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## Colorado's Community Mental Health System Served Record Numbers In 2008

### *Partnerships Are Key To Expanded Access, Recovery*

Colorado's community mental health system served a record number of individuals and families in 2008. The system served more than 90,000 men, women, and children of all ages across the state, eclipsing the record of 84,500 set just one year earlier.

Emergency services for people who do not have healthcare benefits are responsible for much of the increased demand. Substance abuse, anxiety, depression and the stress related to the economic downturn also are contributing to the requests for help.

"Partnerships between the community mental health centers and schools, law enforcement, social service departments, physicians, and other community organizations are helping people access community mental health services," said George DelGrosso, Executive Director of the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council (CBHC). "These local relationships are vital during these challenging times."



In addition to serving record numbers of people in 2007 and 2008, the community mental health systems provided services at a record number of community locations, including the Federally Qualified Health Clinics (FQHCs), 38 school-based clinics, city and county jails, hospitals, homes, and nursing homes across the state.

Although the community mental health system is serving record numbers, DelGrosso explains that the system would serve thousands more who have serious mental health needs if adequate funding were available to hire additional staff. Those services would pay for themselves in many ways by reducing emergency room visits, hospital stays, increased physical health costs, crowding of jails and prisons, reduced school drop-out rates, and less turnover in the work force.

"We all have a stake in serving unmet mental health needs in Colorado," DelGrosso said. "People with untreated mental illness consume more medical care than the average individual, which drives up the cost of healthcare for everyone. This unmet need also is driving up costs within the criminal justice system, and impeding productivity in the workplace and within our schools. As community-based providers, we understand those dynamics. Our community mental health systems have been trying to address this

serious health issue for more than 50 years.”

The Annual Stress in America Survey, conducted by the American Psychological Association, recently revealed that in September 2008, 81 percent of Americans were experiencing heightened stress about their finances, up from 59 percent in 2006. As Americans watch the values of their homes shrink, the prices of commodities rise, and the level of unemployment climb to a 16-year high of 7.2 percent, many are voicing greater fear and helplessness about their financial situation. While it is no surprise that economic conditions play a strong role in the overall psychological wellbeing of a nation, the rapid deterioration of the United States economy has led to a surge in demand for mental health services. Suicide hotlines, crisis counselors, and community mental health programs have also been overwhelmed by the swell of individuals seeking assistance, especially in states hit hardest by housing industry turmoil. At the same time that levels of depression and anxiety are increasing, Americans are finding that the sudden loss of insurance coverage through job loss and overall economic concerns are forcing individuals to postpone or eliminate treatment or medication.

Facing budget shortfalls and lower tax revenue, states have further exacerbated the situation by slashing their budgets for mental healthcare services. In response to the budget cuts, behavioral health agencies have taken to staff reductions and eliminating whole programs altogether.

"My biggest concern with any budget cuts for medically necessary behavioral healthcare services is the potential for greater harm than good when behavioral as well as medical conditions worsen due to lack of necessary treatment" said Steve Melek, an actuary with Milliman, a national consulting firm that specializes in healthcare, insurance, and finance. "Today's budget solution may soon become tomorrow's even bigger budget problem. The right healthcare at the right time for the right patient by the right provider is even more important today for effective treatment of behavioral conditions. Let's continue to find ways to provide innovative solutions which deliver better clinical and financial outcomes."

CBHC is a nonprofit membership organization that represents Colorado's statewide network of community behavioral healthcare providers (including 17 community mental health centers, two specialty clinics, and five behavioral health organizations). Members contract with the State of Colorado and others to provide comprehensive, community-based behavioral and psychiatric services to more than 90,000 people across the state. CBHC members provide a network of skilled therapeutic and community resources to meet the mental health need of individuals and families. Thousands of people, once isolated and disabled by mental illness, are now leading productive and satisfying lives thanks to Colorado's award-winning community mental health system. For more information, visit [www.cbhc.org](http://www.cbhc.org).

For more information about behavioral healthcare issues in Colorado, please contact the Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council at 303-832-7594:

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