



Behavioral Health Program Operational Summary  
February 2023 to Present

Report produced by: McGriff Insurance Services, LLC  
On behalf of the Colorado Firefighter Trust's Board of Trustees

July 26, 2024

Dear Members of the Wildfire Matters Review Committee,

Thanks to the vision of the sponsors of Senate Bill 22-002 (SB22-002), the support of the Colorado General Assembly and Governor Polis, the dedicated work of numerous professionals in the fire service, the expertise of many behavioral health providers, and the leadership of the Trust Committee, [the governing body of the Colorado Firefighter Heart, Cancer, and Behavioral Health Benefits Trust (the "Trust")], the Firefighter Behavioral Health Program (FFBH Program) was officially added in February 2023 to the Trust's mission and integrated into the essential support services that have been enacted in recent years to strengthen Colorado's fire service.

It has now been 17 months since the Trust launched the FFBH Program, and on behalf of Members of the Trust, the Trust Committee, and the firefighters served, we are happy to have the opportunity to share the development of the program and the successes-to-date with the Wildfire Matters Review Committee (the "Committee").

## **I. Introduction**

The FFBH Program commenced providing benefits for eligible firefighters (primarily reimbursement of expenses) on February 10, 2023. Below is the report of the Trust to the Committee regarding the process taken to develop and promote the program, followed by a review and analysis of claims data for the 17-month period of the FFBH Program, and conclusions and recommendations for the future of the Program.

As we move forward in the second year of the FFBH Program, we hope that the below analysis helps to demonstrate the value of behavioral health services for firefighter health, well-being, and continued service.

## **II. Overview of the Process to Develop the FFBH Program**

The February 2023 commencement of the FFBH Program was implemented by the Trust through expedited – but robust – processes.

Starting a new program generally takes many dedicated hours by stakeholders, administrators, and professionals. Because the Trust is organized under state law as a public entity, additional time was necessary to follow processes such as conducting several regular and special meetings of the Trust Committee and a special meeting of Members of the Trust (with a notice period) to consider and vote on necessary amendments to the establishing contract and governing agreement of the Trust.

The below process overview focuses on the research, outreach, and stakeholder participation to provide this Committee with the context for the FFBH Program.

### Step 1: Direction from the Trust Committee

The Trust's first step in the implementation of the Firefighter Behavioral Health laws, codified at C.R.S. §§ 29-5-501, et seq., was to seek direction from the seasoned professionals serving on the Trust Committee, who had expressed the growing understanding of, and need for, behavioral health supports for firefighters. The Trust Committee gave direction to the Trust Administrator to gather information and to stakehold in order to develop an adaptable and flexible program designed to meaningfully address the variety of the sizes, geographic locations, and revenues of Colorado's public fire service agencies.

### Step 2: Interviews with Behavioral Health Professionals

To develop a program proposal and recommendations on which the Trust Committee could act, the Trust Administrator began by interviewing nearly two dozen behavioral health professionals with expertise working directly with first responders in order to identify the most effective services and supports for firefighters.

### Step 3: Identification of, Outreach to, and Survey of Public Fire Service Agencies

The Trust Administrator next conferred with partners, including the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control, to compile an accurate and complete list of the statutorily eligible public fire service agencies. Using this list, the Trust Administrator started its outreach to these agencies by every available means (email, mail, publishing information on its website, and reaching out through other partners). Many of these agencies may not have previously participated in the Trust for its other programs or regularly connected with other local, state, or federal agencies on issues relating to behavioral health.

Outreach from the Trust not only served to make employers and firefighters aware of the FFBH Program, but also allowed the Trust Administrator to solicit information about the behavioral health programs or benefits that Colorado's public fire service agencies already had in place. The results from the data and responses gathered helped the Trust Administrator identify gaps and unmet needs, with or without employer programs or coverage.

### Step 4: Convening Interested Parties and Crafting a FFBH Program with Stakeholder Feedback

The Trust held a series of robust stakeholder meetings with firefighters and professionals from around the state, at which the Trust Administrator presented proposed benefits and processes. These meetings were informal, and the participants were able to establish their perspectives and experience as essential building blocks of the structure of FFBH Program. These stakeholders also reviewed and commented on the draft FFBH Program Plan Document – which explains the available benefits and any conditions – and the claims process/forms.

## **III. FFBH Program Design: Efficient and Effective Use of Funds**

The Trust designed the FFBH Program through the process described above with careful consideration that state funds should be maximized and should not apply to offset or replace benefits or programs which public fire agencies currently have in place.

The FFBH Program provides benefits, like reimbursements, and limits costs or duplication of benefits by stating in the Plan Document that the Program is excess to other coverage. Excess coverage (or benefits, in this case) means that a claimant must first use any other coverage or benefits in place before seeking payment or services through

the FFBH Program. Out-of-pocket expenses or services not provided under an employee’s medical coverage are outside or in excess of coverage – and these are the typical type of payments made to firefighters with claims under the FFBH Program. The FFBH Program also manages these funds in its program design by placing an “aggregate annual limit” on claims, which caps the amount any individual can receive.

The FFBH Program also includes support for peer support networks, the cost savings and claims avoided benefits of which are discussed below.

**IV. FFBH Program Rollout and Promotional Actions:**

- February 2023: Mailing to 330 fire agencies introducing the FFBH Program
- February 2023: Webinar outlining BH program with 97 participants in attendance
- June 2023: Mailing of magnets, informational fliers, and resources
- Quarterly 2023: Mailing to fire agencies
- September 2023: Colorado Firefighter Trust booth outreach at SDA Conference
- Q3 2023: Teams meeting discussion with Peer Support training organizations on Peer Support Grants
- Q3 2023: Chief to Chief support group discussion and implementation
- October 2023: Colorado Firefighter Trust booth outreach at Fire Chiefs Conference
- December 2023: Notice of \$1,500 Peer Support Grant mailing to 200 rural practitioners
- December 2023 and January 2024: Notice of \$1,500 Peer Support Grant mailing to 100 Rural Fire Agencies
- January 2024: Sponsorship and advertising Peer Support training dates and locations
- Q1 2024: Discussion to expand Chief to Chief support group
- Q1 2024: Peer Support grant requests received and paid
- Reimbursements of expenses received from employees of 39 agencies
- Q2 Mailing postcard promoting grants for peer support training to 300 agencies
- Approval of several Peer support training Grants for northern CO
- June 2024 Colorado Professional Fire Fighters Conference presentation
- July Sponsorship of Peer Support Training for 11 in Durango

**V. Data Analysis from FFBH Program Claims**

The Trust’s other programs, the Firefighter Heart and Cancer Programs, currently represent a third of fire departments in Colorado, covering 68% of career firefighters and just 5% of volunteer firefighters. Please note that these numbers understate the total number of firefighters because the data are based on the number of firefighters in the Heart and Cancer Programs, which by law must have 5- or 10-years’ experience (depending on their employment status) prior to being eligible to participate. In contrast, the FFBH Program is available to all statutorily defined firefighters in Colorado because there is no minimum service-year requirement in SB22-002. Further, public fire agencies do not need to be a Member of the Trust for either the Heart or Cancer Programs to qualify.

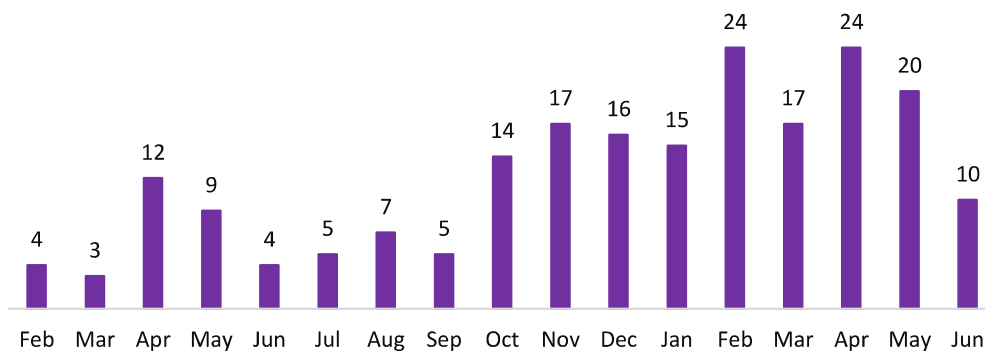
|                        | Department | Career | Volunteer |
|------------------------|------------|--------|-----------|
| Fire Departments in CO | 309        | 6,805  | 5,924     |
| Current Trust Members  | 100        | 4,600  | 300       |
| Trust Representation   | 32%        | 68%    | 5%        |

From February 10, 2023 (FFBH Program start date) to the most current complete month (June 30, 2024), the Trust has received approximately 206 claims of which 63 have been closed while the remaining 143 are open.

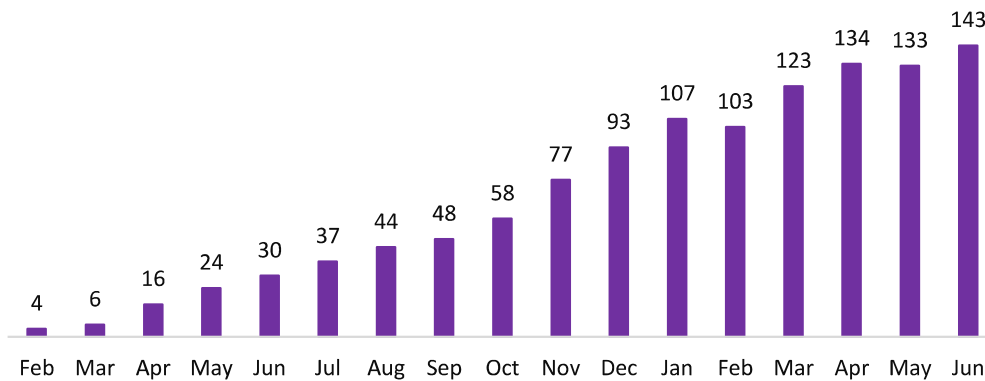
Claims without any activity occurring for 90 days are closed. A firefighter whose claim is closed does not necessarily mean that they must file a second claim. A closed claim may be reopened later if reimbursement or payment requests are made for that original claim.

Open claims have recent activity on the claim, which generally indicates that there are ongoing treatments. Of the 143 open claims, 39 have ongoing treatment that is different from the initial type of treatment.

New BH Claims as of June 30, 2024 by Month

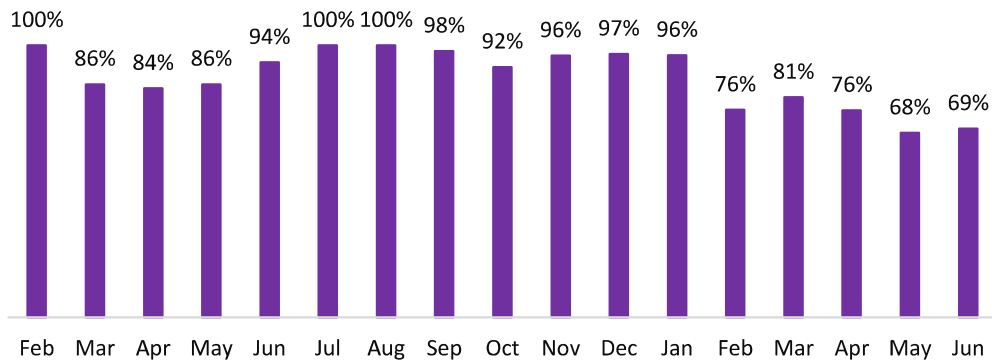


Open BH Claims as of June 30, 2024 by Month



The percentage of open claims relative to the total number of claims has been decreasing since January 2024. It has dropped from 96% in January to 69% in June. The average utilization is estimated to be 6 to 10 sessions.

### Open BH Claims / Total Claims as of June 30, 2024 by Month

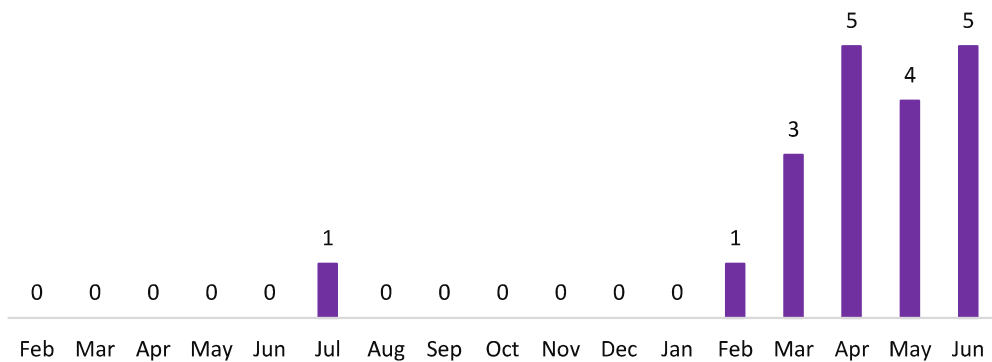


For the second full coverage year from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024, the Trust has received 173 claims from career firefighters and 2 claims from volunteer firefighter group, representing 2.54% and 0.02% utilization rate, respectively. We still get large agencies unaware of this program so continued growth is projected.

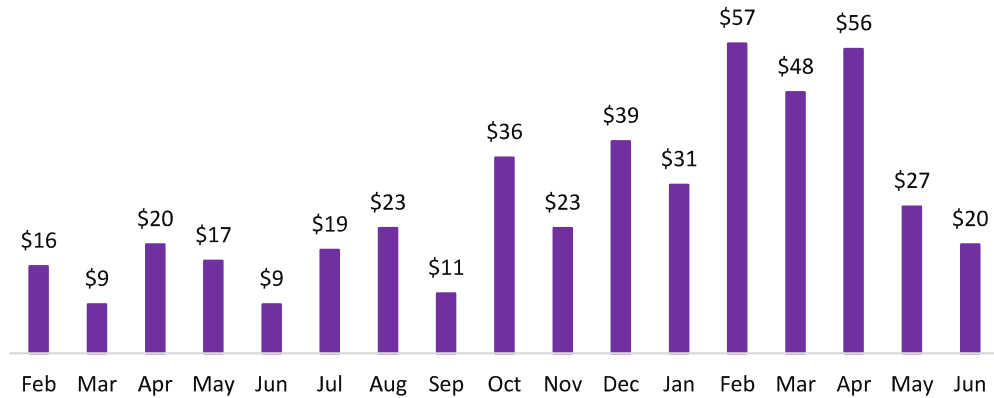
Since the inception of the FFBH Program, the cost of behavioral health claims is approximately \$460,000 as of June 30, 2024. Monthly claims payments – primarily expense reimbursements – have largely followed the number of claims filed. This correlation is illustrated in the table below. The average monthly payment of claims is roughly \$27,000 while the median is \$22,500.

### Closed FFBH Program Claims by Month (claims with no activity for 90 days)

#### Closed Claims by Month (Excluding Reopened Claims)



All BH Claim Payout by Month (in Thousands)



The average cost per claim is \$2,234. However, the actual cost varies significantly from a few hundred dollars to \$10,000. See the distributions below.

| Payout         | Claim | Distribution |
|----------------|-------|--------------|
| <\$1,000       | 47    | 23%          |
| \$1,000-2,000  | 65    | 32%          |
| \$2,000-3,000  | 38    | 18%          |
| \$3,000-4,000  | 21    | 10%          |
| \$4,000-5,000  | 14    | 7%           |
| \$5,000-10,000 | 21    | 10%          |

**VI. Claims and Cost Data Conclusions**

Please note that the following important points should be considered in the evaluation of the FFBH Program, even though these points are not able to be illuminated by claims data:

Point 1:

- *Claims- or costs-avoided* is the concept generally used by the industry as the indeterminable savings from managing risk or proactively addressing issues that may otherwise lead to a claim. These savings are difficult to identify and may be nearly impossible to calculate when the savings of a program accrue statewide.
- The FFBH Program, by helping public fire agencies and eligible firefighters proactively address and treat behavioral health, should result in avoided costs, including, but not limited to the following: higher workers’ compensation premiums; time lost for absences; savings from recruitment and retention.

Point 2:

- Claims data does not speak to the personal stories of how the FFBH Program has helped individual firefighters, their departments, their careers, or their families.
- Each claim filed has a story that is confidential to that individual, and these stories show the struggle and the strength of these first responders.

A. Trend is an Increase in Claims – A Good Trend in the Near Term

The data indicates that as new claims are added each month, the number of open claims has been increasing. Again, as of June 2024, the count of open claims is the highest it has ever been, at 143.

This trend of more claims filed over time indicates increased knowledge of the FFBH Program, growing awareness of the occupational and health impacts of mental health in the fire service, and de-stigmatization of behavioral and mental health treatment. Further, it indicates that there will be growing benefit from FFBH Program for firefighters.

B. Early Data Shows that Other Program Supports May Limit Costs, Reduce Claims, and Prevent Injury

There will always be a need for behavioral health services for professionals in the fire service, but that does not always mean greater utilization of or claims under the FFHB Program. For instance, the FFBH Program includes proactive measures, such as a Peer Support Program. The data is not yet robust on the correlation between the Peer Support Program and claims; however, the preliminary data is promising.

Early data shows indications that strong peer support reduces the utilization rate, and more importantly that suicides or other serious injuries may decline with this support.

The Peer Support Program, as well as the adoption of other proactive measures, are critical to the long-term effectiveness and cost-savings from the FFBH Program.

C. Forecasting Claims in 2025, 2026, and 2027

The table below projects the number of claims based on 6 scenarios from a 3% utilization rate to 20% - these scenarios are a range from conservative to optimistic.

Applying a moderate assumption that utilization rates will increase year-over-year by 5% in 2025, 8% in 2026, and 10% in 2027, we project that the FFBH Program will have 340 claims in 2025, 544 claims in 2026, and 681 claims in 2027.

| Year | 3%  | 5%  | 8%  | 10% | 15%  | 20%  |
|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| 2025 | 204 | 340 | 544 | 681 | 1021 | 1361 |
| 2026 | 204 | 340 | 544 | 681 | 1021 | 1361 |
| 2027 | 204 | 340 | 544 | 681 | 1021 | 1361 |

D. Forecasting Costs in 2025, 2026, and 2027

Based on the actual claim payout distributions, we estimate it would cost the program \$842,367 in 2025, \$1,347,786 in 2026, and \$1,684,733 in 2027 for a total of \$3.87 million in the next three (3) coverage years.

- The Trust solicited utilization rates of the FFBH Program from some of its colleagues and partners. For example, the International Association of Fire Fighters report that the FFBH Program is utilized by 20% of their members and the Colorado Behavioral Health Clinician network reports a 17% utilization in Colorado.
- Entities with strong Peer Support Programs are seeing 8% utilization with no inpatient treatment required and no suicides.

| Year | 3%        | 5%        | 8%          | 10%         | 15%         | 20%         |
|------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 2025 | \$505,420 | \$842,367 | \$1,347,786 | \$1,684,733 | \$2,527,100 | \$3,369,466 |
| 2026 | \$505,420 | \$842,367 | \$1,347,786 | \$1,684,733 | \$2,527,100 | \$3,369,466 |
| 2027 | \$505,420 | \$842,367 | \$1,347,786 | \$1,684,733 | \$2,527,100 | \$3,369,466 |

Based on these calculations, the annual state support of the FFBH Program will be insufficient for the projected program costs by year 5 (2027) of the program.

| Behavioral Health Program |           |           |                        |           |           |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Cost by Year              | 2023      | 2024      | Projected Future Costs |           |           |
|                           |           |           | 2025                   | 2026      | 2027      |
| State Funding             | 1,000,000 | 1,000,000 | 1,000,000              | 1,000,000 | 1,000,000 |
| Claims Incurred           | 94,599    | 518,674   | 850,000                | 1,350,000 | 1,700,000 |
| Training Grants           | 0         | 8,651     | 125,000                | 125,000   | 125,000   |
| Marketing Expenses        | 642       | 1,164     | 3,000                  | 3,000     | 3,000     |
| Other Expenses            | 103,722   | 116,925   | 127,000                | 128,000   | 129,000   |
| Funds Carried Forward     | 801,037   | 1,155,624 | 1,050,624              | 444,624   | (512,376) |

## VII. Conclusion

We understand the existing and continuing demands for resources from the State – and that the General Assembly, members of the Joint Budget Committee, the Governor, and executive branch agencies work to allocate and/or plan for limited resources which support many essential public services and purposes. Accordingly, the Trust has designed a program to maximize the FFBH Program state funds and to use these resources efficiently and effectively.

As the FFBH Program moves forward, we will continue to demonstrate to our state partners, to public fire agencies, to firefighters, and to the public the benefits that these funds bring to their communities and the entire State of Colorado. We hope for the consideration of current and future members of this Committee, the necessary increase of state funds starting in year 5 (2027) of the FFBH Program, and continued funding thereafter.

State leadership in initiating and supporting the FFBH Program has already helped strengthen Colorado’s fire service in the future by addressing the trauma that individual firefighters have faced as emergency responders. While we still have work to do, we are pleased with the progress of the FFBH Program to date and urge continued state support for this important program.