

Legislative Platform

The message is clear: Colorado is ready for a change when it comes to the way we regulate, finance, and deliver behavioral health care. In his charge letter to create the Behavioral Health Task Force, Governor Polis wrote: **"We can and must do better to transform our system for Coloradans with a behavioral health condition so that they have access to affordable, high-quality, and patient-centered care."**

CBHC couldn't agree more. The state's Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) and Managed Services Organizations (MSOs) have done their best to deliver care to all Coloradans in need regardless of location or circumstance. However, they can only do so much without the help of Colorado's legislature and support of state policymakers.

This year, the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council (CBHC) is looking forward to working with our legislature to create meaningful change within the behavioral health system. As we approach the 2020 legislative session, CBHC has identified three areas around which we can create a more balanced approach to delivering behavioral health services.

First, we need to expand access to care. In order to do so, nonprofit, community-based providers need to maintain a highly trained, stable workforce. Last year, CBHC was grateful to see a 2% provider rate increase for workforce; however, community providers are still struggling to compete with the state and other health care employers for professional staff. Working together, we can find a way to offer better worker compensation and better reimbursements for entities that deliver critical behavioral health care services.

Next, we need to responsibly transform our current complex system. Governor Polis's Behavioral Health Task Force and several recent legislative interim committees have prioritized transformation. CBHC welcomes and supports these efforts. One way to reduce complexity is to end the decades-long separation found in the state statute regarding alcohol and drug civil commitment procedures. But even as we transform, we must do so responsibly and with an eye toward ensuring that Colorado's rural and frontier regions have the resources needed to overcome our state's geographic and demographic differences. Working together, we can transform our system so it is less complex – while ensuring that all areas of our state have the resources needed to access a full continuum of services.

Finally, and most importantly, we need to advance the well-being of all Coloradans. Without feeling safe, secure, and cared for, individuals cannot function properly in society. When citizens don't know how to talk to someone who is in emotional distress, they lose the ability to form connections that can greatly improve the livelihoods of those who are hurting. Working together, we can find a way to advance evidenced-based programs like Mental Health First Aid that empower average citizens to better support each other.

After years of studies, reports, recommendations, and task forces, it's time to get specific and implement change. This is a call to all who are ready to stand up and make a change. It is time that we work together to give every Coloradan the opportunity to have a healthy and happy today.

Expanding Access to Care

- Deploy a multi-tiered strategy to comprehensively address the behavioral health safety-net workforce crisis:
 - Pursue behavioral health safety net provider rate increases by increasing the state's community provider cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) or by targeted rate increase, so that employers can recruit and retain professionals in community-based settings
 - Ensure that administrative burden does not add an undue or unnecessary barrier to accessing care on both individuals in need and the workforce that treats them
 - Develop career pathways for professionals entering the behavioral health safety net workforce, by making loan repayment and scholarship opportunities more readily available
- Sustain and expand secure transportation and other transport service delivery for individuals with high behavioral health needs, and ensure a workable model across diverse Colorado communities

Transforming the System

- Consolidate the alcohol and drug civil commitment statutes in Colorado – ending the decades-long artificial separation of these two similar, but distinct, processes that are confusing to patients, providers, and regulators
- Protect investments in rural and frontier communities and enhance opportunities for the growth and sustainability of service capacity

Advancing Well-Being & Community Resilience

- Seek opportunities to expand Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), especially Youth Mental Health First Aid, in order to prepare schools and communities for the rollout of Teen MHFA in 2020
- Protect the health and safety of Coloradans seeking/receiving behavioral health services by reenacting the Mental Health Practice Act and ensure that the path to licensure for qualified professionals is streamlined

