

## United Health Foundation and Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence: *Addressing the Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage in Rural Colorado*

In 2019 the United Health Foundation, the philanthropic arm of UnitedHealth Group, and the Colorado Center for Nursing Excellence announced a three-year, \$1.5 million grant partnership to address the shortage of mental health providers in rural Colorado communities. Nine of the 10 Colorado counties with the highest drug overdose death rates are rural counties, and the average suicide rate in rural Colorado is 40% higher compared to state-wide rates.

The program recruited 40 rural Advanced Practice Registered Nurse Behavioral Health Fellows to return to graduate school and earn a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) certificate. Fellows received financial stipends, monthly coaching and support in securing their required 500+ hours of behavioral health clinical practice, as well as additional support services to ensure they successfully completed the certificate program. Once certified, the 40 PMHNPs began to provide behavioral health care services for a minimum of two years in rural areas, increasing rural clinics' behavioral health care services capacity by 25%.



### COMMUNITY IMPACT\*

**100%**

of Fellows enrolled in certification programs have graduated

**55,000**

additional behavioral health appointments now available annually across Colorado

**85%**

of Fellows report providing behavioral services to the LGBTQ community, 77% report providing services to adolescents, 77% report providing services to low-income families, and 69% report providing services to older adults

\*2019-2023

### WHY IS THIS WORK CRITICAL?



Thank you all so much for the doors this has not only opened for me but also for the increased access to the peds population that is so severely underserved. This not only changed my life but their lives too.”

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH FELLOW



One Fellow who has opened her own PMHNP practice three months ago now has more than 200 patients on her panel. These patients did not have access to mental health services before the grant supported this one provider to upskill to a mental health provider.”

PROJECT DIRECTOR

