

SB 24-007: Behavioral Health First Aid Training Program

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Summary:

SB 24-007 authorizes the Office of Suicide Prevention in the Department of Public Health and Environment to create the Behavioral Health First Aid Training Program and seeks an annual appropriation of \$500K to expand existing training capacity. The Program is intended to promote adult, teen, and youth behavioral health and wellbeing and to improve overall community climate. The training offered by the Program will provide tools and skills for participants to create peer-to-peer response and referrals when behavioral health challenges arise. As a result of this investment, we anticipate training **1,300 teens** and **2,000 adults** annually.

What is Behavioral Health First Aid:

The Behavioral Health First Aid Training encompasses the different curricula under Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), including Adult, Youth, and Teen MHFA. MHFA is an evidence-based skill-based training course that teaches participants how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of behavioral health challenges. The training gives participants the skills needed to reach out and provide initial support to someone who may be developing a behavioral health condition or experiencing a crisis.

What is Adult MHFA? MHFA for Adults teaches people how to recognize signs of behavioral health challenges in adults aged 18 and older, how to offer initial help, and how to guide a person toward appropriate care if necessary.

What is Youth MHFA? Youth MHFA teaches adults who regularly interact with young people how to identify, understand, and respond to signs and symptoms of behavioral health challenges among adolescents ages 12 to 18. Youth MHFA equips educators, faculty, parents, and guardians with the skills needed to recognize and support youth and to offer relevant resources.

What is Teen MHFA? Teen MHFA teaches teens in grades 10-12, or ages 15-18, how to identify, understand and respond to signs of behavioral health challenges among their friends and peers and how to approach a trusted adult when further support or intervention is needed.

Why is this legislation needed:

- Adolescence is a time of critical development, and the time when mental health challenges may first emerge. From 2013-2021, the percentage of Colorado high school students reporting significant mental health struggles rose from 24% to 40% (CO Dept. of Public Health & Environment, Healthy Kids Colorado survey).
- According to the 2022 State of Mental Health in America Report, Colorado had one of the highest shares of adults with mental illness, with roughly one in four adults having a mental illness.

How does Behavioral Health First Aid fit with existing programs:

MHFA aligns with other efforts to improve the well-being of Coloradans by connecting participants to state and local resources. Teen MHFA provides a broad umbrella of behavioral health understanding under which awareness of other programs fit, including **Sources of Strength**. It enables teens to serve as trusted referral sources for their friends to counseling programs such as **IMatter** and gives them the confidence to call the **Safe2Tell** hotline when they see signs of imminent harm to self or others. Youth MHFA helps all adults who interact with youth recognize and respond to signs of behavioral health challenges or crisis in adolescents. These two trainings work in tandem with one another to support adolescents' ever growing behavioral health needs.

For information about MHFA:

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