

CBHC BOARD POSITION STATEMENT 20.0:

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Position Statement

CBHC is committed to a coordinated behavioral health emergency and disaster response. Colorado must formalize the role of behavioral health providers in the disaster preparedness and response continuum and ensure the sustainability of these services.

Background

Colorado's 17 Community Mental Health Centers (CMHCs) provide services to every Colorado community through historically established regional catchment areas. Since their inception, the CMHCs have been an active participant in responses to local, state-wide, and national emergencies and disasters. CMHCs have taken deliberate measures to ensure that disaster response is community-oriented and comprehensively accounts for population health and community need, rather than solely focusing on individual services and supports.

Over the years, Colorado's CMHCs have responded to critical incidents such as:

- Suicides and the community aftermath
- Homicides, child abductions, and hostage situations
- Terrorism, active shooter events, and mass casualty events
- Natural disasters both locally and nationwide, including fires, tornadoes, floods and hurricanes.
- Police violence and social inequities
- COVID-19 contact tracing and emergency response

For decades, engagement and collaborative planning with local community partners regarding emergency preparedness has been critical to implement behavioral health expertise and assuring community adaptive functions. In 2006, CBHC members collaborated with the Colorado Department of Human Services, Division of Behavioral Health, to develop a statewide partnership and structure for behavioral health disaster response, which resulted in:

- Establishment of the Colorado Crisis Education and Response Network (CoCERN) and;
- The [CoCERN Protocol and Guidance Document](#)

CMHCs are committed to sustaining emergency preparedness efforts, participating on [Regional Health Care Coalitions](#), and providing comprehensive services to Coloradans in their time of need.

The CMHCs can often leverage a wide range of resources to provide emergency response and recovery, when called to assist communities. Yet there are significant costs associated with preparedness and planning activities in addition to the ongoing efforts of response and recovery that may be needed over an extended time frame. Additionally, many types of community response do not have a FEMA funding stream attached or other ways to reimburse for staff training, organizational meetings, or time spent during the response or recovery, which could last years.

Each CMHC has a dedicated emergency team. Emergency preparedness is built into the structure of the CMHCs, and the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS) also has defined requirements. CMS defines CMHC expectations to include the following four core elements of emergency preparedness:

- 1.) Risk Assessment and Emergency Planning
- 2.) Policies and Procedures for Emergency Preparedness Planning
- 3.) Current Emergency Communications Plan
- 4.) Training and practicing existing Emergency Preparedness Plan

These responsibilities and commitments ensure that CMHCs participate in statewide initiatives and regional coalitions to develop resources, procedures, and protocols for emergency response.

Policy Priorities

20.1 Formalizing the Role of Behavioral Health Providers in Emergency Preparedness and Response

For decades, Colorado's CMHCs have followed a precise process for preparedness, coordination, and response to emergencies and disasters. In times of greatest needs, Colorado communities have come to depend on the presence of one or more centers working together to meet the needs of the communities at risk. The state of Colorado must recognize the CMHCs as an essential network of safety net providers and support their role as emergency and disaster responder providers. Services provided by CMHCs are always available during times of emergency, and the aftermath, and must be adequately sustained.

- ❖ CBHC supports state efforts to define standards for emergency response, network development, planning, staffing, training and culturally responsive services.
- ❖ CBHC supports the continuation of state and federal programs that coordinate community partners in a collaborative response to community crises.
 - Robust funding for councils, boards, and other response coordination planning efforts
 - Adequately support communities in need during an emergency or disaster through a mix of local, state, and federal resources to sustain the availability of cross-system providers
- ❖ CBHC supports policies, regulation, and legislation that continues Colorado's CMHC's ability to respond to a wide range of community crises.
 - Sufficient resources and flexible funding to respond to mass disasters, community crises, emergency situations, and other acute crises that require behavioral health professionals' response for periods of time ranging from hours to years

20.2 Enhancing Emergency Preparedness and Response Initiatives and Ensuring Sustainable Funding

Colorado's communities are most effective in responding to an emergency when preparedness efforts have been comprehensive and collaborative across systems. To be most effective, emergency preparedness and response efforts need to be adequately organized and funded to meet communities' needs.

- ❖ CBHC supports policies that create sustainability of these activities across Colorado communities.
 - Sustainable, permanent funding for emergency preparedness for every CMHC, overseen by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)
 - Sustainable opportunities for specialty team, center personnel, community partners, and community member education for emergency preparedness:
 - Psychological first aid for emergency response clinicians
 - Formal processes for community engagement and the demonstration of preparedness effort deliverables
 - Adequately support state and local infrastructure to respond to behavioral health needs following community level crisis and invest in community resilience initiatives and activities
 - Create effective and adequate reimbursement for behavioral health disaster preparedness and response initiatives
 - Invest in community resilience initiatives and activities by the behavioral health system

Effective Period

The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council (CBHC) Board of Directors approved this policy on 01/18/2018 It is reviewed as required by the Public Policy Advisory Committee.

Policy Updated

Updates to this policy position were approved by the CBHC Board of Directors on 10/06/2020.

Expiration: 10/06/2022