The Colorado Health Foundation™

New Report Reveals Stark Disparities in Mental Health

Thousands of Coloradans Disproportionately Impacted by Mental Health Challenges

DENVER, CO — The Colorado Health Foundation today released a new Data Spotlight, Mental Health in Colorado: Working to Close the Disparity Gaps, that details how Coloradans are faring when it comes to dealing with mental health issues. This report reveals mental health challenges are impacting 478,000 Coloradans and that some are struggling more than others.

The report, developed in partnership with the Colorado Health Institute, uncovers stark disparities among different life stages, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and geographic location. According to the report:

- Lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) Coloradans are two to three times more likely than their heterosexual peers to experience poor mental health, with nearly 60 percent of LGB high school students reporting poor mental health compared to heterosexual peers and almost 35 percent of LGB adults reporting poor mental health.
- Though there is little difference in the rates of poor mental health by race and ethnicity, blacks and Hispanics fall behind when it comes to receiving help from a professional. A total of 7.3 percent of blacks and 8.4 percent of Hispanics receive support for a mental health concern compared to 13 percent of white Coloradans.

- The state’s suicide rate is climbing, with 19.4 suicides for each 100,000 residents—or 1,058 Coloradans— in 2014, up from 16.5 in 2007. Data reveal a disproportionate impact on individuals from rural communities and men.

Health reforms have resulted in more Colorado residents enrolled in insurance plans that also cover mental health services, with only 5 percent of children, 8.5 percent of adolescents and 14.1 percent of adults uninsured in 2015. Yet, despite the high number of insured Coloradans, people reporting poor mental health remains stagnant or is climbing.

The number of teens reporting poor mental health has remained steady over the past decade – with about one in four teens reporting poor mental health since 2007. Yet, disparities exist. Nearly 60 percent of LGB high school students report poor mental health compared to 20.8 percent of their heterosexual peers. And teen girls are more likely (32.3 percent) to report feeling depressed than boys (16.6 percent).

As for adults and seniors, poor mental health is on the rise. Nearly 14 percent of Colorado adults report poor mental health today, up from 11.8 percent in 2007. A total of 34.8 percent of LGB adults reported at least eight days of poor mental health in the last month compared with 11.1 percent of heterosexual Coloradans. Data on seniors, the least likely to report poor mental health, reveals poor mental health is increasing. In 2007, only 5.9 percent reported poor mental health, compared to 7.9 percent in 2015. The report shows a disproportionate impact by income level – with 19.1 percent of seniors with an income of $10,000 or less reporting poor mental health compared to 5 percent of seniors with an income of $75,000 or higher.

The Data Spotlight also unveils who is and who is not accessing care and why. In 2015, 442,000 Coloradans reported they did not receive needed mental health care. A total of 33.6 percent of LGB Coloradans were

disproportionately impacted, compared to 9.5 percent of heterosexual adults. And fewer black (7.3 percent) and Hispanic (8.4 percent) Coloradans are receiving support for mental health concerns compared to white residents. Some of the most common reasons cited include cost, challenges in getting an appointment, lack of comfort in talking with a health professional about personal issues and stigma.

The state's suicide rate is on the rise. In 2014, there were 19.4 suicides for each 100,000 residents—or 1,058 Coloradans—up from 16.5 in 2007. Men are more than three times likely to die by suicide than women. The age-adjusted suicide rate in 2014 was 30.9 per 100,000 for men and 8.9 per 100,000 for women. In rural communities, the age-adjusted suicide rate was 19.8 per 100,000 residents in 2013, compared to 17.5 per 100,000 residents in urban areas.

"Mental health challenges cut across all life stages and impact individuals from all walks of life. Whether it lasts for a day, a week or a lifetime, no one is exempt," said Karen McNeil-Miller, Colorado Health Foundation president and CEO. "While we've barely begun to scratch the surface on this widespread issue, we know now – more than ever before – the critical role that good mental health plays in overall health and well-being."

"Closing the gaps in who needs mental health services and who has access to them in Colorado is achievable," said Michele Lueck, Colorado Health Institute president and CEO. "This report provides necessary data for targeting efforts."

The report highlights statewide priorities and efforts to improve mental health for Coloradans, such as advances set forth by the Colorado State Innovation Model to integrate primary and behavioral health care services and treatment, and the newly established Colorado Crises Services that provides 24/7 support to those in need with 11 walk-in support locations and call or text options. Yet, there is much more work to be done to close the gaps in mental health issues that touch the lives of thousands of Coloradans.

Read the full Data Spotlight to learn more about what Colorado is doing to improve mental health in Colorado, what remains unchanged and where we are falling behind.

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