



2024 Issue Brief Factsheet: The Critical Role of Primary Care in Supporting Montanans with Behavioral Health Needs

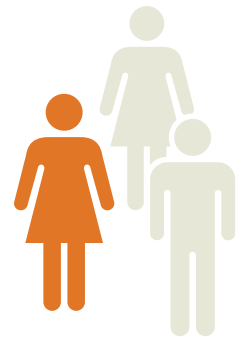
As Montana seeks to build a better behavioral health system, it is important to understand the role that primary care providers play in the prevention and treatment of mental illness and substance use disorders and support them in effectively and sustainably continuing this work.

Montanans Need Treatment Options for Mental Illness and Substance Use Disorders



Montana consistently has among the highest rates of behavioral health conditions in the country and has been in the top five states for suicide completion for the past 30 years. Of particular concern is the state's opioid use disorder crisis, which has shown signs of worsening in recent years and is particularly acute in Indian country.

Montana Medicaid provides health care coverage to more than one of every four Montanans. **In 2022, nearly one of every three Montana Medicaid members (both adults and children) had a behavioral health diagnosis.**



Primary Care is a Key Treatment Resource for Montanans with Behavioral Health Needs

Primary care providers across the state play a major role in Montana's behavioral health system. For Montana Medicaid members who received behavioral health care in 2022:



54% More than half (54%) received **behavioral health care exclusively** from primary care providers

49% Nearly half (49%) received **substance use disorder treatment** from primary care providers

81% Up to 81% received some **behavioral health services** from primary care providers

32% Roughly one-third (32%) received **treatment for serious mental illness** from primary care providers

A Team-Based Approach Supports Primary Care Providers

A health care model called “Integrated Behavioral Health” provides a team-based approach to supporting Montanans with behavioral health needs and the primary care providers who treat them. In this model, behavioral health and primary care providers work together, providing routine screening and prompt care for common issues like depression, anxiety, and substance misuse. They also build referral relationships to specialty care providers so that people with more severe illnesses can get the care they need without a long wait. This model allows primary care practices to treat a wide range of behavioral health conditions more effectively, improving patient health outcomes and provider satisfaction.



At least

68

primary care clinics across Montana use the Integrated Behavioral Health model with support from the Montana Healthcare Foundation.

Primary Care Helps Solve Workforce Shortages in Rural Montana



Like many states, Montana has a shortage of behavioral health providers, particularly in its rural and frontier communities. **Primary care practices that use the Integrated Behavioral Health model help reduce the demands on specialty care providers**, effectively helping address the shortages that impact much of the state.

As Montana seeks effective ways to combat the behavioral health crisis, **the state must consider optimizing reimbursement for primary care practices using the Integrated Behavioral Health model** to ensure that primary care providers are well-equipped to deliver prompt, effective, first-line behavioral health care.

The *2024 Issue Brief: The Critical Role of Primary Care in Supporting Montanans with Behavioral Health Needs* analyzes Montana Medicaid claims data and highlights the central role of primary care providers in the state’s behavioral health system.

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