

Behavioral Healthcare Needs Assessment in Chaffee County, Colorado

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Abstract

In the United States, Colorado ranks 50th in the prevalence of mental illness, but 17th in terms of access to care. Rural counties in Colorado are disproportionately affected by access to mental healthcare compared to urban populations and frequently have higher rates of mental illness and suicide. Through the Chaffee County Public Health office, we conducted a needs assessment survey among behavioral healthcare providers in Salida and Buena Vista, CO, to identify areas of need and improve communication strategies among this rural population. A total of 27 responses were collected, with 17 completed surveys from July 11th to July 25th. 65% of responders noted that they serve farmers or ranchers among their patient cohort, 76% serve LGBTQ populations, and 82% serve low SES or uninsured individuals. Factors that made it difficult for individuals to access behavioral healthcare services in Chaffee County were secondary to affordability (82%), insurance coverage (64%), ease of access (52%), and awareness of current resources (59%). Regarding interventions to enhance access to behavioral healthcare, providers noted reducing the cost of services, providing a county-wide list of behavioral health providers, increasing access for in-person services, and community partnerships. Colorado's paradox of high access to care but high prevalence of behavioral health problems suggests that access alone is insufficient to reduce disease burden. Rural populations are disproportionately affected by rates of behavioral health outcomes and face additional barriers, including affordability, awareness of resources, social stigma, and physical accessibility to resources.

Keywords: behavioral healthcare, mental health, substance use access to care, rural populations, public health