

Help Colorado Flatten the Second Curve:

Support Mental & Substance Use Disorder Care by Passing HB20-1411

By Representatives Tracy Kraft-Tharp & Dafna Michaelson Jenet / Senator Brittany Pettersen

What is the Second Curve?

During this COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to consider the mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) needs of all Coloradans. Just as we needed to act proactively to flatten the first curve of the COVID-19 pandemic – to ensure that our hospitals and healthcare system were not overwhelmed, so too are we seeing the need to proactively address the fact that in the coming months and years, behavioral health services will be needed at unprecedented levels.¹ This expected demand on the behavioral health system is what policymakers and public health researchers are calling “The Second Curve.”

What is causing the Second Curve?

There are many conditions in our country that are now negatively impacting our behavioral health and well-being, but two primary reasons for the unprecedented need are the COVID-19 virus itself and the economic consequences associated with the emergency public health response. We already know that alcohol sales have surged over the past few months² and that the Colorado Crisis Hotline has been handling an increased volume of calls and texts³. Unfortunately, this is only the beginning. According to a survey conducted by Colorado Health Foundation, 53% of all respondents said the stress and worry related to the coronavirus has negatively impacted their mental health.⁴ A recent national study by the Well Being Trust predicted the pandemic could lead to 75,000 additional “deaths of despair” from substance misuse and suicide. As we work to support our communities, it is critical that those in need of behavioral health services have access to it.⁵ For those already receiving services for anxiety, depression, psychosis, and other forms of mental illness or SUD, the need will be even greater as their conditions are exacerbated by the pandemic.⁶ **As community behavioral health organizations prepare to flatten the mental health and addiction curve, now is the time to direct federal resources to Colorado’s behavioral health safety net system.**

What’s in the Bill?

HB20-1411 directs a share of Colorado’s federal CARES Act funding towards critical behavioral health initiatives that Coloradans need to stay healthy and safe during and after the COVID-19 crisis. It requires organizations to consider the needs of underserved populations and communities, including African American communities, indigenous communities, and other communities of people of color. It directs dollars to areas where community behavioral health organizations have been directly impacted by the pandemic – areas where they’ve incurred unexpected and necessary costs related to client support services, telehealth infrastructure, cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE), staff supplies, and other personnel costs. **\$3.53M is directed for SUD providers and \$3.53M for CMHC unanticipated expenses.**

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2020/05/04/mental-health-coronavirus/>

² <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/04/08/alcohol-beer-wine-sales-denver-coronavirus-shutdown/>

³ <https://www.denverpost.com/2020/05/23/colorado-suicides-dropped-coronavirus-pandemic-calls-to-crisis-line-spiked/>

⁴ <http://www.realvail.com/colorado-health-foundation-survey-finds-majority-of-coloradans-impacted-by-covid-19-stress/a8276/>

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2020/05/13/850665769/act-now-to-get-ahead-of-a-mental-health-crisis-specialists-advice-u-s>

⁶ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/2764584?appId=scweb>

Further, funds will be used to support Colorado's existing behavioral health infrastructure, including Colorado's CMHCs, SUD providers, MSOs and Crisis ASOs, our statewide crisis hotline, law enforcement co-responder teams, Mental Health First Aid, School-based Health Centers, and other prevention, public health, and treatment agencies. The bill specifically directs **\$500K for SBIRT programs, \$2M for treatment of school-aged children, \$3.6M for crisis services, co-responder programs, housing assistance, transition programs, and treatment in rural communities, \$1M for school-based health centers, and \$150K for opioid antagonist bulk purchasing** initiatives.

Lastly, there are appropriations for public health initiatives such as **\$250K to increase behavioral health training for educators and school personnel, \$600K for health professional training, grant writing assistance, PPE or telehealth supplies for MAT programs and \$120K for the Safe2Tell program.**

Together, these initiatives will strengthen Colorado's behavioral health system and prepare our state to provide timely, adequate, and high-quality care for individuals who need enhanced support as a result of COVID-19. It will provide relief for community organizations that have incurred unexpected cost associated with the pandemic and its dramatic impact on our economy – organizations that have worked tirelessly to carry out their mission to serve Colorado communities despite these unprecedented circumstances.

We ask that you take action to flatten the second curve. Please support HB20-1411 so that all Coloradans have immediate access to behavioral health needs not only during this time but well into the future.

The following organizations and entities support HB20-1411:

- Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council (CBHC)
- Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention
- Colorado Providers Association (COPA)

For questions, or inquiries on how to support this bill, please contact:

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