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**MENTAL HEALTH
COLORADO**

COLORADO

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to design this annual report.

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**ANNUAL REPORT
2020-2021**

A LETTER FROM VINCENT

Mental Health Colorado is your voice for creating healthier minds across the lifespan. For 68 years, Mental Health Colorado has worked to promote mental well-being, end shame and discrimination, and ensure equitable access to mental health and substance use care.

In 2020, your support allowed us to champion more than 20 bills to help provide a strong start for all children; support Colorado's families; improve wellness in aging; prioritize access to housing, supports, and services; decriminalize mental health; reduce harm from drugs and alcohol; and end shame and discrimination.

The challenges of the pandemic in 2020—including the interrupted legislative session and public and private revenue shortfalls—significantly altered the fiscal outcomes of our mental health and substance use policy work. We ultimately ended the session with greater success than the unusual circumstances had led us to anticipate at the onset of the pandemic. Mental Health Colorado and its partners secured \$15.2 million in federal funding for mental health in response to the pandemic.

In 2021, you've been helping us make good use of this unique historical moment when mental health is top of mind for so many more of us. We have been working with community partners and elected

officials to prioritize access to care for Colorado's school children as they recover from a very difficult year. We've been convening stakeholders to review and revise emergency mental health procedures. We've been laying the foundations for a national movement for prosecutor-led diversion. We keep a spotlight on the need for supportive housing as the key missing piece of the puzzle for healing our mental health landscape.

Thanks to the foresight of Moe Keller, our Director of Advocacy, Colorado will be better positioned than many states for the implementation of the new national 988 number for suicide prevention and crisis intervention. Thanks to the tenacious leadership and patient stakeholding of Lauren Snyder, our State Policy Director, Colorado is on the verge of creating the state's first protective standards for how people with health conditions are treated in the larger county jails. Our communications team, led by Aubree Thompson, is launching the Care Not Cuffs campaign to energize and accelerate our progress toward a state which meets the health care needs of its people with compassion and a sharper, smarter eye on positive outcomes for individuals and communities.

We are grateful to our Brain Wave members and our Board of Directors, and to all of the supporters, donors, and volunteers who helped us advance our mission during this unprecedented year.

Sincerely,



Vincent Atchity
President & CEO
Mental Health Colorado

MENTAL HEALTH COLORADO

Mental Health Colorado is the state's leading advocate for promoting mental well-being, ending shame and discrimination, and ensuring equitable access to mental health and substance use care. We are a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization and affiliate of Mental Health America.



2020-2021 AT A GLANCE

- During the 2020 legislative session, Mental Health Colorado and its partners **secured \$15.2 million in federal funding for mental health** in response to the pandemic.
- To help ensure a strong start for all of Colorado's children in the post-vaccine phase of the pandemic, **we promoted free needs assessment screenings and recovery-focused therapy sessions for kids** anticipating a fall return to in-person school.
- **We provided 21,990 free, anonymous mental health and substance use screenings** through our website. The screenings during the pandemic year were up 267% from the previous year, reflecting a nationwide surge in positive screenings for stress and anxiety and other mental health concerns.
- **We launched the Care Not Cuffs campaign** to increase public demand for a health-based response to health care needs.

As of April 15, 2020, **The Equitas Project is now part of Mental Health Colorado.** The Equitas Project has worked in Colorado and nationally to disentangle mental health and criminal justice since its founding by the **David and Laura Merage Foundation** in 2013.



POLICY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The challenges of the pandemic in 2020, including the interrupted legislative session and public and private revenue shortfalls, significantly altered the fiscal outcomes of our mental health and substance use policy work. However, we ultimately ended the session with greater success than the circumstances had led us to anticipate at the onset of the pandemic.

Mental Health Colorado and its partners secured

\$15.2 million in federal funding

for mental health in response to the pandemic. Mental Health Colorado staff testified 44 times, and there were 75 print or broadcast news stories about our priority bills.

Preventative care and healthy learning environments are central to ensuring a strong start for all children. We championed House Bill 20-1053, which creates policies that will support the early childhood workforce. We led the charge for House Bill 20-1312 to prepare teachers to support their students' ongoing mental health needs. The bill creates the expectation that 10 out of the 90 hours required for teacher re-certification include some form of behavioral health training that is culturally responsive and trauma- and evidence-informed.

The criminal justice system is our primary—and completely inappropriate, ineffective, and costly—response to people's unmet needs for mental health and substance use care.

Building health care capacity and supportive housing

so that we can disentangle mental health and criminal justice will improve health outcomes, save taxpayer dollars, and enhance community well-being.

- Strong, healthy families are vitally important to strong, healthy individuals. Senate Bill 20-205 requires certain employers to provide paid sick leave so that employees can attend to their health needs or the needs of someone they care for.
- The rapid expansion of telehealth played an important role in keeping Coloradans safe during the pandemic. Senate Bill 20-212 will protect access to telehealth to keep Coloradans safe and promote convenient, personalized care.
- Drugs and alcohol have been a part of our landscape throughout history. From childhood onward, we thrive if we can reap their benefits while reducing their potential for great harm. House Bill 20-1085 reduces the risk of harmful addiction and increases access to care for recovering from harmful substance use.
- Senate Bill 20-181 makes improvements to the incompetent to proceed process for individuals involved in the criminal justice system, including individuals who have an intellectual or developmental disability and individuals charged with misdemeanor crimes.



HEALTHIER MINDS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

In 2021, Mental Health Colorado is launching the Healthier Minds Business Roundtable. The Healthier Minds Business Roundtable is a one-of-a-kind networking opportunity for businesses to work together to promote wellness at work, end the shame and discrimination that keep employees and their leaders from seeking and giving support, and make it easier for everyone to access quality care when it's needed.

The Healthier Minds Business Roundtable is a timely opportunity for Mental Health Colorado to elevate our partnership with business leaders as an alarming number of workers are experiencing adverse mental health conditions because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A CDC study confirmed that during the pandemic 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use. Further, the statistics show that depression interferes with an employee's ability to complete "physical job tasks about 20% of the time." It also can cause a 35% reduction in cognitive performance. Depression, according to Mental Health America, costs the national economy over \$51 billion in absenteeism and productivity loss each year.

Mental Health Colorado's Healthier Minds Business Roundtable unites the voice and vision of business leaders who support our mission to promote the well-being of Coloradans and reduce barriers to mental health and substance use care.

WANT TO BECOME A MEMBER?
Contact Alexa Dahlin,
Partnerships and Development Manager
adahlin@mentalhealthcolorado.org

Businesses that invest in their employees' mental and emotional health see increases in productivity and quality of work.

With the right supports and services across the lifespan—support for children, access to housing, employment, and quality care—we can yield healthier populations and prevent crises. Our nation's leaders need to prioritize well-being for all.

Responding to the chronic and acute mental health needs of the population with police, sheriffs, and the criminal justice system is neither appropriate, nor healthy, nor sound fiscal policy. It's discriminatory, harmful, and sometimes fatal.

— Vincent Atchity
Mental Health Colorado
President & CEO



CARE NOT CUFFS

In the absence of adequate access to health services, people with unmanaged mental health needs often intersect with law enforcement and spend time in jails, then cycling in and out of detention, homelessness, and joblessness. With the generous support of the David and Laura Merage Foundation, Mental Health Colorado launched Care Not Cuffs to demand a health-based response to a health care need and to contribute to community momentum toward putting the supports and services in place that yield healthier populations and prevent crises.

You can sign the petition and learn more at carenotcuffs.org

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY: THE BRAIN WAVE

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.

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

In 2020, Brain Wave members testified, emailed, and called legislators hundreds of times to advocate for mental health.

As the advocacy voice for Coloradans, we cannot exist without our Brain Wave members. Their experiences, voices, and time are essential to changing practices here in Colorado. They help make Mental Health Colorado the powerful advocacy force it is. From testifying for better mental health policy, to sharing the stories and personal experiences, to devoting time to speak at our events, these volunteer efforts help Mental Health Colorado advance our mission of creating healthier minds across the lifespan.

My mental health story shapes the woman I have created today. Helping others reach their potential is about getting vulnerable with the hard topics of life. Mental Health Colorado has given me the opportunity to share my story with the world, something that I hold close to my heart.

-Raya Patel
Brain Wave Member



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

The Brain Wave program immediately struck me as a unique opportunity to get involved in the “real” work needed to create a better approach to mental health on so many levels. Sometimes having a direct impact on big challenges and effecting change can seem out of reach, but it’s given me the opportunities, knowledge, access, resources, and exposure that make it possible to be on the frontlines of critical change.

Whether it’s been discussions with legislators influencing active policy decisions, developing my grassroots activism skills, or sharing my personal story, it has exceeded my expectations to get involved on a very direct level.

-Adam Weimer
Brain Wave Member



HEALING TOGETHER

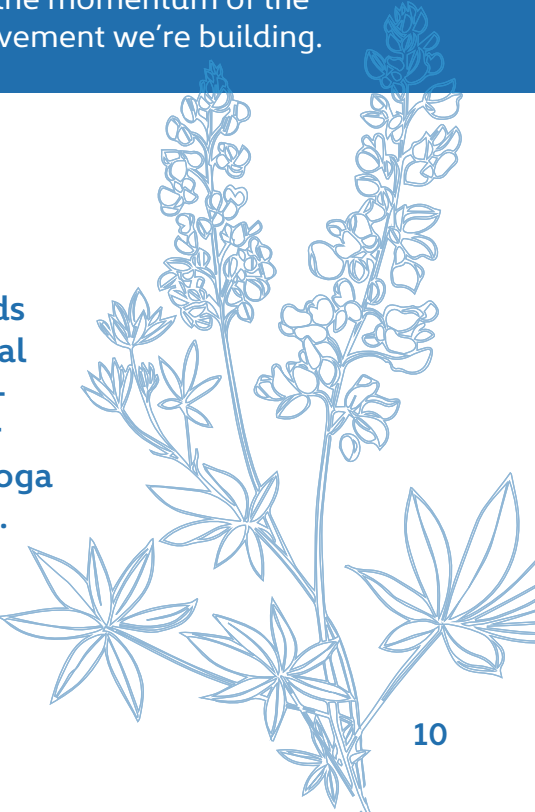
Mental health doesn’t have a start and finish. As we look forward to a post-pandemic world, Mental Health Colorado is highlighting what it means to **heal together**. We’re all experiencing this together and we can collectively recover from our trauma by having compassion for ourselves and each other—and go on to **thrive**.



We know that well-being isn’t achieved through access to care alone. Practicing yoga is a great tool for achieving healthier minds across the lifespan. During Mental Health Month, we hosted a Mind-Body Yoga fundraiser with international yoga teacher Marysia Do.



On May 3, 2021, we partnered with the Governor’s Office to declare May as Mental Health Month. We gathered virtually to focus on the theme: Healing Together. After a year full of hardship, we recognized that individual and community health are as inseparable as physical and mental health. Health is all of us and depends on the momentum of the movement we’re building.



2021 & BEYOND

Building on our successes from 2020, Mental Health Colorado is looking ahead with ambitious initiatives:

- Ensuring that funding and resources for mental health remain a priority in the wake of the global pandemic
- Prioritizing health promotion and early intervention throughout the lifespan
- 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
- Disentangling mental health and criminal justice—jails and prisons should not be the state's largest psychiatric facilities

Funds will be used for

Supporting policy development and advocacy to pass laws and change practices to make healthier happier humans all over the state.

Promoting wellness in aging so that all Coloradans can thrive at every stage of life.

Cultivating public awareness in order to end shame and discrimination.

Thanks to the support of kind Coloradans who care, Mental Health Colorado promotes an inclusive vision of well-being. We work to pass laws and change practices to make healthier happier humans all over the state. Our advocacy and communications work helps communities give their children the tools and resources they need to thrive, cultivates public awareness to end shame and discrimination, and promotes wellness in aging so that all Coloradans can thrive at every stage of life. No Coloradan should have to go without quality care when it's needed.

Health is all of us.

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