



**MENTAL HEALTH
COLORADO**

20^{PATH}**23**
24
ANNUAL REPORT

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CARE
NOT CUFFS



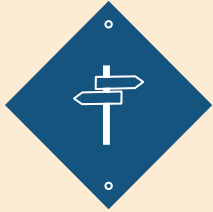
2023-24 AT
A GLANCE



PATIENT'S
RIGHTS
RESOURCES



BRAIN WAVE
ADVOCACY
NETWORK



MISSION STATEMENT

Mental Health Colorado is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to pass laws, change practices, and build a movement to promote healthier minds across the lifespan for all Coloradans.



ADMINISTRATIVE HUB



DONORS



FOUNDATION PARTNERSHIPS



STAFF & BOARD



CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS



LOOK AHEAD



**MENTAL HEALTH
COLORADO**

OVER

Founded in 1953
as the Colorado
Association for
Mental Health

1953

1960

Helped secure the
grounds and facilities
for the Fort Logan
Mental Health Center

1999

Aided the community
following the mass shooting
at Columbine High School
with *A Partner for Parents:
A Handbook for Healing*

2006

Convened & sponsored
The Triage Project, a series
of interagency & interdisciplinary
discussions leading to the formation
of Colorado's crisis call system



R THE YEARS

1986

Developed the
Pro Bono Counseling
& Referral Program

1991

Provided information
on support services
to military families
during the Gulf War

2024

2016

Shifted efforts to
focus on public policy
to improve the lives
of all Coloradans





A LETTER FROM THE CEO

For 71 years, we have been hearing from Coloradans all over the state who discover in their moments of greatest distress that what Walter Cronkite famously said in the 1970s of the healthcare system in America is still painfully and tragically true. It is “neither healthy, caring, nor systematic.” Mental Health Colorado has been listening with compassion and taking informed action in response—educating and advocating with great care for health’s sake.

In 2023–2024, your support allowed us to champion some of the most significant legislation in Colorado history to help provide a strong start for all children, support Colorado’s families, improve well-being in aging, prioritize access to housing, healthcare, supports, and services, decriminalize mental health conditions, reduce harm from substances, and end health-based discrimination. I hope you will visit (and bookmark) our webpage to see our latest Legislative Report & Scorecard, as well as the archive of reports and scorecards since 2016 which we have built and maintain for the education of elected officials and voters.

Use of terms like “system of care” and “safety net” to describe a deeply and tragically flawed healthcare landscape—where homelessness, incarceration, overdose,

and death have been more predictable than positive health outcomes for the most vulnerable Coloradans—have made advocacy challenging. The prevalent use of these terms assumes that a system of care or safety net has existed—obstructing the creative process.

Colorado, ranked for years among the worst states in the nation for access to adult mental healthcare by Mental Health America, has long needed to go beyond maintenance and repair of a fundamentally flawed approach to healthcare that has worked selectively for some while failing too many. Colorado must create an intact continuum of care that works for all—not just for those who are privileged by wealth, race, culture, language, identity, geographical location, or comparatively uncomplicated health status. This imperative has been and will remain a key pillar of our advocacy and education efforts.

Access to the fundamental conditions for well-being is another key pillar of our efforts. The advantages of living in Colorado are taken for granted by some while they remain out of reach for too many. Coloradans experience well-being and thrive, from the beginning of their lives to the end, when they have affordable homes, nutritious food, clean air and water, quality childcare, meaningful

parental leave, good education, employment that meets their financial needs, and a sense of value and purpose within their families and communities. Colorado is rich in human talent, goodness, and resources—we should be aspiring to rival the leading nations of the world for supporting human health and well-being. Promoting this vision for a fully integrated approach to and prioritization of human health and well-being is another key pillar of our advocacy and education efforts.

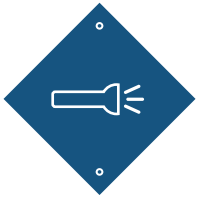
We are grateful to our Brain Wave members and our Board of Directors, and to all the public servants, supporters, donors, corporate sponsors, and volunteers who have helped us advance our mission. We need you more than ever.

Sincerely,



Vincent Atchity, Ph.D.
President & CEO
Mental Health Colorado





2023 - 24 AT A GLANCE

- ▶ Our advocacy efforts led to **landmark legislation** supporting access to quality, accessible eating disorder care.
.....
- ▶ In partnership with the Colorado State Public Defender’s Office and Disability Law Colorado, we **helped pass HB24-1355: Measures to Reduce the Competency Waitlist**, expanding Bridges of Colorado (the state office that connects defendants with mental health needs to wraparound care and services) and offering a community-based alternative to competency proceedings.
.....
- ▶ Our new administrative hub supports collaboration among health equity-focused nonprofits, aiming to enhance well-being and promote **health parity and equitable access to care**.
.....
- ▶ In April 2024, we acquired Envision:You, Colorado’s leading force for **LGBTQ+ health advocacy**. This partnership will amplify our collective impact and allow us to better serve the needs of the LGBTQ+ community.
.....
- ▶ After nearly a decade without engaging in any direct service, we adopted our SAFER Initiative, providing **housing and wraparound services to justice-involved individuals** with co-occurring health conditions.
.....
- ▶ Our internship program offers real-world **professional development opportunities** for undergraduate and graduate students pursuing degrees in social work, public health, public policy, law, communications, nonprofit management, and other fields.
.....

▶ In support of Proposition 122: Access to Natural Psychedelic Substances, and in partnership with the Healing Advocacy Fund, we offered educational webinars explaining Colorado’s new laws allowing **alternative pathways to well-being** using natural medicines.

.....

▶ Our continuing **education and training programs** include a toolkit for workplace well-being, a provider training program for working with patients experiencing serious mental health conditions, and a Know Your Rights campaign informing consumers of their rights as patients.

.....

**SUCCESSES IN
2024 HAVE SET
THE STAGE FOR
A PROMISING
2025**



PASSING LAW



LEGISLATIVE VICTORIES

Over the past two years, Mental Health Colorado championed historic legislative victories to lead the nation in health policy and improve the health and well-being of Coloradans across the lifespan. We know that a healthy society includes access to housing, healthcare, supports and services at every stage in life, especially for Colorado’s most vulnerable populations. This begins with a strong start for all children and support for families and leads to support for well-being in aging. Additionally, we must recognize the great need for care, not cuffs, and harm reduction to ensure those who use substances do so safely. At all levels of care, we understand the importance of eliminating health-based discrimination, so everyone has equal access to the support and services they need to thrive.

► END HEALTH-BASED DISCRIMINATION

While stigma is a word we’ve all heard, it’s difficult to pinpoint how to eradicate a poorly understood concept. However, we as a nation know what it means to recognize and take action to end discriminatory practices--and that’s our objective. This year, Colorado made strides toward this goal with HB24-1342: Test Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities.

This bill requires a testing entity to grant an individual’s request for accommodation on a licensing exam. It expands the definition of “testing accommodation” to be more inclusive, outlines what is required for an entity to grant an individual’s request for an accommodation, and allows individuals to bring a civil action, which the attorney general may investigate.



▶ STRONG START FOR ALL CHILDREN

Our mental health crisis continues to take a toll on our young people, with rates of suicide and other indicators of poor health at an all-time high.

SB23-174: Access to Certain Behavioral Health Services allows children covered by Medicaid to access certain services without a formal diagnosis, opening additional doors to support for our most vulnerable Coloradans.

SB24-001: Continue Youth Mental Health Services Program, made the “I Matter” Program, established in 2021 in response to the youth mental health crisis highlighted in 2020, permanent. This program provides Colorado youth with up to six free therapy sessions.

▶ SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Trusted caregivers can be an essential part of an individual’s support system. HB24-1217: Sharing of Patient Health-Care Information clarifies how caregivers can communicate with treating providers within federal privacy laws to improve outcomes for their loved ones.

Accessing childcare can be a monumental barrier for the success of low-income Colorado families. HB24-1223: Improved Access to the Child Care Assistance Program revamps the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) ensuring more families have access to this essential support.

▶ ACCESS TO HOUSING, HEALTHCARE, SUPPORTS & SERVICES

In 2023, for the first time, the Colorado General Assembly addressed access to quality care for eating disorders. Mental Health Colorado championed SB23-176: Protections for People with an Eating Disorder, the nation's first-ever bill to prohibit private insurance carriers and Medicaid from using body mass index (BMI) to determine access to and level of care. Additionally, this bill restricted access to prescription diet pills for youth. In 2024, we built on the momentum to ensure treatment and recovery facilities have the appropriate oversight for individuals to receive quality, trauma-informed care.

Access to appropriate care and services continues to be a barrier for many Coloradans. SB24-055: Agricultural & Rural Behavioral Health Care created an agricultural and rural community behavioral health program within the Behavioral Health Administration to help focus and support the health needs of farmers, ranchers, and workers in rural Colorado.

Mental Health Colorado advocated for a recommendation by the Joint Budget Committee to ensure Medicaid patients were covered for inpatient mental health care for at least 30 days to prevent individuals from being discharged before they are stabilized due to federal law.

▶ WELLNESS IN AGING

SB23-031: Improve Health-care Access for Older Coloradans creates a training program in geriatric medicine to improve older Coloradans' care, health, and well-being.

To support the financial health of seniors in our community, HB24-1052: Senior Housing Income Tax Credit will reinstate a refundable income tax credit for qualifying seniors, especially those who rent their homes, with incomes under \$75,000, who have not claimed a homestead property tax exemption.

▶ REDUCE POTENTIAL HARMS FROM DRUGS & ALCOHOL

Amidst the ongoing opioid epidemic, the Colorado General Assembly continues to focus on reducing harm from substances. HB24-1003: Opiate Antagonists and Detection Products in Schools allows schools to develop policies to maintain a supply of life-saving opiate antagonists to prevent overdoses, and extends Good Samaritan Laws to protect professionals in the school setting.

▶ DECRIMINALIZE MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

In 2024, Mental Health Colorado, alongside the Colorado State Public Defender's Office and Disability Law Colorado, helped establish one of the nation's first diversion programs for individuals on the competency waitlist. Colorado has the third longest waitlist of defendants waiting to be evaluated and restored to competency in the country. HB24-1355: Measures to Reduce the Competency Waitlist connects individuals with wraparound care as an alternative to incarceration.

More work is needed to decriminalize mental health conditions and reform the systems that interact with individuals experiencing serious mental illness. Mental Health Colorado was a member of Colorado's first Jail Standards Commission, which brought forth HB24-1054: Jail Standards Commission Recommendations, a bill requiring each jail to abide by standards to increase compliance and accountability.

DENVER
39.7392° N 104.9847° W

CHANGING P



PROMOTING WELL-BEING IN THE WORKPLACE TOOLKIT

Mental Health Colorado developed the “Promoting Well-Being in the Workplace” toolkit. This resource is designed for any employer, in any industry, to help create an environment that better supports employee health and well-being. The toolkit includes practical steps employers can take to ensure all employees can thrive and grow. A healthy workplace supports health across the lifespan.



PATIENT'S RIGHTS RESOURCES

Mental Health Colorado created “Know Your Rights” resources reflecting protections now in effect for patients because of several pieces of legislation we helped pass. The documents include information on the rights of minors, rights when receiving involuntary mental health and substance use care, general patient rights, and parity.



SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS PROVIDER TRAINING

To help improve the care and treatment of individuals experiencing serious mental health conditions, Mental Health Colorado developed a training for health care providers. The training includes a curriculum centered on a holistic, person-centered approach to enhance the quality of support and services. To support the training, we filmed individuals with lived experience and their loved ones sharing their stories about seeking care in Colorado and embedded these personal narratives in the training. This training will be distributed far and wide to promote greater competency among care providers.

PRACTICES



CARE NOT CUFFS

Without adequate access to housing, healthcare, supports and services, people with unmet health needs often intersect with law enforcement and jails, leading to cycles of justice-involvement, detention, and homelessness without ever receiving the care they need. This intersection both causes and compounds unnecessary harm and trauma for people in their most vulnerable moments—as well as for their families and loved ones. Too often when someone reaches out for help, they are instead met with handcuffs

Thanks to generous support from the **David and Laura Merage Foundation**, Mental Health Colorado's national initiative, Care Not Cuffs (The Equitas Project), stewards the national movement to decriminalize mental illness, accelerating and fostering transformation in our communities through advocacy, policy, education, and mobilization, with the aim of building safer, more equitable health care and crisis response. To this end, Care Not Cuffs (The Equitas Project) leads and engages people across the country, sharpening and inspiring cross-sector, collaborative efforts to enact change at local, state, and national levels.

You can learn more
at carenotcuffs.org



BUILDING A M



BRAIN WAVE ADVOCACY NETWORK

Mental Health Colorado's statewide network of grassroots advocates, the Brain Wave, is composed of over 1,500 Coloradans who bring lived and professional experience to our work. By sharing their stories and expertise with lawmakers and the media, Brain Wave members shape public policy and public opinion, helping to break down the barriers to care that many Coloradans face.

In the 2023 and 2024 legislative sessions, Brain Wave members testified, emailed, and called legislators hundreds of times to advocate for change. As the advocacy voice for Coloradans, our organization relies on the contributions of Brain Wave members. Their experiences, voices, and time are crucial to driving positive change in Colorado. From testifying for improved health policies to sharing their personal stories, their volunteer efforts make Mental Health Colorado a powerful force for advocacy, advancing our mission to promote healthier minds across the lifespan.

Erin Harrop



“Working with the advocacy team and learning how to get involved at a more systemic level fills me with hope. I wish I had learned these advocacy skills years ago. I spend a lot of my life in academia, where things remain largely theoretical—getting to work with MHC feels more active, and I know the work we do directly impacts my community.”

MOVEMENT

PAWNEE BUTTE
40.8233° N, 103.9719° W

“Mental Health Colorado is important to me because through its policies, programming and advocacy, it bridges the connection between hope and mental health—and hope sustains life.”



Melissa
Petrone Zavaras

- ▶ Over 100 Brain Wavers shared their experience with legislators & testified during committee
- ▶ Nearly 200 Brain Wavers sent emails to their elected officials to influence their support on specific issues
- ▶ 72 Brain Wavers joined us in-person at our annual Legislative Education & Advocacy Day (LEAD) to lobby their legislators & hear from experts across the state about culturally competent care & pathways to care, not cuffs



ADMINISTRATIVE HUB

Mental Health Colorado has established an administrative hub dedicated to supporting the work of health equity-focused nonprofits. The hub will serve as a centralized resource and business infrastructure system for organizations committed to advancing access to healthcare and well-being for all. By uniting these entities under one roof, Mental Health Colorado aims to amplify collective impact, streamline resources, and promote innovative solutions that address systemic barriers to health and well-being across the state.

► SAFER

SAFER was established in Arapahoe County as a collaborative grassroots effort to provide continuous emergency shelter and support services to individuals experiencing homelessness and justice involvement along with unmet health needs or co-occurring conditions. Having a place to call home is an essential prerequisite for good health and well-being, and thus SAFER works to disentangle mental health and criminal justice at one frequent intersection: housing.

In addition to providing emergency shelter, SAFER offers a variety of wraparound services to participants to support their well-being and long-term stability. As of August 2024, only three people out of 221 who have received services have acquired new criminal charges, and there have been zero overdoses among participants

▶ ENVISION: YOU

Healthy communities promote and protect the health of our LGBTQ+ allies, friends, and family. Envision:You, established in 2018 to advance behavioral health for the state's LGBTQ+ community, became an initiative of Mental Health Colorado in April 2024. Envision:You offers expertise in addressing the unique health challenges faced by the LGBTQ+ population.

Envision:You closes gaps in health outcomes for LGBTQ+ individuals through co-created community programming, advocacy engagement, public awareness campaigns, and evidence-based training.

“The acquisition of Envision:You by Mental Health Colorado marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards enhancing support for the LGBTQ+ community across Colorado. With Mental Health Colorado's extensive network and resources, we are poised to expand our programming and reach, ensuring greater access to vital mental health services for individuals within the LGBTQ+ community. Together, we will amplify our advocacy efforts, championing improved health policies and increased funding for LGBTQ+ health initiatives.”

ENVISION:YOU FOUNDER STEVEN HADEN

*Executive Vice President of
Community Partnerships & Outreach*



▶ WOUNDED HEALER PROJECT

The Wounded Healer Project is dedicated to preventing veteran suicide by reconnecting with and supporting our struggling brothers and sisters in the military community. The Wounded Healer Project empowers veteran mental health providers, inspires transitioning service members to explore careers in mental health, and stands by marginalized veterans facing tough challenges like addiction, poverty, and homelessness.

▶ COLORADO FINES COMMITTEE

The Colorado Fines Committee, established by a federal court consent decree following a lawsuit by Disability Law Colorado, addresses excessively long wait times for criminal defendants needing competency evaluations and restoration. Funded by state-paid fines, the committee supports local programs that offer alternatives to in-custody evaluations, such as case management, housing, and treatment services.

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS



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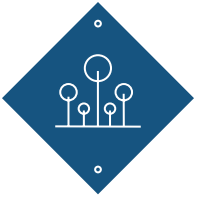
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LOOK AHEAD



As we look toward the future, Mental Health Colorado envisions a transformed health landscape where every individual has access to comprehensive, compassionate care and to the housing, supports, and services which are essential to well-being.



By the time we celebrate our **75TH anniversary**, we aspire to have achieved key milestones:

▶ **INCREASED AWARENESS & DECREASED DISCRIMINATION.....**

We are committed to breaking down the barriers of discrimination surrounding mental health and substance use conditions. Through our advocacy and public education efforts, we are fostering a society where health is better understood and openly discussed.

▶ **AMPLE FUNDRAISING FOR POLICY & PUBLIC EDUCATION INITIATIVES.....**

To sustain and expand our vital programs, we are dedicated to raising substantial funds. These resources will sustain our advocacy, ensuring that health is a priority in legislative agendas, and our educational initiatives, which equip communities with the knowledge and tools to support health and well-being.

▶ **ROBUST PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS SECTORS.....**

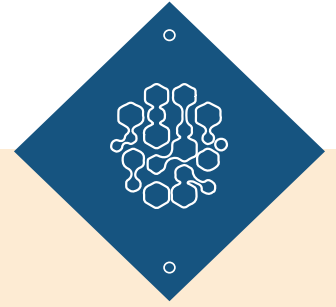
Collaboration is at the heart of our mission. By forging strong partnerships with businesses and organizations across sectors throughout the state, we can create a united front in addressing health challenges.



2028



OUR VISION
& BEYOND



Our vision is timely and urgent. With your support and dedication, we can achieve healthier minds across the lifespan for all Coloradans.



Be a part our progress.
Visit our website to donate.



mentalhealthcolorado.org/donate

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Mental Health Colorado



SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to Front Range Community College
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and Juliana Henoa Cardona for donating their time
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