

From the Archives



**MENTAL HEALTH
COLORADO**

**Mental Health
Awareness Month
2024**

Across history, the discourse regarding mental health has evolved significantly, yet there remains much ground to cover. Since our establishment, Mental Health Colorado has been at the forefront of mental health advocacy, striving to break down barriers, promote education and compassion, and provide support to those in need.

Click on each year to view the original newspaper article on the Colorado Historic Newspaper Collection website.

1950S

1953: Mental Health Colorado, originally called the Colorado Association for Mental Health, is founded. Over the next two decades, the Association will lead a coalition of Colorado groups and local chapters of the association in advocating for mental health.

1953: Shortly after Mental Health Colorado's inception The Rocky Mountain News reports on the state of Colorado mental health laws, describing them as "cumbersome, expensive, and heartless...quaint and obsolete". Mental Health Colorado will be instrumental in updating the state's approach to mental health – work we continue to do today!

1954: Milkmen for Mental Health! As part of a fundraising effort for the Association's Mental Health Week, milkmen distributed collection envelopes along their routes in Denver.

1956: Mental Health Colorado helps advocate for updated terminology in referring to those with mental health conditions especially in legal settings, combatting discrimination – this effort included the voices of those with lived experience.

1956: Mental Health Colorado supports a bill put forward by the Colorado Bar Association to reform the criminal legal systems' approach to defendants with mental health conditions

1960s



1960: The Aurora Advocate reports that an estimated 17 million Americans are living with a mental health condition and a national health priority. Mental Health Colorado is highlighted for their volunteer program in institutions, as well as their coalition members' work with teachers, clergy, and police to educate them on recognizing mental illness.

1960: The Colorado Association for Mental Health hosts the National Association for Mental Health – now Mental Health America – in Denver for its 10th annual conference.

1962: Mental Health Colorado joins other community organizations to promote mental health workforce development, including a tour of Colorado State Hospital.

1963: Mental Health Colorado supports the involvement and organization of local chapters advocating for mental health. John Evans serves as the executive director at this time.

1963: Mental Health Colorado provides scholarships for students participating in University of Colorado's mental health work-study program starting in 1961. The Steamboat Pilot publishes a photo of Mental Health Colorado officers presenting checks to students in the program in 1963.

1967: Between 1961 and 1967, 300 students of the work-study program are supported by Mental Health Colorado's scholarships.

1970s

1971: Mental Health Colorado advocates for the decriminalization of mental illness, stating “Persons who have been treated for mental illness are less prone than the general public to be involved in violent behavior”.

We continue this legacy of advocating for decriminalization through state policy and our national initiative, Care Not Cuffs.

Renamed Mental Health Association of Colorado sometime around 1975.

1975: Mental Health Colorado helped organize a two-day seminar on mental health, including an overview of the history of mental health care in Colorado

1976: For the organization’s annual meeting, Mental Health Colorado included those with lived experience of mental health conditions and institutionalization to discuss patient rights

1978: Mental Health Colorado celebrates its 25th anniversary and all the organization has accomplished in that time, alongside a call to action:

“While Colorado has made great strides in mental health that progress pales in comparison to what still needs to be done in areas of patient rights, reduction of stigma, greater accessibility and acceptability for mental health services...Make a difference. Contact the Mental Health Association of Colorado and find out how you can join the hundreds of others helping the mentally ill.”

1978: Mental Health Colorado calls for nominations for an annual award to “recognize outstanding efforts on behalf of the cause of mental health” in media communications.

1979: As part of a campaign advocating for improved mental health services for children and promoting children’s mental health programming, Mental Health Colorado conducts a Read-A-Thon Fundraiser. The Vail Trail describes Mental Health Colorado as “the only statewide voluntary non-profit organization devoted to: 1) working for the improved care and treatment of the mentally ill; 2) to prevent mental illness; and 3) to increase mental health education and research.”

1980s

1983: Mental Health Colorado launches our Teach Early Adolescents New Skills (TEANS) program, “designed to help students cope with the stressful early teenage years”.

1985: Mental Health Colorado hosts a two-day symposium on mental health care and policy, bringing together state and national experts to discuss mental health law, policy development, and strategies for healthcare delivery. The symposium is supported by the National Institute of Mental Health and Harvard Medical School.

1988: Mental Health Colorado organizes Pro Bono Mental Health Project, connecting individuals experiencing homelessness to pro bono psychiatric services. Over 100 volunteer providers participate. Mental Health Colorado continues this legacy today through our SAFER program, providing short-term housing and services to those experiencing substance use and mental health conditions.

1989: Mental Health Colorado is recognized with a national award for Pro Bono Mental Health Project; the Douglas County News Press reports that “The project has become a nationally recognized model program for involving private sector professionals in meeting the mental health needs of people who would otherwise go unserved.”

1990s

1990: The Louisville Times acknowledges the difficulty of reaching out for help under the headline “First call is usually the most difficult”; the paper goes on to share a variety of local resources including Mental Health Colorado for referrals to mental health services and support navigating service fees and insurance.

1990: Mental Health Colorado promotes well-being in ageing, publishing a free booklet on depression in seniors. The booklet “Brings New Hope”, while defining depression, providing a symptom checklist, and explaining treatment options.

1992: Mental Health Colorado hosts its second annual Legislative Education Day, focused on the mental health of children, supporting parents, and educating health professionals working in pediatrics about mental health. Mental Health Colorado continues to promote civic engagement for mental health through our annual Legislative Education and Action Day at the Capital!

1995: Mental Health Colorado participates in programming to educate the public on seasonal affective disorder (SAD) and treatment options for depression

1995: Mental Health Colorado publishes some advice in honor of Mental Health Month in May of 1995 encouraging self-care: “to help you feel right about yourself and the rest of the world...You might plant a flower, really listen, laugh out loud, share a joke...give yourself a present, re-read a favorite book, or maybe have breakfast in bed.”

1995: Mental Health Colorado in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education conduct a suicide prevention campaign in response to the state’s high teen suicide rate in the 90s. The campaign produces two free brochures on the topic, distributed to all schools in the state.

1999: Executive Director Jeanne Mueller Letter appeals to policy makers in a letter to the editor in the Aspen Daily News following the Columbine tragedy. Mueller writes, “Mental health is a neglected issue in communities...in large part because of the stigma attached to mental illnesses...We must embrace mental health as we do physical health.” She concludes, “Help is available – today, tomorrow and next year.”

2000s

2000: Mental Health Colorado declares May as Mental Health Month! Mental Health Colorado uses the moment to emphasize that everyone has mental health, that mental health is intertwined with our physical health, and the need to combat stigma and normalize mental health care.

2000: The Colorado House of Representatives approves suicide prevention program and calls for a public health approach to the state’s suicide rate.

2003: Mental Health Colorado participates in Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Legislation Advocacy Day

2003: Mental Health Colorado advocates against budget cuts to essential mental health services, and works in collaboration with other community organizations to address budget crisis

2003: Mental Health Colorado works to educate the public about anxiety disorders and offers free screenings as part of National Anxiety Disorders Screening Day on May 7th during Mental Health Awareness Month

2005: Mental Health Colorado joins a group of health organizations in advocating for legislation to support healthcare funding, especially increasing availability of mental health care and decriminalizing mental health. The Aspen Daily News reports that the number of people with mental health conditions in county jails has grown significantly in the prior decade, “a trend accelerated by budget cuts”.

2005: Mental Health Colorado creates resources for parents to support their children’s mental health, especially in response to local and national tragedies.

