

BOD Discussion and Action

Preventing Violent Crime Through Expanded Mental Health Services

The Board approved the following motion:

The Board of Directors voted unanimously to support Governor John Hickenlooper's proposal to strengthen Colorado's mental health system in response to firearm violence and, in addition to the elements set forth in his proposal, the Council further suggests more mental health workers and patient beds, more emergency mental health workers, more mental health workers that are available to treat dual diagnosis of substance abuse and mental health illness, and more emphasis on pediatric mental health care.

Background:

In response to Newtown, Connecticut, Aurora, and other recent shootings, the Council on Legislation and the board of directors should prepare CMS for the firearm safety public policy debate that is already underway at the local, state and federal level. These debates are already media "high profile" and are unavoidable for the state's largest organization representing physicians. CMS has long recognized firearm violence as a public health crisis. In 2012, the House of delegates expanded existing CMS policy (scroll down to review CMS firearm safety policies) by putting CMS on record as follows:

"urging community leaders to support the creation of a comprehensive and accessible network of mental health services and crisis intervention capabilities in order to divert some seriously emotionally or mentally disturbed individuals from violence to a support system that can identify and address their potentially harmful actions".

While the Obama Administration is crafting a federal legislative and regulatory response, the Denver Post ran a front-page story on December 30 describing the impending firearm safety debate in the 2013 General Assembly. In addition, Gov. John Hickenlooper announced a plan in December 2012 called "Strengthening Colorado's Mental Health System: A Plan to Safeguard All Coloradans." In introducing the plan to the public, Governor Hickenlooper made the following points:

- For the past five months, in response to the Aurora shooting, we have been working to expand mental health care and services across Colorado.
- No single plan can guarantee to stop dangerous people from doing harm to themselves or others. But we can help people from falling through the cracks.
- We believe these policies will reduce the probability of bad things happening to good people.

The five key strategies of the Governor's plan include:

1. Provide the right services to the right people at the right time.

- Align three statutes into one new civil commitment law. This alignment protects the civil liberties of people experiencing mental crises or substance abuse emergencies, and clarifies the process and options for providers of mental health and substance abuse services (requires legislative change).
- Authorize the Colorado State Judicial System to transfer mental health commitment records electronically and directly to the Colorado Bureau of Investigation in real-time so the information is available for firearm purchase background checks conducted by Colorado InstaCheck (requires legislative change).

2. Enhance Colorado’s crisis response system (\$10,272,874 budget request).

- Establish a single statewide mental health crisis hotline.
- Establish five, 24/7 walk-in crisis stabilization services for urgent mental health care needs.

3. Expand hospital capacity (\$2,063,438 budget request).

- Develop a 20-bed jailed-based restoration program in the Denver area.

4. Enhance community care (\$4,793,824 budget request).

- Develop community residential services for those transitioning from institutional care.
- Expand case management and wrap-around services for seriously mentally ill people in the community
- Develop two 15-bed Residential Facilities for short-term transition from mental health hospitals to the community.
- Target housing subsidies to add 107 housing vouchers for individuals with serious mental illness.

5. Build a trauma-informed culture of care (\$1,391,865 budget request).

- Develop peer support specialist positions in the state’s mental health hospitals.
- Provide de-escalation rooms at each of the state’s mental health hospitals.
- Develop a consolidated mental health/substance abuse data system

The Governor’s plan would be:

- Implemented through the Office of Behavioral Health at the Colorado Department of Human Services.
- Coordinated and in partnership with the state’s Behavioral Health Organizations, Community Behavioral Health Centers, state and local law enforcement, the Department of Public Safety, the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing, the Department of Public Health and Environment, the numerous highly-skilled providers and advocates across the state, and many hospitals and psychiatric emergency medical partners.

Details of the Governor's budget request include:

- \$13 million to provide services to 809 additional people with developmental disabilities, including an increase of 576 funded waiver slots to eliminate the Children's Extensive Services Waiver Program waiting list. Currently 2,400 individuals are on the wait list to access Developmental Disability services. The Governor's budget proposal reduces that wait list by 30%.
- \$1.8 million in continuing funds to provide Early Intervention and Case Management services for children from birth to 2 years of age.
- \$17.7 million for strengthening Colorado's Behavioral Health system including \$10.3 million for expansions of the behavioral health crisis response system; \$4.8 million for improving behavioral health community capacity; and \$2.1 million for increasing access to civil beds for those defendants determined incompetent to proceed with their trials.
- \$6.8 million for County Administration Food Assistance, including \$2 million to cover county administrative costs associated with a projected increase in caseload with implementation of health care reform.
- \$15.5 million for a 1.5% rate increase in provider rates.
- \$1.3 million to compensate for increasing utility costs.
- \$3.8 million to provide services for elderly adults in needs, including a 1.7% Cost of Living increase for Old Age Pension recipients.
- \$860,000 to modernize Departmental data and IT systems.
- \$5 million as a legislative set aside for the estimated costs of the recommendations of the Elder Abuse Task Force to increase protections for vulnerable seniors. These costs will fund a system of mandatory reporting of instances of exploitation or mistreatment of seniors.

Firearm Safety: CMS Policies adopted by HOD: The Colorado Medical Society:

- Recognizes firearm violence as a public health crisis.
- Supports educational efforts designed to increase awareness, especially among children, about the dangers of firearms and to reduce firearm violence in our society.
- Encourages physicians to consider this issue each and every time an opportunity to educate patients and parents presents itself.
- Encourages awareness among physicians and school faculty about traits that may indicate an individual could be capable of violence.
 - Although these individuals may never display violent behavior, they still may benefit from professional help.
 - Health care professionals should collaborate with school officials in developing programs to achieve zero tolerance toward school violence.
- Supports the enactment of reasonable laws that seek to regulate the sale and distribution of firearms in order to protect public health and safety.
- Supports enforcement of existing firearm safety and firearm control laws.
- Supports legislative efforts that specifically penalize those who commit crimes

with firearms.

- Urges our community leaders to support the creation of a comprehensive and accessible network of mental health services and crisis intervention capabilities in order to divert some seriously emotionally or mentally disturbed individuals from violence to a support system that can identify and address their potentially harmful actions.