

Invest in the Colorado Behavioral Health Workforce

The importance of committing necessary investments into Colorado's community behavioral health workforce to keep pace with the growing demand for accessible, high quality services.

Invest in a Committed, Passionate Workforce

Non-profit, community-based providers need to maintain a workforce that is consistently available to provide the safety-net services upon which Coloradans depend to keep our state healthy. Over the past 20 years, community provider inflationary increases have fallen so far behind that providers have lost more than 35% of their spending power as compared to the inflation rate across our state. Additionally, compared to State employee salary survey increases, community providers have lagged by almost 32%. Without adequate rate increases, providers in the safety net system cannot possibly compete with the growing healthcare industry, especially at a time when Colorado communities are clamoring for more services by the very providers whose mission it is to serve all Coloradans regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Cost of living adjustments (COLAs) are one strategy Colorado utilizes to maintain competitive salaries for public employees. Colorado has done a great job of keeping state employee salaries on par with inflation. However, Community Providers have suffered by losing more than 35% in spending power at the end of the 20-year comparative period.

If Colorado is truly committed to ensuring access to care, it must invest in the safety net workforce.

Now is the time for the legislature to infuse a significant investment that can bring community providers back to competitive standing as employers.

Every Possible Approach

Beyond salaries, states as vast and diverse as Colorado must develop innovative strategies to recruit and retain a competent workforce. Without proper investments, Colorado's goal to be the nation's healthiest state will most likely suffer as passionate people struggle to sustain a career in community behavioral health services. While loan forgiveness programs are a worthy strategy (and recent investments are appreciated), now is the time for Colorado to pursue creative initiatives that:

- Invest in **employee retention efforts ranging across every aspect of a clinician's life** including their well-being, community involvement, and personal stability.
- Enhance opportunities for **workforce training, specialization, and retention** to ensure the **incentivization of critical specialties** such as crisis, forensic, and other specialty care.
- Encourage experienced clinicians to commit **to the safety net system** though rewarding career tracks and incentivizing professional growth.

