2022 Priority: Increase Access to Mental Health Care

OVERVIEW

Barriers to care persist for individuals in Colorado, including lack of insurance coverage and a shortage in providers. In the behavioral health sphere, more Coloradans report poor mental health, and fewer are getting the care they need.[1] In 2019, more than one in 10 Coloradans said they did not get needed mental health care in the past year, reporting barriers related to stigma and lack of coverage.[2] These access issues have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expanding care capacity and availability, including addressing cost, can alleviate these issues. As such, Rocky Mountain Partnership is **focusing on policy solutions to increase access to mental health care** as a means to improve social and economic mobility in our region.

STATE & FEDERAL POLICY SOLUTIONS

- **Incentivize providers to join the mental health care workforce.** The gap between supply of mental health care professionals and demand for their services is growing and recognized as a key issue worldwide.[3] One way to close this gap is to implement incentive schemes, levers organizations can use to attract, retain, and motivate health care professionals, common in organizations across all work settings. Financial incentives are particularly important, via providing wages, bonuses, or loans.

- **Expand access to treatment options, programs, and facilities for mental health patients.** Due to lack of available programs, individuals continue to present in emergency rooms for non emergency mental health care, or have an untreated mental health incident result in incarceration and extended stay in a jail facility. The 2019 Colorado Health Access Survey showed that individuals did not access needed mental health care most often due to lack of insurance coverage, being concerned about the cost, or not being able to get an appointment.[4] By increasing access to treatment options and programs, including reduction in cost to the individual, people in need of these services will be able to access them and reduce stays in costly emergency and jail rooms not suited to an individual needing compassionate mental health care.

- **Subsidize quality mental health treatment for low-income community members.**Anyone needing mental health care should be able to access it, regardless of their economic status. Repairing holes to the safety net for mental health treatment for low-income community members can help providers be adequately reimbursed to keep pace with inflation and ensure enough quality providers are available to serve those needing help.[5]

INSTITUTIONAL POLICY SOLUTIONS

Coordinate with the new Colorado Office of Behavioral Health. The Office of Behavioral Health prevents and treats mental health and substance use disorders through contractors with providers, administers state mental health hospitals, regulates the public behavioral health system, and provides training.[6] Institutions in the region should coordinate with the Colorado Office of Behavioral Health to ensure a focus on coordination, collective strategy, and connection to existing systems.

SOURCES

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