



Testimony for HB21-1068

My name is Moe Keller, Director of Advocacy for Mental Health Colorado. We are in strong support of HB 1068 Health Insurance Coverage for an Annual Mental Health Wellness Examination Performed by a Qualified Mental Health Care Provider.

Mental Health Colorado believes there is no health without mental health, and that prevention of mental health and substance use conditions should be central to health care. Too often, our health care system continues to ignore problems until they reach a crisis level.

Prevention and early intervention are important, essential services and treatments for individuals when the first symptoms appear. Investing in mental health care before the mental health condition reaches a crisis point has proven to be not only beneficial to the individual and that individual's family but a cost saver to private insurance companies and state and local governments as well. Investing in mental health promotion and prevention of mental health and substance use conditions is critical to improving health outcomes for individuals, communities and the nation as a whole.

While we can and do work to provide mental health services and supports and to promote recovery for individuals in need, the overwhelming number of those struggling is a reminder of how often we wait too long to take action.

Mental Health America, of which we are an affiliate, has been engaging in a messaging program called Before Stage Four. The intent is to bring attention to the fact that mental health and substance use disorders are generally not treated until a stage four event. If you had a spot on your hand and the doctor said it could be cancer but go home and come back when it reaches stage four and then we will address the condition, we would not tolerate it. And yet, this is what we do with mental health conditions.

- **Mental Health America has seen a huge spike in the number and severity of individuals taking their anonymous mental health screenings since last February. The per day number of anxiety screenings completed in August was 535% higher than in January, before coronavirus stress began. The per day number of depression screens was 709% higher in August than in January.**
- **There were over 48,000 moderate to severe anxiety screens (79%) and over 94,000 moderate to severe depression screens (85%).**
- **These impacts on mental health are more pronounced in young people (<25): over 9 in 10 are screening with moderate-to-severe depression, and over 8 in 10 are screening with moderate-to-severe anxiety.**

- **“Loneliness and isolation” is cited by the greatest percent of moderate to severe depression (74%) and anxiety (64%) screeners as contributing to mental health problems “right now.” These percentages have been steady since mid-April.**

HB21-1068 is a major step in the right direction. Providing for a mental wellness exam has the potential of assisting many individuals to identify and deal with their anxiety, depression or other concern at the earliest stages, and improve their mental health before stage four.

Mental Health Colorado respectfully requests your yes vote on HB -1068.