



MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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Medicaid Usage increases at Mountain Ride Call Center

If you are looking for clues about Medicaid usage in **Northwest Colorado**, one indicator is the Mountain Ride Transportation Resource Call Center program run by Northwest Colorado Council of Governments (NWCCOG).

Mountain Ride books transportation for medical visits across the remote corners of Colorado where individuals often travel well over 100 miles to Grand Junction or Denver to see a specialist. The center processes Medicaid reimbursement for individuals and transportation companies across an 8-county region. In 2016 the Call center processed 8,533 one way trips and associated services. Of these trips 6,461 were Medicaid reimbursed Non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT) trips. Think of NEMT as a doctor visit, often a recurring visit to a specialist, that is non-discretionary but doesn't require an ambulance—for instance dialysis.

Mountain ride has seen exponential rise in Medicaid reimbursements in the past three years, starting in 2014 with 1,085 Medicaid NEMT trips in the first four months of operation. In 2015, 4,864 rides were booked, with 6,461 trips in 2016. For comparison, through the first half of 2017, 4,200 NEMT Medicaid trips have been processed, a trend towards a 30% increase in Medicaid usage for this service.

"Regional mobility management in Colorado creates accessibility to basic needs, social interactions, and vital appointments for people with disabilities, Veterans, and older adults. Mobility management programs ensure that regional transportation options are properly coordinated to be the most effective and efficient for everyone. The NWCCOG Mountain Ride Call Center serves this purpose very effectively," stated Moira Moon, Lead Grant Coordinator at CDOT.

Through statistics from the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF) which manages Medicaid for the State, total reimbursements to individuals for Non-Emergent Medical Transportation or NEMT through Mountain Ride increased from \$20,004 in 2014 (4 months) to \$131,633 reimbursed in 2015, to \$193,855 in 2016, to over \$220,939 in reimbursements to individuals through the first half of 2017 "We were astonished by the first half of 2017 ride numbers," said Karn Stiegelmeier, Chair of NWCCOG.

The Mountain Ride program started at NWCCOG in 2014 in response to a gap analysis of senior services performed in 2011 by NWCCOG and the Alpine Area Agency on Aging which identified medical transportation as a major hurdle in seniors being able to age in place. Clearly there was pent up demand. The program has sustained as a three-person department through a one-time start-up grant from the Colorado Department of

Transportation (CDOT) which will be fully depleted this year. That grant funded more than half of the \$210,000 program budget. The other annual grant through CDOT for increasing mobility in the region has been renewed annually with the next award to be announced on August 4th for the 2018 funding year. The program is also partially funded through NWCCOG membership dues and contributions from each of the regions public transit agencies.

Interestingly, the NEMT service is not new and is required of individual counties by HCPF, though most counties were challenged with the complex billing being handled by a Health and Human Services staffer juggling many other responsibilities. Call volume varies widely across the program, from 224 trips in Pitkin County in 2016 to 1,627 in Grand County.

This year NWCCOG is working with HHS departments to fund the costs of the program after the CDOT grant ends with individual HHS departments contributing about \$32,000, which for most represents less than one third of a position. Those conversations are happening internally as HHS departments are constructing their 2018 annual budgets.

“This regional program is far more economical than each county trying to do it on their own. Additionally because of their expertise in this area, it enables us to provide the very best service to our clients,” said Joanne Sprouse, Director – Division of Human Services, Summit County.

One surprise of the program has been learning how high the percentage of Medicaid beneficiaries are to County populations, especially since much of the Call Center’s territory is the mountain resort region:

- Eagle County 13.90% of the population, or 7,450/month are enrolled in Medicaid
- Grand County 15.57% of the population, or 2,276/month are enrolled in Medicaid
- Jackson County 24.12% of the population, or 327/month are enrolled in Medicaid
- Pitkin County 8.91% of the population, or 1,585/month are enrolled in Medicaid
- Summit County 14.14% of the population, or 4,278/month are enrolled in Medicaid

The fact sheets of Medicaid usage by county statistics are posted on the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing website at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/hcpf/county-fact-sheets> also notes of those monthly individuals enrolled, how many were added as part of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) expansion to Adults & Parents.

More detailed fact sheets about the distribution of ride by agency, client type and county is available on the Mountain Ride Call Center website at www.mtnride.org . Rides can be booked by calling 1-844-686-7433.

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