

House Bill 21-1281

Community Behavioral Health Disaster Program

Sponsors:

Representatives Lisa Cutter and Perry Will and
Senator Brittany Pettersen

Proposal Summary:

Creates the community behavioral health disaster preparedness and response program, which is intended to enhance, support, and formalize behavioral health disaster preparedness and response activities conducted by Colorado's Community Mental Health Centers and other community behavioral health organizations.

Issue:

In the past year, Coloradans across our state have faced numerous traumatic events, including historic wildfires, the COVID-19 pandemic, and another mass shooting. These events have contributed to increases in depression, anxiety, suicidality, and substance use and they require a focused, timely, and coordinated response from behavioral health providers who understand the needs of their communities. Just as first responders and other key local organizations are called on in times of an emergency or disaster, Colorado has come to expect the involvement of mental health professionals when a community tragedy occurs. From the planning phase through recovery, it is essential that the psychological well-being of the community is addressed during difficult times. These activities are critical not only when disasters strike, but throughout the year as planning and community collaboration is essential to the success of a response. Planning is ongoing, and a response and recovery phase can take months, even years. If the disaster response does not rise to the level of a FEMA disaster declaration, these response activities are often provided without financial support for the organizations involved.

Solution

The bill requires the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to implement the community behavioral health disaster preparedness and response program using existing initiatives and activities to ensure that behavioral health is adequately represented within disaster preparedness and response efforts across the state. The program is intended to enhance, support, and formalize behavioral health disaster preparedness and response activities conducted by community behavioral health organizations.

The bill requires the department to:

- Promulgate rules for the oversight and management of the program
- Work collaboratively with community behavioral health organizations
- Create, define, and publish eligibility criteria for community behavioral health organizations to participate in the program
- Provide funding to community behavioral health organizations on an annual or as-needed basis for the activities the organizations conduct.

To carry out these tasks, the bill seeks a general fund appropriation to support community behavioral health disaster behavioral health preparedness training and activities.

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The Following Individuals/Organizations Support HB21-1281:

- Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council
- Montrose County Sheriff's Office