



MEMORANDUM

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To: NWCCOG Council
From: Jon Stavney, Executive Director
Date: March 2019
Re: Eagle County Public Health Innovations: Mental Health tax, Tobacco Age, etc

Recently, Mental Health seems to finally be an open topic for discussion across the state of Colorado, whether how it is affecting [youth](#), how [1 in 8 Denverites has depression](#), the recently passed [red flag gun law](#) or how [suicide is ravaging the high country \(NPR\)](#), suddenly mental health stories seem to be everywhere. Agencies and jurisdictions are rapidly developing policy and programs to address mental health. Some are calling to treat [Mental Health on equal footing with physical health](#). Eagle County has been on the cutting edge of that trend since Chris Lindley, Eagle County Public Health Director was hired from CDPHE. In November of 2017, NWCCOG listened in as Chris Lindley, Public Health Director, presented to Eagle County Mayors and Managers immediately after the passage of 1A Mental Health initiative had passed with a 75% approval. In the year of its passage, there were 12 suicides, including a 15-year old in Basalt immediately after the election. Eagle County was creative in writing the ballot language. The County attorney, Bryan Treu believed at that time that other counties would follow, and they have, including the City of Denver. We asked Lindley to share with NWCCOG Council what Eagle County has been doing in the year and a half since being the first county in the state to pass a ballot measure targeted to address mental health issues.

In November 2017, Lindley was sanguine. "In spite of passage of County funding for Mental Health being a first in the state, it is not a time to celebrate, vote tells us we need to be doing more. Eagle County has no beds for detox, none for respite care... with the suicide rate, that starts the county at 0/3." He explained that since polling showed that voters didn't want this measure to be seen as a blank check for Commissioners, dollars would flow through Total Health Alliance, citizen committee, directly to services, not to Eagle County. The process through 2018 that Lindley outlined at the time was as follows: "First step, assess facilities, services. Second, identify true gaps. Third, the group

will then take those recommendations to BOCC and present a model. On January 1, 2018 the fund will not yet have money. This will take time. Marijuana harvest season was just finished. The fund will get those dollars in the fall of 2018. It will take a while for funds to come up. The idea is to come together to get things done in the mean-time as the fund builds.” He expanded on the vision, “which drove staff and Commissioners towards the ballot is a shared use behavioral center in Edwards Complex, with respite care beds – call it mental health light. Crisis stabilization beds – for those on a very bad day, “social detox.” The only options at the time were for those in mental health crisis to go to the Emergency Room... or to Jail. Neither were designed to work as a 24 hr. per day walk in clinic. Long, long game to do the same in Basalt for RFV. Partnering with Mountain Family Health Center – plan to get beds in county in two spots. Such services are now only in Denver or GJ.”

For background, **Eagle County** in 2018 had “zero funding going toward mental health” reported [KUNC public radio](#), “now it has about \$1.6 million” through a variety of funding streams including the County General Fund, a 2.5% tax on recreational marijuana passed in 2017, the Katz Foundation, Eagle County Paramedics and other local law enforcement agencies. This has allowed the hiring of 6 school-based psychologists and the Hope Center Eagle River Valley which is a new 24/7 program. The county also has longer term plans for construction of a dedicated facility in Edwards. The commissioners felt strongly enough based on staff research and a public advisory committee convened on the topic to use \$500,000 from emergency reserves in 2018. Chris Lindley, Eagle County’s director of public health has a vision of the effort resulting in long term solutions that include “a robust system of behavioral health providers” and measurable outcomes that include lowering the County suicide rate which is among the highest in Colorado.

Summit County voters approved [ballot measure 1A](#) in November of 2018 which includes funding for wildfire prevention programs, mental health and suicide prevention services, recycling and waste diversion services as well as repair of buildings, and early childhood care. In the Resolution passed by the BOCC to put 1A on the ballot, six Whereas clauses are dedicated to the mental health portion, one citing that “Summit County’s suicide rate far exceeds the national average and more than one in four teens report experiencing symptoms of depression.” [Mental Health Colorado](#) provided technical assistance and strategic recommendations to Summit County to “implement a program for enhanced mental health services and substance use disorder treatment and services.” The measure is predicted to raise \$8.8 million per year through a 4.7mill property tax with \$2 million annually being dedicated to mental health related services.



Pitkin County voters reauthorized a property tax in Nov 2019 for the Healthy Community Fund. First approved in 2002, roughly half of the proceeds are distributed to 67 area non-profits and most of Pitkin County's public health efforts which include Mental Health. Pitkin County commissioners annually approve the distribution of funds through their budget process.

https://www.aspendailynews.com/news/pitkin-county-works-out-details-on-healthy-community-fund-tax/article_af2a0448-9a9b-11e8-8595-9fded81cea62.html

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Related: Eagle County pushed for House Bill19-1033 to enable Counties to raise the minimum age for purchase of tobacco products which will be on the governor's desk for signature this June. The Municipalities of Aspen, Basalt and Avon had already done so under powers granted to them, and it was a frustration to those communities that the County could not legally do the same to provide consistency. <https://coloradosun.com/2019/02/27/cigarettes-all-over-again-colorado-has-the-highest-youth-vaping-rate-in-the-country/>

Staoney Notes: March 8th Mayors Managers Eagle County:

HB19-1033 – Bryan Treu, EC Attorney. Some of our mountain communities (Avon, Aspen, Basalt) were first in state to raise age for tobacco. EC was asked if they could match what Avon and other towns were doing. Bryan said county as an arm of the state could not do that. This year with public health focus at the state and altered makeup of state legislature, EC decided it would (again) push for enabling legislation for counties on tobacco. The result was this bill which allows counties to regulate and control the source (sale) and levy a special tax on tobacco (this includes town), and eliminate state share back forfeiture (complicated). Similar to MJ – tax would require a countywide vote, not raising age. If you don't act as a Muni, you can keep the 27% share-back from state tobacco tax. Locally, the push is for consistency across jurisdictions – preview of coming attraction – EC will likely regulate to 21 years old (would be first county to go from 18) can do w/o vote of people, but tax would be second approach.

Avon Mayor, Sarah SH said town has gotten pushback because some customers would go across "the street" not just for tobacco but also for other purchases, so having EC in line would be great." Like MJ, jurisdictions would have to collect this yourself – will be some headache since state will not do it for them. Couldn't get state to do that. SSH – it has been complicated in Avon. Did pass overwhelmingly. Basalt did same.

EC Commissioner Jeannie Mc- this idea came from our public health department (see white paper), and from Eagle River Youth coalition (Lilly testified), it came from Public H POV, and was not about raising revenues." Overwhelmingly this can have an impact on our youth. Lilly Reynolds at Eagle Valley High has been interning with EC public health for the year (was featured on CPR by John Daly June 28, 2018). Testified. Lilly – "we have higher rates than Colorado for vaping which is higher than national average. Edwards (uninc EC) has been an issue of easy access. Mandy Ivanov (Health Promotion Coordinator, Schools Liaison EC PHE)– in 2017 Healthy Youth Survey learned that 50% of youth are buying from brick and mortar stores. 62% of those under 18 are buying from stores too. With licensing will have ability to reach forward. (Mandy) ECSD – is now looking at cessation because we have so many addicted youth. When you have 18 year olds in the high school, there is a legal ability to purchase and pass on to younger students. Have found that when change age to 21, then this significantly reduces access to products.

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