



Incarcerated Individuals and Health First Colorado (Colorado's Medicaid Program): An Introduction to Cost Savings for Counties

In order to encourage county governments to enroll incarcerated individuals into Health First Colorado, the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (the Department) is sharing the following summary of El Paso County's effort to enroll its inmates via a collaborative partnership between the El Paso County Sheriff's Office (EPCSO) and the El Paso County Department of Human Services (EPCDHS).

Colorado is a Medicaid Expansion state and now covers adults without dependent children. Additionally, Colorado implemented the 'Suspend Function' in the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS), which is the state's eligibility determination system. The 'Suspend Function' allows incarcerated individuals to enroll into Health First Colorado, have coverage suspended while incarcerated, and then have their coverage re-instated when they incur a hospital admission exceeding 24 hours while incarcerated.

Historically, county governments have borne the burden of paying the entirety of an inmate's medical expenses. Under Medicaid Expansion, Health First Colorado now pays for medical expenses when a member incurs a hospital admission exceeding 24 hours. The Department contracts with seven Regional Care Collaborative Organizations (RCCOs) to coordinate care for members and guide them through the scope of services available within their geographic region.

Program Information

In 2015, the total amount of medical expenses of incarcerated individuals admitted to a local hospital for periods exceeding 24 hours were approximately \$729,000; these were entirely paid by Health First Colorado. The applicable medical expenses paid by Health First Colorado between January through October 2016 totaled approximately \$774,000. This equates to over \$1.5 million dollars in less than two years.

Initially, EPCDHS outreached to the Sheriff's Office and worked to establish an improved working relationship between the two governmental agencies, as they both work with much of the same population within the community. This enhanced relationship quickly resulted in a solidified partnership with a primary focus on inmates discharging from the county jail. The El Paso County jail also became an official Health First Colorado Medical Assistance (MA) Site, offering all the applicable services provided to releasing inmates, hospitalized inmates, and the general public as well. This means that anyone visiting an inmate in the jail can also meet with an available EPCDHS representative in the jail lobby during the representative's working hours. All EPCDHS staff at the jail are fully dedicated to the jail; in addition, EPCDHS' involvement does not delay the discharge process. In addition to Health First Colorado, EPCDHS is also able to enroll released inmates in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other public assistance benefits programs. In addition, EPCDHS is also works to connect released inmates to available community resources.



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To further enhance the continuity of care vision of this partnership, RCCO coordination services were incorporated to provide follow-up and information service utilization. The EPCDHS office is currently working to enroll inmates in detoxification units due to their inpatient treatment needs. Roughly 70 individuals a month are enrolled in Health First Colorado from detoxification units.

Highlights of El Paso County's Collaborative Health First Colorado Enrollment Approach

In the first year (August 2015 – July 2016), this collaboration has already demonstrated early successes:

- **No additional cost to taxpayers**, as EPCSO, EPCDHS, Public Health (PH) and RCCO (Community Care, a program of CHP) were able to implement these activities by redeploying staff, work space, and program expenses from existing funds to conduct this work;
- **Expanded reach through increased hours of service** as all partners are able to serve clients releasing from Criminal Justice Center between 6 a.m. - 5 p.m., Monday-Friday (excluding holidays), instead of only standard business hours;
- **Contact rate of 83%** with all releasing inmates. EPCDHS staff attempted contact with 11,425 inmates in the first year, making successful contact with 9,440 of those releasing during the hours DHS staff were on-site. The low rate of those declining to speak with EPCDHS staff may indicate increased trust among inmates and the service agencies wishing to support their successful transition to the local community;
- **Enrolled 34% of eligible inmates**, a total of 1,400 individuals, into Health First Colorado at the CJC. EPCDHS staff were also able to confirm and/or update the records of 1,509 active Health First Colorado members during their release process; and
- **Enrolled an additional 102 individuals into Health First Colorado under the "Suspend Function"**, as these were individuals who were admitted to a local hospital while still in the custody of the El Paso County Sheriff's Office during this time period.

Working collaboratively with the El Paso County DHS, the Sheriff's Office and its contracted medical vendor have reported approximately \$1.5 million in medical expenses associated with inmate hospitalizations and paid for with Health First Colorado coverage. This savings of \$1,503,000 encompasses January 2015 – October 2016.

Our mission is to improve health care access and outcomes for the people we serve while demonstrating sound stewardship of financial resources.

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