



## Public Health

During the 2021 legislative session, the General Assembly considered several measures related to public health including behavioral health, suicide prevention, and public safety.

### Behavioral Health and Suicide Prevention

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the need for behavioral health resources and increased investment in suicide prevention in Colorado. With the influx of over \$3 billion from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) to Colorado, the General Assembly allocated a portion of the funds to behavioral health resources.

*House Bill 21-1119* updates the powers and duties of the Suicide Prevention Commission and Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to create a comprehensive approach to suicide prevention that includes prevention, intervention, and postvention. CDPHE is required to prepare written region-specific information for health care providers on how to recognize and respond to suicidal patients.

In addition, the bill updates the criteria CDPHE must follow for awarding grants from the Crisis and Suicide Prevention Training Grant Program to public schools or school districts to include train-the-trainer programs for employees who have not received such training. The bill also updates the Mental Health Education Literacy

Resource Bank in the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Suicide Prevention Plan to include a comprehensive suicide prevention component and training on behavioral health and suicide prevention.

The federal government enacted ARPA to provide support to state, local, and tribal governments in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Senate Bill 21-137*, otherwise known as the “Behavioral Health Recovery Act of 2021,” extends, modifies, and finances behavioral health programs throughout state government and creates the Behavioral and Mental Health Cash Fund for federal APRA funds dedicated to behavioral health programs.

In addition, the bill makes several other changes in law, including:

- continuing the requirement for opioid prescribing limitations;
- making the Harm Reduction Grant Program continuously appropriated to CDPHE;
- continuing the Building Substance Use Disorder Treatment Capacity in Underserved Communities Grant Program indefinitely;
- requiring the Perinatal Substance Use Data Linkage Project to use additional data sources from state-administered programs when examining issues related to pregnant and postpartum women with substance use disorders and their infants;
- continuing the public awareness campaign about safe storage of opioid medication;

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- requiring state and private prisons to provide at least two doses of an opioid reversal medication upon release to individuals that were treated for opioid use disorder while in custody, as funding and supplies allow;
- removing fire stations from the list of safe stations at which an individual can turn in controlled substances without legal liability for possession; and
- creating a task force to meet during the 2021 interim to develop recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor for how to spend funds received from the American Rescue Plan Act on behavioral health needs.

*House Bill 21-1281* creates the Community Behavioral Health Disaster Preparedness and Response Program within CDPHE. The program is intended to enhance, support, and formalize behavioral health disaster preparedness and response activities of community behavioral health organizations. The bill also creates the Community Behavioral Health Disaster Preparedness and Response Cash Fund.

### Public Safety

The General Assembly passed a variety of bills related to public safety, including those focused on peace officers, first responder interactions with individuals, and gun violence prevention.

Colorado peace officers are called to respond to a wide variety of societal issues, including situations involving people in crisis due to behavioral health disorders. *House Bill 21-1030* allows additional public safety agencies and behavioral health entities to apply to the Peace Officers Mental Health Support and Community Partnerships Grant Program. Grant funds are to provide co-responder community responses, community-based alternative responses, and counseling services for peace officers and their immediate family members, among other services. The bill encourages grant recipients to work with

their regional community-based services providers to implement these programs.

*House Bill 21-1122* creates the Commission on Improving First Responder Interactions with Persons with Disabilities in the Attorney General's Office to review training for first responders to enhance interactions with people with disabilities. The commission must perform a detailed study of existing training for peace officers on interactions with persons with disabilities, both in Colorado and in other states. The study is meant to aid in the creation of a curriculum for peace officer training concerning interactions with persons with disabilities.

*House Bill 21-1299* establishes the Office of Gun Violence Prevention (the office) within CDPHE with the purpose of coordinating and promoting efforts to reduce gun violence. The office is required to conduct an education campaign with the goal of increasing general public awareness of state and federal laws and resources relating to gun violence prevention. The campaign is to be directed towards gun owners, parents, and legal guardians of children, and professions that provide services to communities disproportionately impacted by gun violence. In addition, the office must develop materials and training resources for local law enforcement, healthcare providers, and educators.

The office must establish a grant program to award organizations that conduct community-based gun violence intervention initiatives and create and maintain a resource bank for data, research, and statistics on gun violence in Colorado. The office is required to collaborate with researchers to improve data collection, enhance prevention tools, and provide resources to communities.