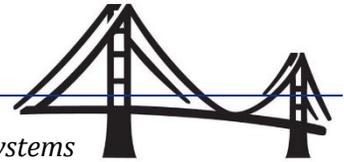




# Bridges Program

*Connecting Colorado's Criminal Justice and Mental Health Systems*



## **BRIDGES PROGRAM (SB 18-251) PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

**VISION – All Coloradans are provided a fair chance of living a healthy and productive life.**

To promote better mental health in Colorado, we need to take steps to improve the conditions of people and provide quality mental health care services for all, including those who encounter the criminal justice system.

Mental health issues can lead to involvement in the criminal justice system. Experts describe a complex relationship between mental health issues and involvement in the criminal justice system; the latter can be either a consequence or a cause of the former. Untreated mental health issues can trigger a chain of events and actions leading to an individual's incarceration. Conversely, living conditions in prison can lead to severe mental health issues. In addition, experts note that the legal system has become one of the main places where people are identified with mental health issues and could get access to care.

**MISSION – To promote positive outcomes for Coloradans living with mental health conditions who encounter criminal justice involvement by fostering collaboration between both systems.**

In Colorado, we value innovation and have a long history of using our ingenuity to solve difficult problems. We need to use this same ingenuity to strengthen the mental health of all Coloradans. We can improve our behavioral health and criminal justice systems by using proven solutions, and we need to have the courage to try new ideas and make changes needed to fix the problems with our current system. If we can harness our state's innovation potential, we can create a system that supports the mental health of all Coloradans and drives our state forward.

It's time that we take responsible steps to manage the integration of our behavioral health care and criminal justice systems. Fostering collaboration is one way of making sure that we are managing our state's resources wisely and getting the best outcomes for our investments. Bridges is a well-thought-through approach that strengthens our systems and creates a path toward the mental health and wellbeing of all Coloradans.

**HOW – Local professionals will serve as Bridges Program Court Liaisons in each Colorado Judicial District and will facilitate communication and collaboration between the criminal justice and mental health systems.**

They will work with both systems to:

- Promote positive outcomes for Coloradans living with mental health conditions who encounter the criminal justice system;
- Keep judges, district attorneys and defense attorneys informed about available community-based mental health services for defendants, including those in need of competency services;
- Connect individuals to appropriate mental health services.