



**MENTAL HEALTH
COLORADO**

Mental Health Colorado's Brain Wave Advocacy Toolkit



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Turn the Tide



A Message from Our CEO

Dear Brain Wave Advocate,

Every one of us has mental health—from the very beginning of life to the very end. And just as we must learn to care for our own well-being, we must also learn to look out for one another's well-being. Well-being is a rising swell that lifts and is lifted by how well we care for ourselves and each other.

Advocacy is how we make the caring community a reality. As a Brain Wave advocate, you take action—in your neighborhood, your family, your workplace or school, or at the State Capitol—to support, improve, or protect policies and practices that shape lives. As an advocate you speak up for what's right, challenge discrimination with compassion, and ensure that fellow Coloradans understand the issues and embrace the best practices. As an advocate, you make sure that the elected officials who create our laws and the leaders in all settings who are responsible for setting expectations and policies hear from the people their decisions impact most.

You have the power to educate policymakers, inspire your community, and create change. Whether you are a person with lived or living experience, a loved one, a care provider, an educator, a public servant, or a business leader, you are an expert. Your story matters. Your voice matters. And in a state the size of Colorado, even a relatively small number of voices can create a very big wave.

This toolkit will help you realize your strengths and fulfill your potential as a changemaker—offering practical guidance, tools, and inspiration to make your advocacy effective and sustainable. We invite you to use it, share it, and make it your own. Together is how we promote healthier minds across the lifespan for all Coloradans.

Thank you for being part of the Brain Wave, and for lending your voice to this movement.

With appreciation,

Vincent Atchity
President & CEO
Mental Health Colorado

Catch the Wave

How to Be an Advocate

Advocacy is a journey, and every action matters. Whether you have 2 minutes or a full day, there's a role for you. You can start by sharing our posts on social media, take the next step by emailing your legislator using our online alerts, or prepare to share your story in testimony to bring an end to discrimination and influence changes in law, policy, and practice. Find the pathway that's right for you.



Prioritize Self-Care

Advocacy can be rewarding and healing, but it can also stir big emotions.

- **Build your support network**—friends, family, fellow advocates, counselors.
- **Prepare for emotional moments**—have a plan for how you'll decompress after advocacy work.
- **Find healing through advocacy**—turning pain into action can help honor your experiences.

“I advocated against a bill that would criminalize Coloradans who unknowingly possessed any amount of synthetic opioids, after losing my best friend, Will, to fentanyl poisoning from a sleeping pill he didn't know was laced. Speaking out helped me in my grieving process—I knew I was protecting others like Will.”

– A. S., Brain Wave Advocate

In 2023, fentanyl claimed more than 1,200 lives in Colorado—outpacing homicides across 2021–2023.

“There are no bad emotions, but anger is one of the most complicated ones — because it requires a productive outlet to properly deflate. I've found issue advocacy to be a productive outlet for anger. And I've found Mental Health Colorado to be a productive outlet for advocacy.”

– T. F., Brain Wave Advocate



Catch the Wave

How to Be an Advocate



Act Locally: Family, Workplace, Friends

Change begins in conversations at home, in your workplace, and with friends.

- Normalize talking about mental health.
- Tell people about laws and practices that support improved health and well-being.
- Share resources when someone needs help.
- Model compassion and respect.



Help End Health-Based Discrimination

When you encounter discrimination toward people with mental health and/or substance use conditions, including self-directed discrimination (believing harmful stereotypes, blaming self, avoiding support, etc.), respond with kindness and curiosity with minimal judgment.

- Ask questions that invite reflection.
- Offer facts to counter myths.
- Share stories that humanize the issue.



Key Everyday Actions to Create Change

- Use respectful, person-first language. Be kind. Be a model citizen in a community that cares.
- Share Mental Health Colorado posts and other resources on your social media.
- Speak up in all settings—from casual conversations to family dinners to formal meetings—and teach others what you know about policies and practices that support well-being.
- Ask questions about policies and practices that fail to support well-being or run counter to building a caring community.
- Support businesses and organizations committed to well-being and health equity.

Make Waves in the Media

Share Your Story

Stories change hearts and minds in a way statistics can't. Stories make policies personal and persuade others that change is needed.



When crafting your story:

- Know your audience – consider what they value and what might move them.
- Speak from personal experience – be authentic.
- Focus on positive change – try to show the path forward.
- Avoid jargon and acronyms – keep it clear and relatable.

*A powerful way to structure your story is the 'Problem-Solution-Ask' model. Briefly describe the **problem** you or a loved one faced (the challenge or barrier to care). Explain the **solution** that would have helped or did help (what needs to change). Finally, make a clear ask of your audience (e.g., 'I urge you to vote yes on this bill to ensure other families don't face this barrier.')."*

Find Mental Health Colorado on social media!



Use Your Platform

- Share your story with a short, powerful caption.
- Include a call to action with links to Mental Health Colorado's newsletter, posts and other relevant sources.
- Use strong visuals.
- Tag @MentalHealthCO, use strategic hashtags.

Engage at the Capitol

From the Colorado State Capitol to the classroom, workplace, municipality, and neighborhood, policy encompasses the laws, statutes, administrative rules, and codes that create the legal, regulatory, and administrative framework in which we live, work, and play.

Policy change at every level isn't theoretical, it's real, and it has a direct impact on the lives of Coloradans. One of the most effective ways to influence state policy is by providing testimony and lobbying your legislator.



- **Testifying** means speaking directly to lawmakers, often during a committee hearing, about how a proposed law will affect you, your family, your clients or your community.



- **Lobbying** your legislator involves meeting or communicating with them to explain your position, share your personal story, and urge them to support or oppose specific bills.

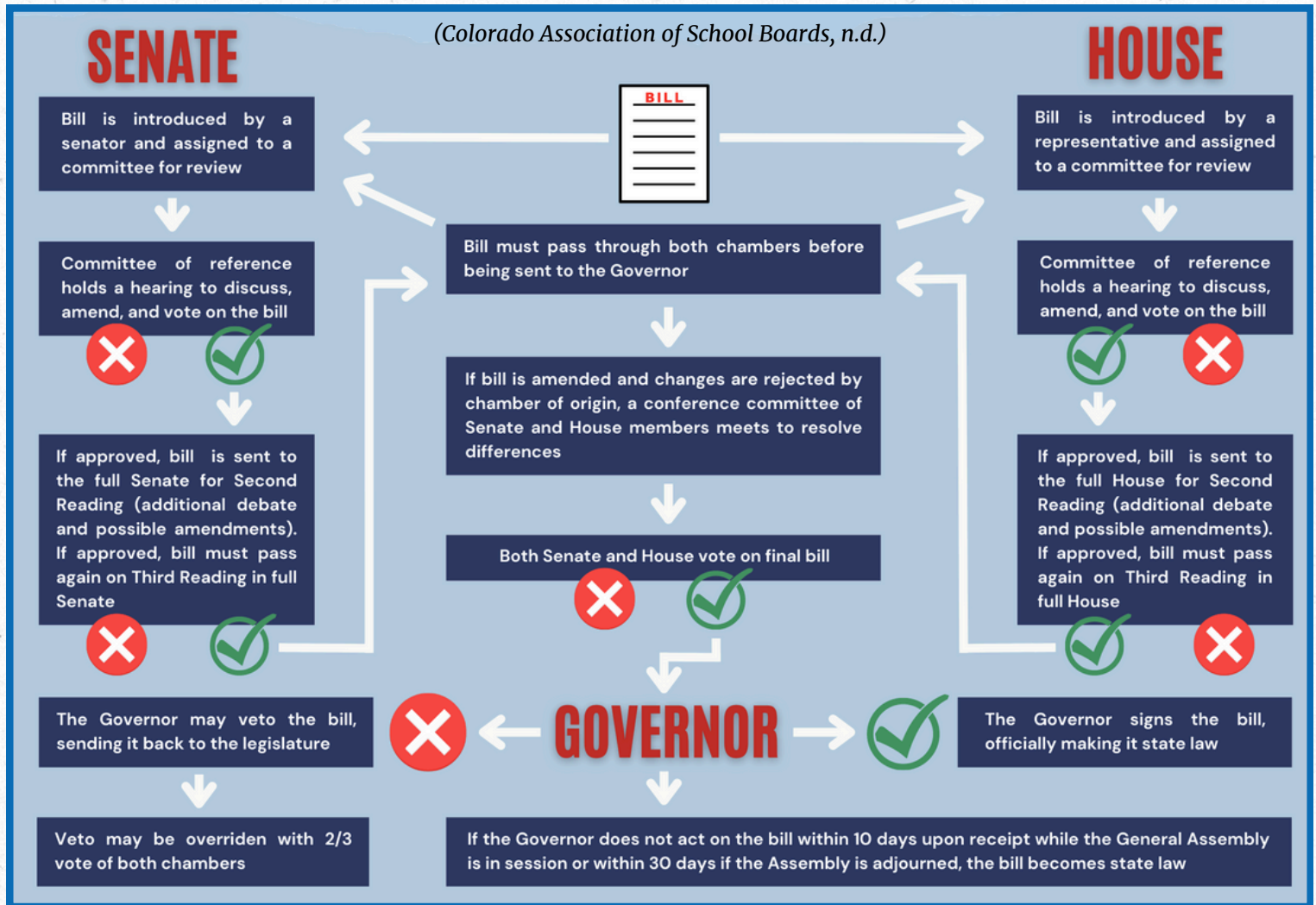
Thanks to the determined efforts of our Brain Wave advocates, who have courageously shared their experiences, met with legislators, and demanded action, Mental Health Colorado has helped secure landmark legislation and advance changes in practice since 1953. Your voice is not only powerful- it's part of a proven, winning strategy.



Engage at the Capitol

How a Bill Becomes Law in Colorado

(Colorado Association of School Boards, n.d.)



Engage at the Capitol

Testify in Committee

- Review upcoming legislation on our website.
- Coordinate with MHC staff for talking points and support with signing up to testify.
- Sign up prior to the hearing to testify or submit written testimony.
- Be flexible - committee agenda change quickly, and some bills have hours of testimony.
- Attend in-person at the Capitol or virtually when not possible.
- Bring a copy of your testimony to read or refer to; practice beforehand.

Guide to Writing 3-Minute Testimony



1. **Greet the Committee:** “Good Afternoon, members of the X Committee”
2. **Introduce Yourself:** “My name is X, and I’m here representing [myself/organization name]”
3. **State A Position:** “Thank you for the chance to speak in [support/opposition] of [bill number & name].”
4. **Speak from Your Perspective:** Connect your story with the bill’s purpose. Be specific.
5. **State Your Ask:** “I urge you to vote [yes/no] on [bill], because...”
6. **Close Your Statement:** “Thank you for listening. I’m happy to answer any questions.”

Lobbying Your Legislator



- **Email Template:** Personal greeting, a brief summary of your story, the policy you support or oppose, and why it matters.
- **Call Script:** Quick intro, state your position, share a brief story, thank them for their time.
- **Legislative Education & Advocacy Day (LEAD):** Join Mental Health Colorado at LEAD to engage directly with your legislators at the Capitol.

The Ripple Effect

Sustain the Movement



DONATE



Your contribution makes waves, amplifying the stories, events, and legislative efforts that promote healthier minds for all Coloradans.



VOLUNTEER



Help at events, educate communities, and connect people to resources.

Riding the Wave

Key Resources

- Mental Health Colorado – mentalhealthcolorado.org
- Find your legislator – leg.colorado.gov/find-my-legislator
- Look up and track bills – leg.colorado.gov
- Watch the House or Senate floor – coloradochannel.net
- Track legislative proceedings in real time – leg.state.co.us
- Statutes – leg.colorado.gov
- Session schedule – leg.colorado.gov/session-schedule
- Sign up to testify – leg.state.co.us

➡ ➡ **In a Crisis? *You are not alone.***

- **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline**: Call or Text 988
- **Colorado Crisis Services**: 1-844-493-TALK (8255) or text “TALK” to 38255

Legislative Glossary

For Advocates

Amendment – A formal change or addition proposed to a bill.

Bill – A proposal for a new law or a change to an existing law, introduced by a legislator for consideration by the legislature.

Chamber – One of the two legislative bodies in Colorado: the House of Representatives or the Senate.

Committee Hearing – A public meeting where a small group of legislators (a committee) reviews bills assigned to them. This is often where advocates give testimony to support or oppose a bill.

Crossover – The process when a bill passes in one chamber and is sent to the other for consideration.

First Reading – The formal introduction of a bill to the legislative body; the bill's title is read aloud, and it is assigned to a committee for review.

Postpone Indefinitely (PI) – A procedural move to stop a bill from moving forward in the legislative process. When a bill is PI'ed, it is considered dead for that session.

Second Reading – A stage when legislators debate the bill on the floor and consider amendments. Voice votes are often taken at this stage.

Testimony – A time-limited statement—spoken or written—shared with legislators during a committee hearing to provide information, a personal story, or a position on a bill.

Third Reading – The final vote in a chamber (House or Senate) before the bill moves to the other chamber or to the Governor for signature.

Veto – When the Governor rejects a bill passed by both chambers; the bill does not become law unless the legislature overrides the veto.