With the dual growing mental health crises of increasingly diverse mental health clients and decreasing numbers of providers, we are called to serve our community by educating excellent diverse clinicians."

The grant directly addresses key challenges highlighted in a [Behavioral Health Workforce Report released by Oregon Health & Science University in 2022](#), including projected shortages of mental healthcare providers and the need for increased diversity in the

profession. The report notes that in 2019 one in five adults had a mental illness. The rate for young adults was even higher, at almost one in three. Yet despite the growing need for mental health counselors, the workforce has shrunk since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, Lane County is designated by the State of Oregon as a Healthcare Professionals Shortage Area (HPSA) for Behavioral Health. Bushnell's College of Health Professions is committed to meeting this shortage and responding to the growing demand for mental health providers in our local community.

As a testament to Bushnell's ongoing commitment to mental health education, 135 future mental health counselors are currently enrolled in the Clinical Mental Health Counselor master's program with 30 license-eligible clinical mental health counselors graduating this semester. The winter commencement ceremony is scheduled for Friday, December 15 in the Morse Center.

In addition to academic achievements, Bushnell students are actively involved in serving the community, providing mental health treatment to those who need it the most. Through partnerships with organizations such as the Eugene Mission, CAFA, and Serenity Lane, Bushnell students are making a positive impact by addressing the mental health needs of diverse populations.

The grant from OHA represents a critical step towards building a resilient, diverse, and well-equipped mental health workforce that can effectively respond to the challenges faced by the community. Bushnell University is fostering a generation of mental health professionals who are not only academically prepared but also dedicated to making a meaningful difference in the lives of those they serve.

About Bushnell University

Founded in 1895 Bushnell University helps students discover and answer God's call on their lives. Devoted to offering a Christ-centered environment, Bushnell encourages students to grow in wisdom, informed by faith, leading to lives of service. Accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, the University was founded by pastor-educator Eugene C. Sanderson and pioneer businessman and church leader James A. Bushnell.

Bushnell is the largest private university in Eugene's vibrant University District. The University offers bachelor's and master's degrees for undergraduate and graduate studies through on campus, online, and hybrid course formats. More information about the University is available at www.bushnell.edu.

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