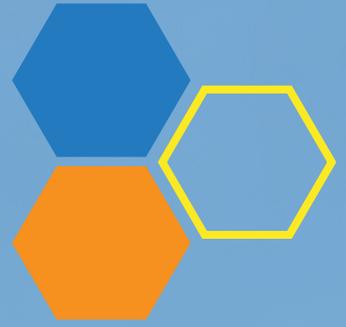




MENTAL HEALTH
COLORADO



MENTAL HEALTH COLORADO: **ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**

*Using your story to change policy and create
healthier minds across the lifespan.*



ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH COLORADO

Mental Health Colorado advocates for every Coloradan. We engage policymakers, providers, the public, and the press to promote well-being, ensure equitable access to mental health and substance use care, and end discrimination. Our efforts range from the Capitol to the classroom. We are Colorado's leading non-profit, non-partisan organization working to pass laws, change practices, and build a movement—to create healthier minds across the lifespan for all Coloradans.

Advocacy is a critical pillar of our work. Our statewide network of grassroots advocates, the Brain Wave, powers our advocacy efforts by amplifying voices of Coloradans who have direct experience and knowledge. Brain Wavers help illuminate issues that continue to exist across the state by sharing their stories and experiences with lawmakers, the media, and community partners.

Our Brain Wave is integral to shaping public policy and opinion.

This toolkit aims to empower you to join the Brain Wave at Mental Health Colorado and transform the health landscape to better serve the needs of all Coloradans.

BY THE NUMBERS

Across the state, Coloradans struggle with mental health and substance use needs.

Adults in Colorado

#51 In 2022, Colorado ranked dead last for prevalence of mental health conditions and lower rates of access to care among adults.

 More than 1 in 10 Coloradans (10.44%) had a substance use need – the 7th highest in the country in 2022.



Rates of suicide in rural Colorado are significantly higher compared to urban areas – 1 in 5 rural adults reported feeling depressed in 2021.

Youth in Colorado

 While Colorado saw a 32% drop in youth dying by suicide in 2022, teens continue to be at risk with 40% of high school students in Colorado reporting persistent sadness or hopelessness.

 11% of Colorado high school students reported using substances to cope with or overcome negative or difficult feelings in the past 12 months.

36,000

As of May 2023, I Matter Colorado has scheduled nearly 36,000 appointments and served nearly 8,000 youth across the state.

#37 Colorado ranks 37th for adult and youth measures compared to the rest of the country.

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Legislative advocacy is the primary arena where we engage Brain Wavers to support our efforts to change policy. This type of advocacy refers to the process by which elected officials introduce and pass bills that become law.

Colorado's statewide legislative body is called the General Assembly, which comprises two chambers: the House of Representatives and the Senate. The General Assembly has 100 members, with 35 Senators serving four-year terms and 65 Representatives serving two-year terms. The State Legislature is part-time and meets 120 days between January and May, though several committees meet year-round and in the interim.



HOW A BILL BECOMES LAW

Each introduced bill must pass through both chambers to become state law. The process is open, meaning the public can watch all proceedings.

#1 Introduction

A Senator or Representative introduces a bill as the "prime" sponsor; other legislators may sign on as co-sponsors.

#2 First Reading

The bill is read on the House or Senate Floor, given a bill number, and assigned a committee.

#3 Committee Hearing

The assigned Committee is focused on specific issues such as education, public health, behavioral health, etc. At the hearing, committee members examine the bill and determine if it should be passed to the entire chamber. At each committee hearing, advocates can testify in support of, opposition to, or neutral on a bill but must take a position.

This step is where you can testify and make your case in front of members.

During the hearing, Committee members may:

- Amend the original bill: add, take out, or substitute language
- Postpone indefinitely (PI): Make a motion to stop the bill from moving forward in the process (what's called "killing" the bill)
- Vote to continue in the process
- Hold the bill for another hearing
- Refer the bill to another committee

#4 Appropriations Committee Each bill will receive a fiscal note, which estimates the bill's fiscal impact on the State. If the bill has any associated costs, it must go through Appropriations, which is the Committee that determines what will be funded. If the bill passes the committees, it moves to Second Reading.

#5 Second Reading or Committee of the Whole (COW) After the bill has successfully passed Committee, the bill will be read on the floor, where it can be debated or further amended. A voice vote is all that is required for approval.

Often, contentious bills can get stuck in this step as a political strategy, which can delay the legislative calendar, hearings, and votes.

#6 Third Reading Once the bill has survived second reading, final debate and a recorded vote to formally approve the bill occur before sending it to the other chamber. The chamber may also choose to "kill" the bill on the third reading.

#7 Repeat of Process The bill undergoes the same steps – introduction to third reading – in the other chamber.

#8 Amended Bills If the bill is modified in the second chamber, the first chamber must approve the new changes. If they do not immediately agree, it goes to the Conference Committee and is reapproved by both chambers.

The Conference Committee is a group of legislators – selected by House and Senate Leadership – to work out the differences and develop a comprised bill.

#9 Sent to the Governor Once both chambers agree on a final bill, it is sent to the Governor where it may be:



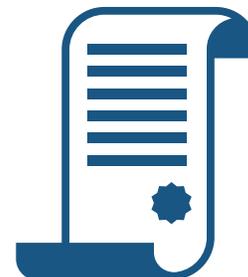
SIGNED INTO LAW

Congrats!



VETOED

If the Governor vetoes a bill, the legislature can override a veto with a 2/3 majority vote



LEFT TO BECOME LAW

If legislators are in session, the Governor has 10 days to sign or veto the bill, or it becomes law. If out of session, the Governor has 30 days to sign or veto the bill

ADVOCACY 101

At Mental Health Colorado, we primarily focus our advocacy efforts on advancing change on the state level through legislative and/or regulatory policy. Most importantly, advocacy gives you a voice in the legislative and regulatory processes.



What is policy?

Policy refers to the system of laws, statutes, administrative rules, and administrative codes – the legal and regulatory framework within which we all work, play, and live. Policy is the instrument that government entities – city, county, state, and federal – work to improve their constituents' circumstances. To ensure the policy helps and not harms, input from advocates is critical to shaping good policy.

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is taking action— actively supporting, opposing, or better informing an idea or cause and communicating your position with policymakers. The power of advocacy comes from being a constituent or a voter who elected lawmakers to represent your views in the State Legislature. You have the power to educate policymakers and make change. Whether you are a person with lived/living experience, a loved one, or a provider, you are an expert, and your voice matters. One of the compelling things about state-level advocacy versus federal advocacy is that, given the size of our state, even a relatively small number of voices can make a very big wave.

WHAT DOES ADVOCACY LOOK LIKE?

Advocacy can take many forms, but at its heart, advocating with Mental Health Colorado is about sharing your story and experience to improve policymakers' understanding of the state of mental health and/or substance use needs in Colorado. Here are the ways you can advocate:

Testify at Committee Hearings

Change Legislators' hearts, minds, and votes in real-time by testifying at committee hearings during Legislative Session. Though it may sound daunting, this is a powerful form of advocacy and allows you to share your experiences broadly with a first-hand account of how policies have a tangible impact as a constituent.

Lobby Your Legislator

Request a meeting to directly request legislators to support or oppose a specific piece of legislation. You can use a combination of your story and data that Mental Health Colorado can provide. There will also be an opportunity on March 6, 2024, to participate in the Mental Health Colorado Day at the Capitol and learn how to lobby legislators with staff and other Brain Wave Members effectively.

Directly Communicate with Legislators

Email or call legislators about policies you support or oppose. This approach can effectively show that you care about how your Legislator decides to vote on a policy. Often, Mental Health Colorado will develop draft emails you can send to your elected official with a click of a button.

Share Your Story in the Media

Brain Wave members help humanize the need for policy change and demonstrate systemic challenges to life by sharing their stories with media – print, radio, and TV—as well as on our website and social media platforms. It's a great opportunity to highlight issues to all of Colorado.

Provide Feedback to Mental Health Colorado

We always want to hear your thoughts! Please feel free to email us anytime about your experience and/or concerns to help shape our priorities and positions on policy.

Volunteer with Us

Connect with your community and help build awareness about our work at Mental Health Colorado. You can sign up to volunteer here

GUIDE TO TESTIFYING

As noted, testifying at Committee Hearings is a powerful advocacy tool to shape the policy landscape. Here's how you can participate in the policymaking process.

Find out when the bill you are testifying on is scheduled in Committee:

- Look up the bill and scroll down to the Committee to find the date, time, and room where the hearing will occur.
- Mark your calendar but *note that the hearing date and time may change or not start on time.*

Sign up to testify:

- Click on how you would like to testify: in-person, remote, or submit written testimony.
- Select Committee Hearing and Hearing Item
- Select the correct Committee
- Select the correct Meeting Date and Time
- Select the correct hearing item
- Fill out all your information and submit

You must sign up to testify before the hearing to testify in-person, remotely, or submit a written statement.

Prepare your testimony:

Be sure to draft what you will say before the hearing. You will have 2-3 minutes to share your story. Preparing ahead of time will ensure you are relaxed and ready.

Share your testimony with Committee Members:

On the hearing date, be sure you arrive or are signed up a few minutes early. If the bill is a Mental Health Colorado agenda or priority bill, we will help coordinate and try to accommodate your schedule as best we can. At the hearing, the Chair of the Committee will recognize you to testify – in-person or virtually. If a time limit is imposed, there will be a visible time counting down your time; if you go over it, the Committee will ask you to wrap up.

Follow the bill

You can closely follow where the bill is in the process and the votes on the [Colorado General Assembly's website](#).

Here are a few general guidelines on how to structure your testimony:

- **Greetings to the Committee**
Good afternoon, members of the Senate/House X Committee
- **Introduce yourself**
My name is X, and I am here representing myself
- **State your position**
Thank you for the opportunity to speak and testify [in support of/in opposition to] X bill
- **State the issue for your perspective**
In a few sentences, provide a summary of what brought you to testify today; what is the issue you want this bill to address; how will this bill impact or not impact the issue? In other words, connect your story with the bill's purpose.
- **State your ask**
I urge you to vote yes/no on X bill because X, Y, Z
- **Close your statement**
Thank you for taking the time to listen to my story—I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have

You can always send drafts if you want us to look: banshus@mentalhealthcolorado.org.

Arrive or sign on early

It is important to be flexible. There are a lot of variables, including how many bills are ahead of the bill you're testifying on. Bill orders change quickly, and some bills will have a lot of testimony. We appreciate your patience in advance!

Write out your testimony

Bring a printed copy or have a copy on your computer to refer to.

Practice prior to sharing your testimony

Rehearse your testimony to be sure you are comfortable and to ensure you do not go over time.

Lead with authenticity

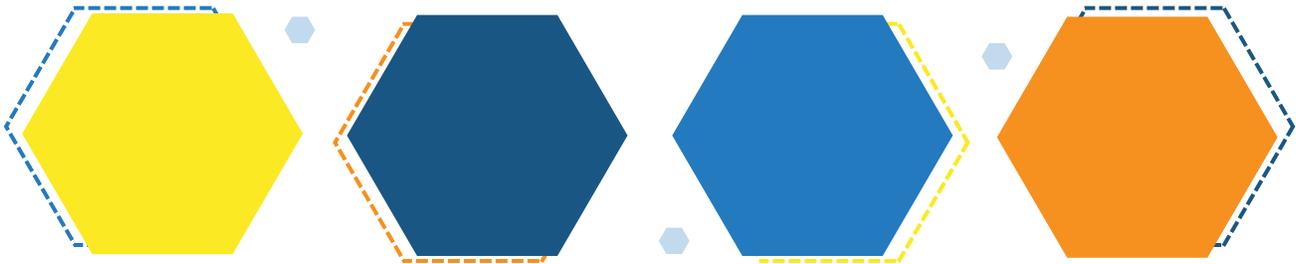
This is YOUR story, YOUR experience, and YOUR expertise.



IN CLOSING

Thank you for continuing to inspire us every day at Mental Health Colorado. You – our Brain Wave advocates —are why we never give up pushing our system to serve Coloradans with the highest quality of care and dignity possible.

We hope you will join us in transforming Colorado's behavioral health landscape through advocacy and the lens of people with lived/living experience. Advocacy is critical in helping us achieve our mission to create healthier minds across the lifespan. Please reach out with any questions, concerns, or comments.



KEY RESOURCES

MENTAL HEALTH COLORADO: MENTALHEALTHCOLORADO.ORG

SIGN UP TO TESTIFY: LEG.STATE.CO.US

FIND YOUR LEGISLATOR: LEG.COLORADO.GOV/FIND-MY-LEGISLATOR

LOOK UP AND TRACK BILLS: LEG.COLORADO.GOV

LISTEN TO COMMITTEE HEARINGS: SG001-HARMONY.SLIQ.NET

WATCH THE HOUSE FLOOR: COLORADOCHANNEL.NET

WATCH THE SENATE FLOOR: COLORADOCHANNEL.NET

TRACK LEGISLATIVE PROCEEDINGS IN REAL TIME: LEG.STATE.CO.US

STATUTE: LEG.COLORADO.GOV

SESSION SCHEDULE: LEG.COLORADO.GOV/SESSION-SCHEDULE