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Colorado's Community Mental Health Centers Help Fill Service Gap For Veterans

*Colorado's First Lady Joins Community Mental Health Centers to
Help Returning Soldiers, Families*

With the help of a unique collaborative effort, families and veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are receiving free, confidential mental health treatment in three rural areas of Colorado.

The Civilians for Veterans Fund is a new partnership that is bringing the network of Colorado's Community Mental Health Centers together with the generosity of private donors and the expertise of the Veterans Administration (VA) to allow veterans and their families to receive mental health and substance use treatment in a confidential location near their home. With the support of Colorado's First Lady, Jeannie Ritter, the program aims to increase the number of people who are currently receiving services.



"It's no secret that our soldiers and their families need more help coping with the stress and trauma associated with this war and the long absence of loved ones," said Colorado First Lady Jeannie Ritter. "This collaborative program between private funders, the Veterans Administration, and Colorado's Community Mental Health Centers is an important step toward expanding treatment services to rural areas of the state. Now it's time to spread the word and get these soldiers and their families in for treatment. I'm thrilled to be a part of this innovative and collaborative effort."

Increasing state and national attention is being directed to the mental health needs of soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the needs of their families. Many of these soldiers serving abroad are Reservists and National Guard members who return to their home communities and civilian jobs when

their tour of duty is complete. While these active-duty, National Guard, and Reservists are serving overseas, the family members remain at home in their communities, left to cope with life's daily pressures without the support of their spouse. Often, when soldiers return, the families face many readjustment issues that compound any mental health problems that may be related to the absent spouse, or PTSD-related problems.

In April of 2008, the RAND National Security Research Division released the nation's first large-scale assessment of the psychological and cognitive needs of military service members who served in Iraq and Afghanistan in the last six years. The RAND report detailed that nearly 20 percent, or 300,000 service members, who have already returned from Iraq and Afghanistan report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression, and that only 54 percent of those 300,000 service members with PTSD or major depression sought help over the last year. The major reason cited for not seeking mental health treatment was fear of it damaging their careers.

In Colorado, additional strain is placed on veterans and their families due to the lack of mental health services available through the Veterans Administration in some rural areas. Furthermore, there are currently no services provided by the VA to cover the mental health needs of the veteran's family. To address these needs, Colorado's Community Mental Health Centers, cooperating with the VA and private funders, have created an opportunity for veterans and their families to seek free services from a Community Mental Health Center near their home. Since Colorado's network of Community Mental Health Centers covers every region of the state, this is an opportunity to keep soldiers and their families in their home communities, supported by the VA's technical assistance to the clinicians at the Centers. Additionally, when care is received in a mental health center rather than a VA clinic, the services are confidential, thus easing the fear of causing harm to a soldier's career or adding to the stigma surrounding mental health.

Currently, the Civilians for Veterans Fund is helping to provide services in three regions of Colorado; the San Luis Valley, Gunnison/Montrose region, and in the Southeastern areas covering the Arkansas Valley. With additional revenue, this fund aims to expand to other rural and urban parts of Colorado, so that all veterans and their families will have a confidential resource to meet their mental health needs. The San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center will help soldiers and their families in the San Luis Valley region. Southeast Mental Health Services will serve those in the Arkansas Valley, while the Midwestern Colorado Mental Health Center will help those in need in the Gunnison/Montrose region.

For more information about the Civilians for Veterans Fund or to receive additional supporting documents, contact Doyle Forrestal, Director of Public Policy at the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council, 303-832-7594 or dforrestal@cbhc.org

Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Services (CBHS) is a nonprofit, philanthropic subsidiary of the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council. CBHS promotes and assures appropriate behavioral healthcare to the citizens of Colorado. CBHS is handling the administrative and program coordination duties, while the VA will provide consultative, liaison and outreach assistance. The Civilians for Veterans Fund accepts

donations to support the necessary behavioral health needs of the veterans and family members in Colorado.

For more information about behavioral healthcare issues in Colorado, please contact the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council at 303-832-7594:

- George DelGrosso, Executive Director, gdelgrosso@cbhc.org

- Doyle Forrestal, Director of Public Policy, dforrestal@cbhc.org

CBHC is a nonprofit membership organization that represents Colorado's statewide network of community behavioral healthcare providers (including 17 community mental health centers, two specialty clinics, and five behavioral health organizations). Members contract with the State of Colorado and work together to provide comprehensive, community-based behavioral and psychiatric services to more than 83,000 people across the state. CBHC members provide a network of skilled therapeutic and community resources to meet the mental health need of individuals and families. Thousands of people, once isolated and disabled by mental illness, are now leading productive and satisfying lives thanks to Colorado's award-winning community mental health system. For more information, visit www.cbhc.org.

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