***“More Americans could lose their lives to deaths of despair, deaths due to drug, alcohol, and suicide, if we do not do something immediately. Deaths of despair have been on the rise for the last decade, and in the context of COVID-19, deaths of despair should be seen as the epidemic within the pandemic.” [[1]](#endnote-1)***

**An epidemic within a pandemic**

* All overdose deaths, including from heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine, totaled 1,223 in 2020, up nearly 20% from 1,062 the year before, according to state health department data that is preliminary and expected to rise even higher.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* The Colorado Department of Revenue collected increased liquor excise tax revenues between February 2020 and May 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019. Across the entire month of March, revenues raised by the existing excise tax rate increased by 13.6% between 2019 and 2020. The greatest increase in revenues occurred in the month of May, which saw a nearly 50% increase from 2019 to 2020.[[3]](#endnote-3)
* In a study by the CDC, 13.3% of adults reported having started or increased substance use to cope with stress or emotions related to COVID-19.[[4]](#endnote-4)
* According to the Alcohol Policy Resource Center (APRC), in 2020 there was a 19% increase in frequency of alcohol consumption among 30-59 year-olds and a 41% increase in heaving drinking for women.[[5]](#endnote-5)
* SUD involuntary commitments are up 70% according to data reported by the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), demonstrating a sharp increase in serious substance use that has become a danger to the person.

**What was proposed**

Directed by the Governor to find budget savings, CDHS put forward [**FY 21/22 Budget Request R07 - Increase Medicaid Match for Substance Use Treatment**](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tvit7XjAXyIX_i-frNzBYGpfAkk8vntV/view?usp=sharing). R07 proposes a one-time $11.4M reduction in General Fund appropriations for SUD services provided through the OBH. The request argues that the new Medicaid residential benefit will reduce costs and that current capacity limitations of SUD residential providers create a risk that the funds may be underspent.

**The case for rejecting the proposal**

CDHS’s proposal hinges on the new HCPF Medicaid SUD benefit replacing OBH financing for residential services. Stakeholders feel this assumption is premature since the new Medicaid benefit only rolled out on January 1, 2021, and there is a lack of data showing utilization trends and serious questions about the funding and rate calculations that went into the new benefit. Concerns about capacity limitations as a rationale are confusing since a significant portion of the cuts would come from funding for the Increasing Access to Effective Substance Use Disorders Services (SB 16-202) line item. According to JBC Analyst Christina Beisel, these funds are highly flexible and intended to address capacity issues across the state.[[6]](#endnote-6)

The budget decisions facing state policymakers are regrettably difficult. But the data are clear that Coloradans’ use and misuse of substances has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. **As Colorado’s economy continues to recover from the deep recession it experienced last year, it is critical that the Joint Budget Committee reject this proposal and ensure Colorado’s SUD treatment system has the resources needed to meet the increased demand for services.**

**The following stakeholders urge Colorado’s Joint Budget Committee to REJECT the proposed cuts to critical SUD funding in CDHS budget:**

* Advocates for Recovery Colorado
* Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council (CBHC)
* Colorado Providers Association (COPA)
* Colorado Psychological Association
* Mental Health Colorado
* Peer Assistance Services, Inc.
* Sobriety House, Inc.
* State Representative Chris Kennedy, House District 23
* State Senator Brittany Pettersen, Senate District 22

1. <https://wellbeingtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WBT_Deaths-of-Despair_COVID-19-FINAL-FINAL.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://coloradosun.com/2021/02/04/colorado-fentanyl-overdoses/> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.coloradoseow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Colorado-SEOW-COVID-19-and-Alcohol-Use-Brief_Final_9_24_2020.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/e66ef581-2dad-4990-b616-2308f4814a74/Stress%20and%20Alcohol%20Infographic.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/fy2021-22_humbrf3.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)