

INCREASING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NETWORK DIVERSITY

January 15, 2024



OVERVIEW

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) is crucial to increasing health care engagement, addressing health disparities, and ensuring that all individuals have equitable access to quality behavioral health care services. Providers who identify as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) often have a deeper awareness of the cultural, social, and historical factors that impact the health of individuals from diverse backgrounds. Cultural understanding and humility help providers better connect with and understand the experiences of their patients, leading to more effective and relevant care. Members may be more likely to seek help for their health care when they feel understood and supported by providers who share their cultural experiences.

Colorado Access (COA) is committed to fostering a health care environment that reflects the cultural and linguistic diversity of the communities we serve, understands the diversity of our members, and is dedicated to expanding our provider network to ensure that all members have access to providers who they trust and who can best meet their health care needs. **Colorado Access understands the need for greater representation of BIPOC providers in our behavioral health network and is seeking proposals from behavioral health care providers to enhance provider diversity.**

CURRENT STATE

- Across the United States, there is a significant lack of diversity among behavioral and mental health providers, particularly in relation to BIPOC representation. Nationally, roughly 80.9% of behavioral and mental health professionals identify as white, whereas 9.1% identify as Hispanic or Latinx, and 6.7% identify as Black or African American.¹ These discrepancies bar many patients from receiving empathetic understanding of their unique experiences in their care. To address this gap and improve the quality of treatment, there is a growing call nationwide for behavioral and mental health providers to develop culturally responsive approaches that consider the impact of identity and intersectionality on patient care.²

¹ *Mental Health Professional Demographics and Statistics in the US*. (2023). Zippia. Retrieved December 21, 2023, from <https://www.zippia.com/mental-health-professional-jobs/demographics/>

² Gurley, S. K. (2022, April 21). *BIPOC Mental Health Trends and Disparities*. Anxiety & Depression Association of America. <https://adaa.org/learn-from-us/from-the-experts/blog-posts/consumer-professional/bipoc-mental-health-trends-and>

- Colorado, specifically, is experiencing a shortage of behavioral health providers, brought about by factors such as burnout, low pay, limited opportunities for non-degree holders, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In some cases, patients face waitlists of up to 18 months. Individuals from historically underrepresented communities face an even greater challenge in their search for care, as the existing workforce does not adequately reflect the diversity of the population in need of services statewide. The scarcity of providers who share similar cultural identities with their patients further compounds the difficulty in finding validating mental health support.³
- COA has implemented a comprehensive strategy to better address the challenges facing members in search of culturally responsive behavioral health care. This strategy includes funding full-time clinicians, increasing reimbursement fees for network providers, and integrating culturally responsive training into our network support and development. It further includes collaborating with community partners to foster a diverse talent pipeline. Current partners include Metropolitan State University Denver and the Maria Droste Counseling Center. These partnerships encompass various stages of professional development from early exposure to the field, to providing student support in the form of scholarships, incentives, assisting with career placement, licensing, and funding to facilitate the process.⁴

PROGRAM VISION

COA will partner with multiple behavioral health providers to expand, retain, and train their BIPOC workforce within our two Regional Accountable Entity (RAE) regions encompassing Adams, Arapahoe, Denver, Douglas, and Elbert counties.

Providers will be awarded between \$100,000 and \$250,000 to fund their proposals, which should include a detailed vision and work plan to achieve the goals outlined below:

³ Maria Droste Counseling Center. (2022, April). Diversifying the Behavioral Health Workforce in Colorado: Report, Recommendations, & Strategic Plan. <https://mariadroste.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022-Diversifying-the-Behavioral-Health-Workforce-Report-and-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

⁴ Colorado Access. (2022, June 14). Strengthening Colorado's Current and Future Behavioral Health Workforce to Meet the Diverse Needs and Backgrounds of the State's Growing Population. PR Newswire. <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/strengthening-colorados-current-and-future-behavioral-health-workforce-to-meet-the-diverse-needs-and-backgrounds-of-the-states-growing-population-301567893.html>

PROGRAM GOALS

- Improve representation of BIPOC providers within the COA behavioral health network to ensure members have access to providers with whom they identify.
- Improve member access to culturally responsive behavioral health care services.
- Improve cross-cultural interaction and responsiveness within the COA behavioral health network.

PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS FOR PROVIDER(S)

Selected providers are expected to partake in one or more of the areas addressed below, and their plan(s) should be included in the application.

- **Provider Recruitment and Retention:**
 - Recruit BIPOC behavioral health care providers into the practice.
 - Establish plan to retain new and current BIPOC providers.
- **Cultural Responsiveness Training:** Administer training in cultural humility and responsiveness to administer to all new and existing providers.
- **Establish a plan for integrating intercultural competency into ongoing professional development and workshops.**
- **BIPOC Community Engagement and/or Behavioral/Mental Health Service Expansion:**
 - Establish plans for community engagement to ensure that expansion aligns with the needs and preferences of respective communities.
 - Include behavioral and mental health services specifically tailored to BIPOC members in expansion plan.

SCHEDULE

- The program will be conducted from the time of selection in **March 2024 to September 30, 2024.**⁵
- Interested providers should submit applications by no later than **February 16, 2024.**
- Providers will be notified of their selection status in **March 2024**; checks will be distributed to selected providers at that time.

DELIVERABLES

The provider will provide and/or participate in the following:

- **Monthly Reporting:** Providers will use a COA-provided template to actively measure and report program success. Each month, the report will include:
 - Monthly distribution of funds: Providers will maintain a running total of funding spent each month that includes a detailed line-item list of expenditures
 - Progress in recruiting and hiring new providers: This should include strategies for recruiting BIPOC behavioral health providers and number of recruitment activities as well as successes and barriers encountered
 - Staff retention efforts
 - Number of completed intercultural competency trainings by existing and new employees
 - Community engagement and/or expansion efforts, including type, description, and number of attempts
 - Any other key performance indicators as noted by provider in their application
- **Final Report:** Providers will submit a final report detailing their experience implementing their project plan(s).

⁵ Program dates are subject to change based on funding availability and can be flexible based on the selected providers' current program specifics and hiring availability.

FUNDING

- Selected providers will receive a one-time installment of between \$100,000 and \$250,000 to initiate the scope of work.
 - All distributed funds must be spent by no later than **September 30, 2024.**
 - Unspent funds must be returned to COA at this time.

SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS AND SELECTION CRITERIA

- If you are a provider interested in submitting a proposal for this scope of work, you should:
 - Address, in detail, **at least one** of the scopes of work outlined in the section “Program Expectations for Providers”;
 - Have a strong foundation working with populations in Adams, Arapahoe, Denver, Douglas, and/or Elbert counties;
 - Have the capacity to intake COA Health First Colorado members with behavioral and mental health needs into your practice scope of work;
 - Be willing and able to create a sustainability plan to continue programming beyond the initial installment and scope of work ending September 30, 2024;
 - Be validated and enrolled with Health First Colorado as a licensed behavioral or mental health provider;
 - Be credentialed as well as contracted and in good standing with Colorado Access; OR willing to become credentialed, and maintain good standing, immediately upon award;
 - Demonstrate operational effectiveness in billing claims to COA or have a plan to operationalize claims submission to COA if not currently contracted with COA.
- Additionally, strong consideration will be given to provider applications which include:
 - Plans to hire additional BIPOC providers;

- Plans to increase access to quality behavioral and mental health services for BIPOC members;
- Ability to offer services in languages other than English;
- Address, in detail, **multiple** scopes of work outlined in the above section “Program Expectations for Providers.”

If you are interested, please complete and submit an RFP form through this [link](#). Please select **Increasing Behavioral Health Network Diversity** from the dropdown menu. For questions regarding the application or requirements, please email clinical@coaccess.com.

The application will be available until 11:59 PM on February 16, 2024. Providers will be chosen, and all applicants will be informed of their selection status in March 2024.