

TOPIC: POTENTIAL RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA OF COLORADO'S MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID PROGRAM

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I. SUMMARY

At the September, 2011 CCHE meeting, former first lady Jeannie Ritter spoke with the Commissioners about the "Mental Health America of Colorado's Mental Health First Aid" program. Commissioners asked staff to prepare a resolution in support of this program to be presented at the October CCHE meeting. This Action item is brought before the Commission to formally vote on the proposed attached resolution.

II. BACKGROUND

The Mental Health America of Colorado is a non-profit association, established in 1953, to provide leadership to address the full range of mental health and wellness issues in Colorado. The Mental Health First Aid is a groundbreaking public education program that helps the public identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Through its 12 hour training (at a cost of \$2,000 per training), participants learn:

- How to provide help to someone showing signs of mental illness or mental health crisis;
- A 5-step action plan to help an individual in crisis connect to professional care; and
- The potential warnings signs and risk factors for depression, anxiety disorders, trauma, psychotic disorders, eating disorders and substance abuse.

MHAC's Mental Health First Aid training program has been implemented at CSU, with over 30 participants. They believe that college campuses are key populations to target, as mental health issues are extremely prevalent on Colorado's campuses. In particular, some populations are more vulnerable to experiencing the need for mental health services, including, but not limited to veterans and those with pre-existing special needs.

With the support of former first lady Jeannie Ritter, the MHAC Mental Health First Aid program is seeking to scale its efforts across Colorado's college campuses, and seeks the support of the CCHE in promoting this effort.

III. STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Commission consider approval of the attached resolution.

Resolution of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education
Concerning the Need for Expanded Mental Health Services on Colleges and Universities
and
Supporting Mental Health America of Colorado's *Mental Health First Aid* Program

Whereas, the academic and emotional pressures of the postsecondary environment along with the dramatic changes in social and personal lives often leave college students susceptible to mental illness; and,

Whereas, it is estimated that roughly one fifth to one quarter of young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 have a diagnosable mental illness; and,

Whereas, suicide is the eighth leading cause of death for all Americans, it is the second leading cause of death for college-age individuals; and,

Whereas, many public colleges and universities in Colorado provide advising and counseling support to enrolled students with mental illness; and,

Whereas, diminished state support for public higher education along with increased enrollments have placed new demands on student support services on colleges and universities; and,

Whereas, supplementary services from non-profit mental health organizations may provide important training and support to faculty and staff on public colleges and universities in Colorado; and,

Whereas, Mental Health America of Colorado (MHAC) is a non-profit association, established in 1953, and provides leadership to address the full range of mental health and wellness issues in Colorado; and,

Whereas, MHAC's mission is to "create opportunities for all Coloradans to achieve mental wellness"; and,

Whereas, MHAC's programs educate people about mental health conditions, provide outreach to people in need and advocate for improved health care in Colorado; and,

Whereas, MHAC's Mental Health First Aid program is a public education program that helps the public identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders; and,

Whereas, the Mental Health First Aid program recognizes that mental health issues can be a critical barrier for student success at Colorado's colleges and recognizes that some student populations may be more at risk, including, but not limited to veterans and students with pre-existing special needs; and,

Whereas, providing college communities with the skills and tools necessary to recognize signs of and seek resources for mental health issues such as depression, anxiety/trauma, psychosis, eating disorders, substance use disorders, and self-injury is a powerful asset to the health and well-being of student communities.

Now, therefore, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education endorses the Mental Health Association of Colorado's Mental Health First Aid Program in hopes that the provision of supplementary mental health services will lead to improved wellbeing and performance among the thousands of students enrolled at public colleges and universities in Colorado.

Done this 6th day of October, 2011.