



From the Director's Desk -

Can we tackle the Mental Health Crisis together?

In recent years, courageous leaders in the high country have taken bold steps to address a crisis that impacts us each and all. In 2022, NWCCOG will highlight those efforts and encourage action in other communities. I'm talking about a suite of issues known as Behavioral Health which includes all types of mental health and addiction.

Recent news in our region highlights bold moves by leaders to address BH. These include [Summit County](#) breaking ties with Mind Springs Health and [Eagle County](#) approving a new Behavioral Health project with Vail Health.

Calling mental health "[The Next Global Pandemic](#)" sounds hyperbolic, yet Jim Clifton, Chairman of Gallup is doing exactly that to "create a new national awareness of this issue...so that this emergent "pandemic" is taken just as seriously as the COVID-19 pandemic."



Eagle County Commissioners participate in a site tour for Vail Health's new Northstar Center in Edwards. Project planner Tom Braun, front right, leads the tour. *Kelli Duncan/Vail Daily*

COVID was the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and Cancer in 2020 and [in 2021](#). Right behind it, and the top cause of death for those ages 1 – 44 is what the CDC categorizes as "Unintentional Injury" such as overdoses and car accidents. This doesn't include Suicide which was 11th overall in 2020. For a graphic of how these causes have shifted positions while increasing dramatically since 1981, I urge you to [look at this graph](#).

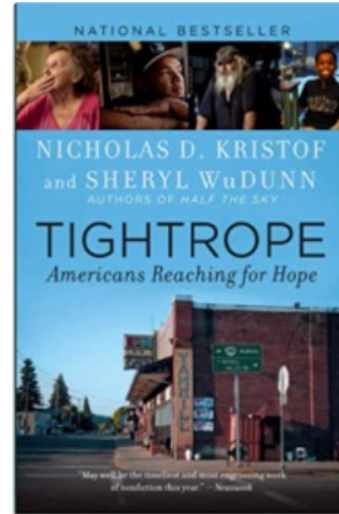
For years we've treated mental illness as a closeted, individual issue. While it can be privately excruciating, it is also very much a social issue deeply impacted by public policy. Like seatbelts, homelessness, and the [cycle of poverty](#); if enough collective will can be mustered, we can address it. Like those

issues, our attitude towards people with mental health—blaming those who suffer is precisely what impedes us.

Mental illness is as common as physical illness. It "happeneth to us all." If we continue to think that people who are sick, poor, or homeless did something to deserve it, we excuse our inaction. Factors impacting mental illness can often be directly traced to policy or our assumption that there is nothing to be done. If you think nothing can be done, contemplate the impacts of the Mothers Against Drunk Driving movement since 1980 when it began, the movement to prevent the tobacco industry (again now with vaping) from predatory advertising to kids, or Ralph Nader's unpopular push for seatbelt laws and

other vehicle safety measures which save lives every second of every day. Allowing Purdue Pharma to flood the market with opioids in recent years was a policy decision to prioritize corporate profit over public safety. There is often a balance with policy between individual freedom (or unregulated profit motives), and the common good – and there can be overreach in attempt to do the right thing: think of the failed push for 55 MPH speed limits, or helmet laws for motorcycles. Yet no one argues that we shouldn't have speed limits or school zones.

The truth about mental illness that it is practically universal. Clifton cites a CDC report from 2021 that reveals that 41.5% of U.S. adults exhibited symptoms of anxiety or depression. That isn't quite every one of us, but statistically it means just about every household. He also cites [Deaths of Despair](#) a book by Princeton economists that calls a significant swath of middle America a "suicide belt." That book dives into the Why of these maladies which includes people feeling disenfranchised, left behind and impacted by forces beyond their control. The book shows these forces are not beyond our collective control. I went right from DOD to reading [Tightrope](#), about NYT columnist Nicholas Kristof's classmates from Yamhill Oregon. It also happens to be the town where my mother grew up—and it is heartbreaking. [Tightrope is now a documentary](#). Clifton says, "Think of deaths of despair as suicide in slow motion." The bottom line is that poverty, addiction, depression and despair are overwhelming much of the nation. These are not "red state" or "blue state" issues.



Unlike our national response to COVID, Behavioral Health still has the opportunity to not be wasted to politics. It's an old saw now to call any investment in social programs socialism, but maybe this one has already touched enough of us that it can escape that tag. It's a new saw to harass and treat public officials taking actions to protect people as [public enemies](#). I'm sure back in the day someone thought that those Mothers Against Drunk Driving were public enemies. Certainly, corporations thought that about Nader. Maybe even in this divisive environment, we will see the faces of our loved ones and ourselves in this crisis and come together to address it. Other efforts to tackle social issues have been hamstrung by rhetoric claiming it is a waste of resources that the strong shouldn't spend on the weak 'other'.

We would do well to focus on combatting this common contagion that is quietly destroying our communities. That didn't play out so well with COVID, but we have another chance with an even more destructive illness. It is not going away. There is no herd immunity from mental health or our indifference.

NWCCOG supports communities taking a lead in addressing Behavioral Health.

Jon Stavney

Executive Director - NWCCOG

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Note: Like many organizations these days, NWCCOG was impacted by recent illness -- this is our [December Newsletter](#) published a bit later than anticipated. We hope your Holidays were filled with joy, health, and fellowship.

NWCCOG Programs Collaborate bringing home modifications to older adults - assists with aging in place


Beginning in early 2022, the NWCCOG Energy office and Vintage, the Area Agency on Aging, are teaming up to provide a Home Modifications Pilot Program to older adults in Grand County.

The purpose of program is to reduce accidents by making the home a safer place to live daily life and age in place and support independent living by making daily activities easier. Once an eligible older adult enters the program, a physical therapist will visit the home and complete a home safety assessment. A copy of the assessment, complete with recommended home modifications and assistive technology, will be given to the client and to Energy/Vintage.




The Energy department will then install the recommended modifications into the older adult's home. Allowable home modifications under this program include, but are not limited to, installation of grab bars and rails, updating cabinetry hardware, installing non-skid strips or decals in tub/showers, modifying electrical outlets, changing lighting to reduce glare, modifying faucets, installing easy-to-read, programmable thermostats, installing a flashing light system for hearing impaired clients, installing non-skid strips on stairs, installing push bars on doors, raising toilet seats, installing lever door handles, and lowering the door viewer.

The Energy and Vintage departments look forward to working together to provide home improvements, modifications, and repairs that help older adults maintain their independence and prevent accidents.

Vintage provides funding for the program through Older Americans Act and Colorado State Funding for Senior Services funds. There are no income requirements, but clients must be at least 60 years old. For more information about the project contact Erin Fisher / efisher@nwccog.org / 970-455-1067.



**GRAND COUNTY
HOME MODIFICATION
PILOT PROGRAM**



Have a client who could benefit from the Vintage Home Modification Program for people 60+ in Grand County?

The purpose of this program is to reduce accidents by making the home a safer place to live and age in place.

Clients need a referring professional to apply

For more information contact Amanda Rens-Moon
arensmoon@nwccog.org
970-315-1325

ELIGIBILITY

- Grand county residents 60+
- No income requirements (program is free to clients)
- No citizenship requirements
- May own or rent (with Landlord's approval)
- May be an apartment, a condo, a duplex, a townhome, a mobile home, or a single-family home

HOME MODIFICATIONS ALLOWED

- Install removable and/or adjustable shower heads and grab bars
- Change cabinetry hardware
- Install non-skid strips or decals in tub/shower and/or stairs
- Change lighting and reduce glare
- Move furniture
- Install flashing light system for hearing impaired individuals
- Install push bars on doors
- Raise toilet seats
- Install lever door handles and lowered door viewers

AND MORE...

Ramps are currently NOT part of the Home Mods Program

A physical therapist will complete the home safety assessments and make the recommendations for the home modifications

Welcome New Employees



NWCCOG welcomed Jeff Woods to the Elevator Inspection team in December of 2021. Jeff left Texas in 1996, moved to Colorado in 2001, and has been living in Eagle since 2006. His previous work experience as operations manager with ThyssenKrupp Elevator from 2006 to 2010 along with starting his own business specializing in Code Compliance and upgrades to elevator spaces, uniquely qualifies him to hit the ground running in his new position. He's looking forward to "joining a good group of people that I have known for years."

When asked about outside interests he replied, "Family travel, anything related to fixing up vehicles (new, antique and 4x4), all river related fun, lake fun, dirt biking, mountain biking, snowmobiling, skiing, camping. Pretty much anything the mountains has to offer." Obviously, he's in the right place.

NWCCOG welcomed Ashley Oberg to the Energy Program team as an Energy Efficiency technician also in December of 2021. Ashley has been in Summit County for just over a year arriving from Trenton, Nebraska. She's experienced in construction and remodeling and has recently worked with Crossville Studios -- specializing in tiles and countertops.

Ashley is excited about learning "all of the different aspects of the job. I really love acquiring new skills. And I'm excited to be able to help people."

In her spare time she's looking forward to "hiking, hanging out with friends, re-learning how to ski and possibly snowboard this winter."



Transportation Gap Analysis shows strengths and weaknesses in the system

The December 27th issue of the [Summit Daily News](#) utilized the [Transportation Gap Analysis](#) published by NWCCOG to highlight both the strengths and areas of needed improvement in transportation across the region.



NWCCOG Transportation Gap Analysis Assessment



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While Summit County has a plethora of transportation options within the county, although more limited now due to staffing challenges, there is a dearth of options between counties. Workers living in neighboring counties are finding it more difficult to obtain reliable transportation options to and from work.

Similar situations were discovered in neighboring communities. The report details suggested areas of focus to improve overall transportation in the mountain region. But as Summit County Commissioner Elisabeth Lawrence pointed out, "... we're continuing to put all of our time and energy ... into those routes that are critical. We wish we could offer it like we used to with really robust service. We just simply don't have the workforce right now."

Questions about the Assessment should be directed to Charles McCarthy, Mobility Manager - cmccarthy@nwccog.org or 970-468-0295 x 110.

Next Council Meeting - Thursday, January 27, 2022

Full Council Meeting, EDD Board & NLF Board Meeting

Location: Zoom Conference Call, On-site location TBD

Time: Council 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM - EDD 12:30 PM - 2:30 PM

Primary Agenda Items: Annual closed Executive Committee Meeting to review Executive Director performance; elect executive committee & officers; elect CHP representative; annual NLF Board meeting; EDD Board meeting & election of officers; approve Decembers minutes; approve preliminary end of year financials