



MENTAL HEALTH COLORADO

**ANNUAL REPORT
2019-2020**

Mental Health Colorado is your voice for creating healthier minds across the lifespan. For more than 65 years, Mental Health Colorado has led the charge to promote mental wellness, end shame and discrimination, and ensure equitable access to mental health and substance use care.

From the Capitol to the classroom, our advocacy efforts paid off—securing \$20 million for critical mental health and substance use care and passing all eight of the bills we championed in 2019. We led the fight for consumer protection and enforcement of mental health parity, holding insurers accountable for treating mental health equal to physical health—because when you’re fighting addiction, depression, or suicidal thoughts, you shouldn’t have to fight for coverage too.

A strong start for all of Colorado’s children is central to ensuring healthy minds and bright futures. We helped over 1,000 schools—many in rural and frontier communities—develop a framework for improving mental health. We also worked with legislators to put more nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists in schools.

As the whole world faces the challenges of the Coronavirus pandemic, we can’t allow ourselves to forget that every day, Coloradans are denied coverage for mental health or substance use treatment, put on a waitlist for months without care, are forced to pay thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs, and are often handcuffed and jailed, because that’s our community’s heartless and discriminatory response

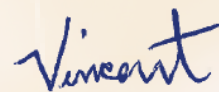
to unmet mental health needs. We championed important legislation last year to increase consumer protection, hold insurers accountable, and close loopholes to ensure no more Coloradans fall through the cracks.

The challenges of the pandemic in 2020, including the truncated legislative session and projected public and private revenue shortfalls, have had a dramatic effect on the altered landscape of our communities and the economy. We can’t be sure yet what our policy impact will be in the current disrupted session. What we do know is that all Coloradans, indeed everyone in the world, now have a much keener understanding of the vital way in which our mental and our physical health are connected.

We also know that the consumers for whom we have advocated since our founding in 1953 will be feeling the consequences of this pandemic more painfully than others, making our advocacy work all the more important as we head into the second half of the year.

You have a role to play today—and every day—in supporting mental wellness. Our lives depend on it.

Sincerely,



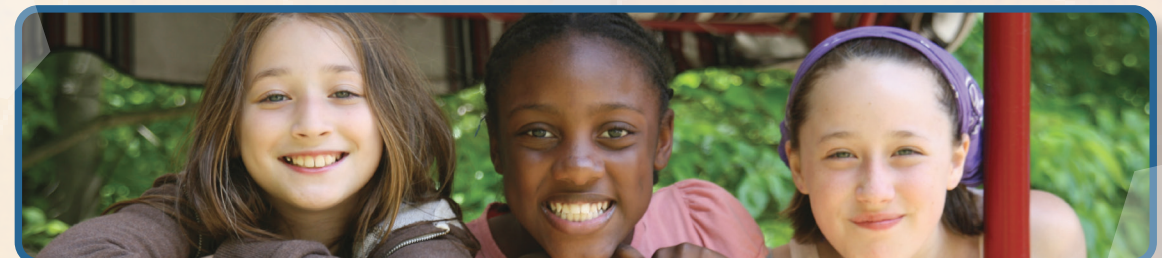
Vincent Atchity
President & CEO
Mental Health Colorado

Mental Health Colorado is the state’s leading advocate in promoting mental health, ending shame and discrimination, and ensuring equitable access to mental health and substance use care. We work with consumers, providers, policymakers, and others to reduce barriers to mental health and substance use care and promote mental wellness to reduce the need for care.

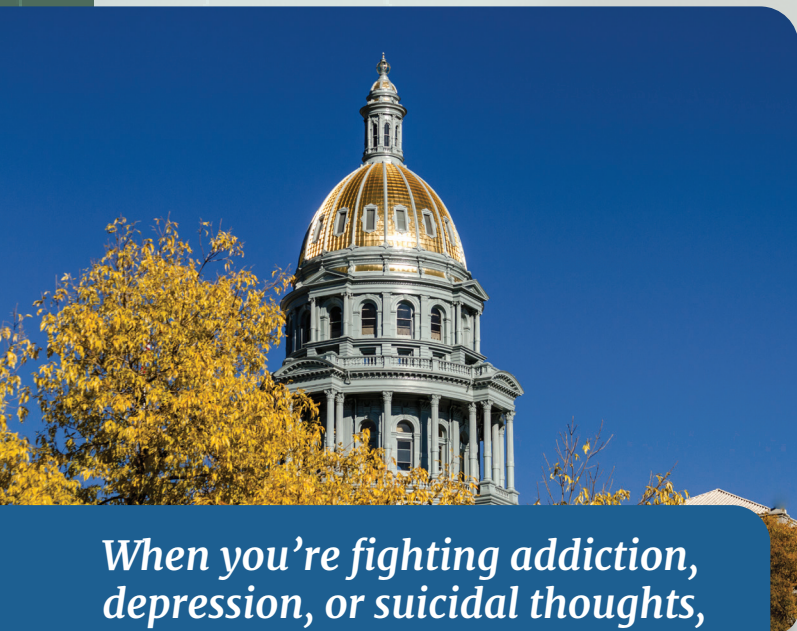
Established in 1953, Mental Health Colorado is the only consumer-driven statewide advocacy organization that focuses solely on mental health and reducing potential harm from drugs and alcohol. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and an affiliate of Mental Health America.

2019 At A Glance

- We secured a **\$20 million** increase in spending for mental health and substance use care
- We trained over **1,000** schools on best practices for school-based mental health and wellness programs
- We released the Early Childhood Mental Health Toolkit, a guide for promoting community-based mental health support for young children and their families
- We expanded our Brain Wave to more than **1,000** grassroots volunteer advocates statewide
- We provided **6,953** free, anonymous mental health and substance use screenings through our website
- We developed a consumer wellness guide website in partnership with the Office of Behavioral Health to help Coloradans navigate treatment and coverage for mental health and substance use conditions



Policy Accomplishments



When you're fighting addiction, depression, or suicidal thoughts, you shouldn't have to fight for coverage too.

Mental Health Colorado had an unprecedented 100% success rate in advocating for passage of our priority legislation in 2019.

Every day, Coloradans are denied coverage for mental health or substance use care, put on a waitlist for months, or forced to pay thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs. We led the fight for equitable coverage for mental health and substance use conditions. The parity legislation we championed increases consumer protections, holds insurers accountable, and closes loopholes in current law to ensure no more Coloradans fall through the cracks.

Coloradans to specify their preferred methods of treatment in the event of a mental health crisis that prevents them from making decisions for themselves.



Governor Jared Polis signing House Bill 19-1044, Psychiatric Advance Directives.

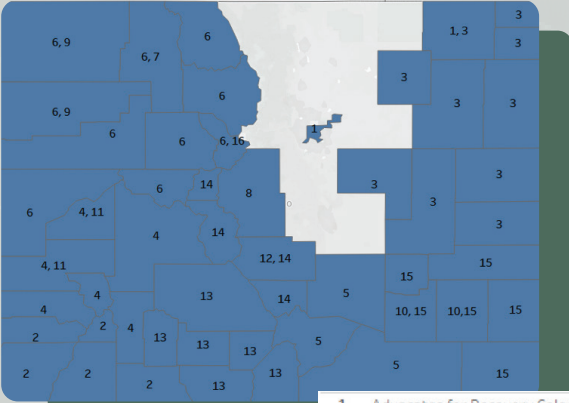
We championed legislation to get more school health professionals to support students' mental health needs and established standardized screening and assessment tools in schools statewide.

None of Colorado's 178 school districts are able to meet national recommendations for school counselors, school social workers, and school psychologists—resulting in nearly a million underserved students in Colorado.

We prioritized the needs of our most vulnerable citizens and focused on removing the backlog of people languishing in jail while waiting for treatment. We championed legislation to develop a safety net that does not turn people away because they are hard to serve, have a co-occurring condition, or are involved in other systems such as child welfare or criminal justice. We also expanded the number of providers who accept Medicaid clients, increased funding for housing and support services for individuals who are homeless and have a substance use condition, and ensured that a portion of any opioid settlement money in Colorado will be used to support recovery residences and sober living homes.



Mental Health Colorado championed House Bill 19-1009 to expand the availability of housing and support services for individuals who are homeless and have a substance use condition. Since the passage of this bill, the state has awarded \$4.6 million in grants to expand substance use disorder treatment in rural communities.



Since the passage of Mental Health Colorado's agenda bill, House Bill 19-1009, the state has awarded \$4.6 million in grants to expand substance use disorder treatment in rural communities.

1	Advocates for Recovery Colorado	\$256,000
2	Axis Health System	\$1,228,810
3	Centennial Mental Health Center	\$8,188,440
4	Center for Mental Health	\$3,089,256
5	Health Solutions	\$704,781
6	Mind Springs Health	\$3,364,140
7	Mountain Medical	\$138,168
8	Park County	\$100,000
9	Providence Recovery	\$259,922
10	Region Six Alcohol and Drug Abuse Corp.	\$552,990
11	River Valley Family Health	\$718,086
12	Rocky Mountain Behavioral Health	\$150,000
13	San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group	\$1,263,144
14	Solvista Health	\$2,800,000
15	Southeast Health Group	\$1,800,000
16	Summit County	\$216,028

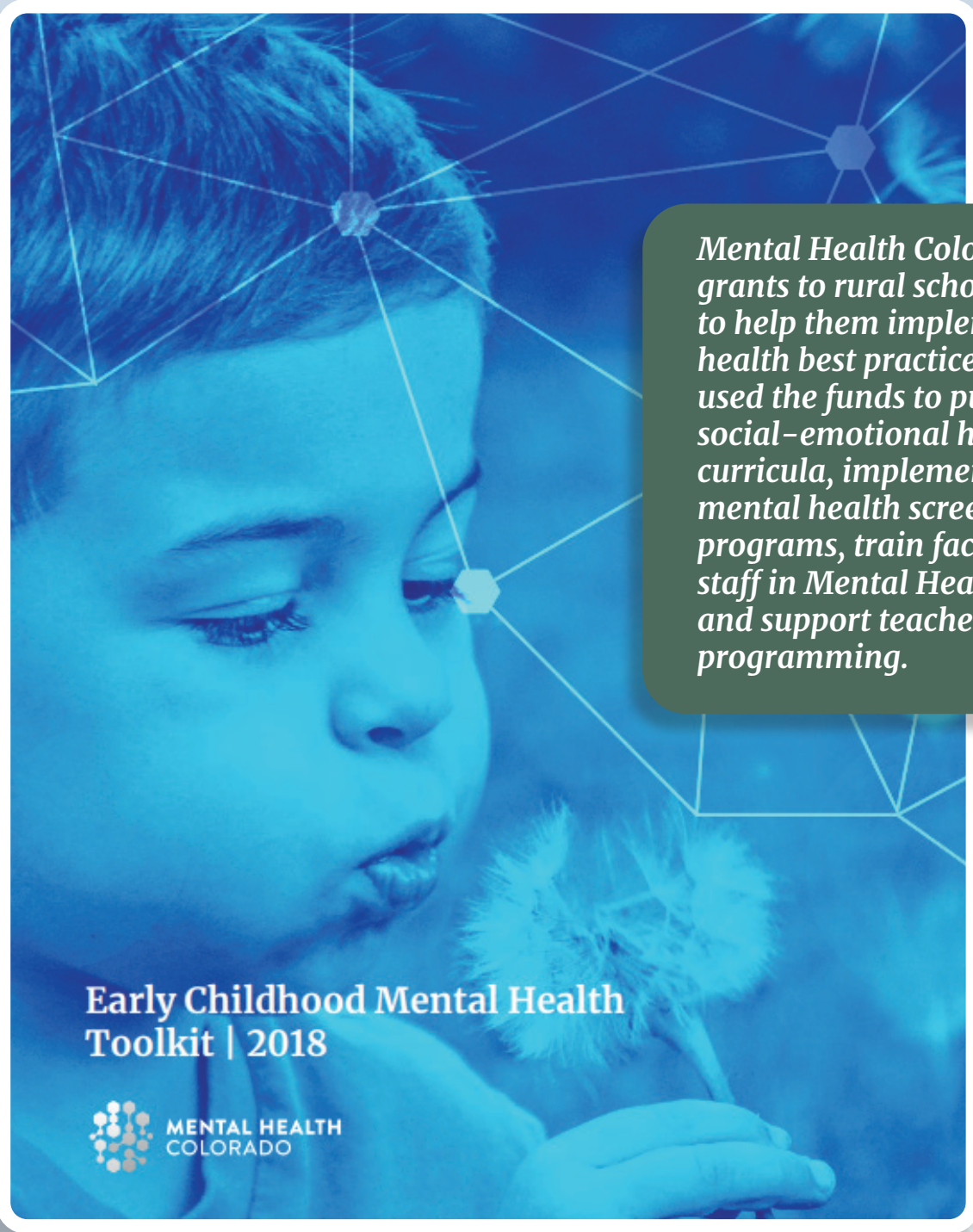
When we allow our most vulnerable citizens to go to jail or live on the streets because they cannot access treatment, we fail these people, their families, and the taxpayers.

We also helped pass House Bill 19-1193, which expands funding to an existing program that supports high-risk pregnant women with substance use conditions and increases capacity for appropriate treatment options for mothers and their children.

Bill sponsors, supporters, and Mental Health Colorado staff gather as Governor Jared Polis signs House Bill 19-1193, the Special Connections bill, into law.

Healthier Minds Across the Lifespan

In our focus on creating healthier minds across the lifespan, we continue to prioritize children’s mental health. In 2019 we released our Early Childhood Mental Health Toolkit and worked with school districts across the state to implement the best practices in our School Mental Health Toolkit. We provided training to over a thousand schools and seven of the 34 regional early childhood councils.



Mental Health Colorado awarded grants to rural school districts to help them implement mental health best practices. Districts used the funds to purchase social-emotional health curricula, implement universal mental health screening programs, train faculty and staff in Mental Health First Aid, and support teacher wellness programming.

The School Mental Health Toolkit has been so well-received by Colorado school districts that in 2019 we partnered with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) to create a national version.

We developed an online wellness guide in partnership with the Office of Behavioral Health to help Coloradans find providers, navigate insurance and payment options, and learn what to expect from treatment. The website has been visited more than 15,000 times since it was introduced.



“So, what is our challenge? Every Coloradan has a role to play today, and every day, in supporting improved mental health. There can be no passive waiting for someone somewhere else to do something.”

–Vincent Atchity, Mental Health Colorado President & CEO

Engaging the Community

Mental Health Colorado’s statewide network of advocates—the Brain Wave—brings lived and professional experience that informs all our work. By sharing their experiences and expertise with lawmakers and the media, Brain Wave members shape public policy and public opinion and help dismantle the barriers to care that Coloradans face.



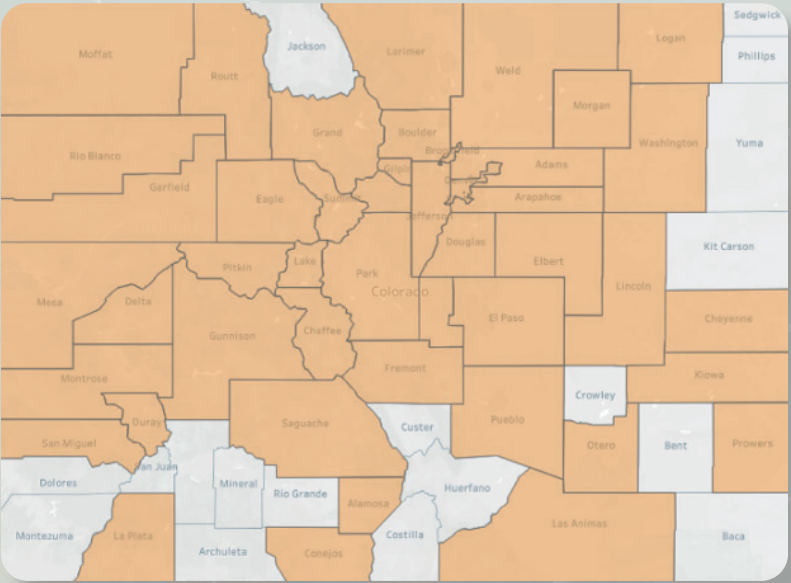
“I got involved with the Brain Wave because I have a son with a serious mental illness. Being involved with the Brain Wave has been really meaningful for me. I got to testify on several mental health bills last legislative session, and I was able to tell my story... The work that Mental Health Colorado is doing is so important for families like mine.”
–Judy, Brain Wave member

In 2019, Mental Health Colorado recruited over 300 new Brain Wave members across the state. Brain Wave members stand up for mental health in every state legislative district and in 46 counties.



“Being able to be a part of the Brain Wave and working with Mental Health Colorado to bring about change in our system is an empowering feeling. It’s enabled me to feel like my voice is being heard. I know based on my personal experience that implementing these changes in our system will make a difference and save lives. That feeling of empowerment and knowing that I’m working toward this cause is priceless.”
–Russell, Brain Wave member

You can join the Brain Wave at www.mentalhealthcolorado.org/jointhewave



Brain Wave members stand up for mental health in every state legislative district and in 46 counties.



“The main reason I decided to join the Brain Wave was because I was looking to get more integrated and involved in the mental health community in our state. But also because I believe healing together is easier on all of us who struggle with mental health conditions.”
–Adriana, Brain Wave member

Brain Wave Breakdown



Brain Wave members contacted their legislators in support of improved mental health and substance use legislation



Brain Wave members testified on Mental Health Colorado bills



Brain Wave members dedicated their time to improving mental health in some other way: attending a webinar, emailing a local leader about mental health, or filling out a survey that informed parity legislation

All of these efforts helped end shame and discrimination associated with mental health and substance use!

Looking Ahead to 2020 & Beyond

Building on our successes from 2019, Mental Health Colorado is looking ahead with ambitious initiatives:

- Making sure that funding and resources for mental health remain a priority in the wake of the global pandemic
- Working closely with partners and stakeholders in every corner of the state to ensure that Mental Health Colorado truly represents your voice for healthier minds across the lifespan
- Formulating a legislative agenda that represents inclusive coalitions of Colorado's mental health allies in every sector, while working within anticipated state revenue shortfalls
- Prioritizing prevention and early intervention throughout the lifespan
- Disentangling mental health and criminal justice—jails and prisons should not be the state's largest psychiatric facilities
- Ensuring that every Coloradan understands that mental health and physical health are connected

Funds will be used for:

- Supporting policy development and advocacy
- Helping school communities give their students the tools and resources they need to thrive
- Cultivating public awareness in order to end shame and discrimination
- Promoting wellness in aging so that all Coloradans can thrive at every stage of life



“Everyone has a story and by sharing our stories, we gain power and we empower others. Thank you, Mental Health Colorado, for giving me an avenue to make my crooked path straight. Every life matters. Every life counts. There is purpose in pain, and I am still navigating my journey.”
–Melissa, Brain Wave member





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