

## Kaiser Permanente Names Director of Mental Health Scholars Programs

**Dan Gizzo, PhD, will launch a new academic program focused on mental health careers, increasing the pipeline for new therapists statewide.**

Dan Gizzo, PhD, a clinical psychologist, is the new director of the Mental Health Scholars Programs, an unprecedented initiative for Kaiser Permanente that will enable employees spanning the state of California to earn advanced degrees in mental health professions.

With the current national shortage of mental health professionals expected to worsen in the coming years, and as the demand for mental health services continues to grow, Kaiser Permanente is creating the Mental Health Scholars Programs as part of its commitment to improving access to mental health care for all who need it.

This first year, Dr. Gizzo will set up partnerships with 2 to 3 academic programs where Kaiser Permanente employees will be able to earn advanced degrees in counseling, social work, or psychology with their tuition subsidized by Kaiser Permanente. He'll develop the structure for recruiting the students within Kaiser Permanente and will be responsible for connecting Mental Health Scholars to the organization's existing mental health training programs.

"We want to target participants who are engaged and enthusiastic about becoming mental health professionals," he said. "This program has the potential to make a significant impact on mental health care at Kaiser Permanente."

### Bringing Broad Experience

Dr. Gizzo brings to his new role more than 16 years at Kaiser Permanente, recently as director of training with the Department of Psychiatry & Addiction Medicine in the San Diego Medical Center.

He discovered his field while volunteering with disadvantaged children in New York, and went on to provide therapy to children and families.

"I've never been bored. Psychology offers an immense variety of interactions, work roles, and new challenges," he said. "Right now, we are at an interesting point nationally in decreasing stigma. There is a fair amount of attention being paid to mental health and there is much work to do to meet the demand for services."

As a specialist in child and adolescent psychology and pediatric neuropsychology, Dr. Gizzo has found great variety — from working with children who have Tourette's Syndrome to co-leading labor-management workgroups.

Experience specifically preparing him for his new role includes leading the American Psychological Association accredited doctoral internship program in clinical psychology in San Diego, developing trainings for the feedback-informed care model at Kaiser Permanente, and training interns and psychologists in areas including behavior modification, post-concussion syndrome in youth, evidence-based treatments with children, and more.

### Inspired by Nurse Scholars

The first participants enter the Mental Health Scholars Programs in fall 2020. Over time, the program is expected to enroll up to 1,000 students preparing for careers as therapists and in other mental health professions.

“There will be some prerequisites for participating, but we’ll have a diversified recruitment plan welcoming employees who are looking for ways to expand their careers in this field,” said Dr. Gizzo, who works from offices in Northern and Southern California.

While the program is brand-new, he explained that it’s based on Kaiser Permanente’s [Nurse Scholars Academy](#). “We don’t want to recreate the wheel. Rather, we want to build upon Nurse Scholars’ many successes and apply the learnings to our work.”

Nurse Scholars launched in winter 2015 with a Kaiser Permanente sponsored Bachelor of Science in Nursing program with Samuel Merritt University. Today it also offers fellowship, leadership, master’s, and doctorate programs.

The Nurse Scholars Academy has supported 657 participating employees in earning degrees.

For Dr. Gizzo, launching the Mental Health Scholars Programs means affecting widespread, positive change within his field.

“I am looking forward to helping Kaiser Permanente employees interested in mental health careers make their dreams a reality. At the same time that we will be transforming our mental health workforce, we will be able to make a difference to our members seeking care in our system — increasing access and the opportunity to get the care they need.”