

Mind Springs mental health services in Pitkin County remain unchanged

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Jason Auslander

jauslander@aspentimes.com



Mind Springs Health lost its contract to provide emergency crisis services with the state of Colorado.

Bryce Martin | Sky-Hi News

Pitkin County officials worked hard over the past two years to build a mental health care system that provides affordable, accessible care to all county residents.

But a recent statewide development involving a mental health care agency that provides a good chunk of those services in Pitkin County sent them scrambling to assure residents that nothing would change locally, Pitkin County Manager Jon Peacock said.

“We’ve gotten a lot of concerned calls,” he said Friday. “(Reporting about the change) created a perception that services are going away ... (when) it actually doesn’t change much of anything.”

Pitkin County and other local agencies got together in 2016 and re-examined how mental health care was provided to residents. What they found was a disjointed and fragmented system that was full of gaps and in need to revamping.

The result was a \$488,000 contract with Mountain Family Health Centers — which runs a low-income clinic in the midvalley — and Mind Springs Health to plug those gaps and create a more complete and accessible system in Pitkin County. That contract included money from Aspen Valley Hospital, the city of Aspen and the Aspen School District, though most came from a county property tax

called the Health Community Fund.

And while the system hasn't been in place long, preliminary results released in February were glowing from all involved. They included improved response times for people in mental health crisis, overall better access to mental health services for residents and more attention paid to public school students' mental health.

Then in June, the state decided to change its crisis services policies and ended its contract with Mind Springs for those services.

Coverage of that development, however, gave the wrong impression to Pitkin County residents, Peacock said. In fact, the only change in mental health services in Pitkin County is a new crisis hotline – 1-844-493-8255 – that will field all such calls from across the state, he said.

Karen Koenemann, Pitkin County's public health director, agreed.

"From a public standpoint (in Pitkin County), not a lot has changed," she said. "This was really specific to crisis services and not the other services Mind Springs provides. Everything else is business as usual."

In fact, Mind Springs is one of the only providers of mental health services in many areas, so the new state contractor is recontracting with Mind Springs for the same services in some of the affected areas, Peacock said.

"Amidst all the changes to crisis services statewide, we are glad Pitkin County's effective crisis response system will remain in place, with the only change being a new hotline number," Lance Nabers, Mind Springs' program director in Pitkin County, said in a news release.

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