

Letter to the editor: Coloradans must mobilize to protect mental health safety net

POSTED JANUARY 5, 2020
BY BOULDERBEAT

We, the undersigned, are Medicaid mental health clinic directors serving some of the over 300,000 Medicaid members in the regions managed by CCHA/Anthem, including Colorado Springs, Golden, and Boulder areas. Our addiction counselors, psychotherapists, and social workers provide mental health care for children and low-income Coloradans who face a myriad of mental health struggles such as addiction, depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Now, as people struggle to find mental health care, Anthem — paid by Colorado's Health Care Policy and Finance (HCPF) department to manage behavioral health care — has announced a **20% cut in provider reimbursement that began January 1.**

This cut means Anthem, a for-profit corporation, takes Colorado Medicaid money allocated for treatment and gives it to out-of-state shareholders, marketing expenses and executive salaries. This follows for-profit United Healthcare's acquisition of Rocky Mountain Health Plan.

Colorado is getting ripped off. This is only the beginning: Anthem has bid to purchase Beacon Healthcare for undisclosed billions and will then control all of Medicaid except for Denver's nonprofit Colorado Access.

Coloradans must mobilize to protect our mental health safety net. Medicaid members have little time to organize in their defense. Providers are prohibited from collective bargaining. The State, through legislature and HCPF, is the only safeguard against corporate profit skimming.

Legislators could rein that in. HCPF has an extensive process to set reimbursement rates, which currently Anthem can legally ignore. The people **must ask our legislature** and governor to prohibit Anthem from reducing the State set rates.

Anthem's record of at-will reductions in provider reimbursement exposes the vulnerability of Medicaid members to long wait lists at large facilities. Small facility contractors have decided that the paperwork, liability and complex cases are not worth low rates and stopped taking Medicaid work already. We mental health providers cannot afford to maintain our practices in light of Anthem's rate cuts — our costs go up, yet our reimbursement rates are going down. The economics simply do not work.

This is a crisis. The availability of qualified mental health care, particularly for low-income families, is abysmal. Arbitrary rate cuts must stop. We call on readers to contact State Senate Majority Leader Stephen Fenberg at 303-866-4872 and advocate for predictable rates for providers.

Kelly Bianucci *Executive Director, The Child and Family Therapy Center of Denver*

Andrew Rose *Director, Boulder Emotional Wellness*

Joy Redstone *Director, Naropa Community Counseling*

For more information, see <https://www.coloradocounselingassociation.org/cca/medicaid.asp> or contact Andrew Rose LPC, 303 532 6780