

Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) and HB18-1003

SBIRT is an evidence-based practice used in health care settings to identify, reduce and prevent problematic substance use. SBIRT creates patient and provider awareness about the preventable health issue of risky substance use - excessive alcohol use, marijuana or illicit drug use that may lead to negative consequences, and nonmedical use of prescription medications such as opioids - and encourages patient-directed solutions to behavior change. Research has demonstrated that SBIRT provides a high return on investment, both in saving dollars and improving overall health. **Screening** involves asking a few validated screening questions to assess risk associated with substance use. **Brief intervention** is a short motivational conversation to educate and promote behavioral changes in situations where a patient has indicated moderately risky substance use. **Referral to treatment**, which is necessary in approximately five percent of patients, links a patient to additional services, such as further assessment or specialty treatment for more severe substance use problems.

HB18-1003: Expands needed prevention, early intervention programming statewide

The allocation of \$925,000 will pay for the following:

- Evidence based in-person and online training for ALL health professionals serving adults, adolescents and women of childbearing age.
- Consultation and technical assistance to health providers, schools, workplaces and communities.
- Partnerships with primary care, mental health, health insurance plans, school systems, employers and substance use prevention, treatment and recovery efforts.
- Increase in public awareness of the risks related to alcohol, marijuana, tobacco and other drug use and reduction in stigma.
- Appropriate staff to deliver the in-person training, consultation, and technical assistance.
- Development and dissemination of a patient-facing education tool for women of childbearing age on the risks of substance-exposed pregnancies.

Why fund screening?

Though there is momentum, screening is not yet an established standard of care. As with other preventive health services, such as immunizations, blood pressure screening, and tobacco cessation, it takes decades to change practice. Health providers lack formal education on the continuum of substance use. It is worth noting that many providers remain unaware of the potential of SBIRT to improve health outcomes, inform prescribing practices, and decrease health care costs. Routine screening also normalizes conversations about alcohol and drug use and leads to decreased stigma around these topics. Stigma is a major reason that people who need help do not receive services. The Opioid and Other Substance Use Disorders Interim Study Committee heard testimony on the how the opioid epidemic is ravaging Colorado. However, much of the focus on addressing the epidemic has been on treatment – when people are already very sick. SBIRT is a prevention – early intervention practice designed to identify risks before individuals experience long-term health effects, economic loss, and damage to social supports. For every \$1 spent on prevention, up to \$10 is saved in treatment, health care costs and lost productivity.¹

Previous Successes

Between 2006 and 2017, SBIRT Colorado was funded through the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This funding expired in February 2017. Colorado is a national leader and innovator in the field. Key successes include:

- Screened nearly 200,000 patients in 21 primary care and emergency departments across the state.
- Decreased alcohol and cannabis use in patients who received brief interventions.
- Trained more than 6,500 health professionals to provide screening and brief interventions.
- Partnered with the state Medicaid office to activate SBIRT billing codes, allowing for provider reimbursement.

Colorado Department of Healthcare Policy and Financing has provided funding to train Medicaid providers since 2016.

- 500 health and mental health professionals, in 23 cities across Colorado, trained in SBIRT, with an additional 175 trained utilizing the online training.

For questions, please contact Bethany Pace-Danley, Peer Assistance Services, Inc., 720-480-9187 or Gil Romero, Capitol Success Group, 303-921-8630

¹ <https://www.samhsa.gov/prevention> Accessed: 3/12/18