

# De-criminalizing Behavioral Health

By Dr. JC Carrica, Ed.D., Chief Operating Officer, Southeast Health Group

You wouldn't go to a plumber to get a cavity filled, or a mechanic to cast your broken leg.....so **why are so many people with mental health and substance use problems ending up in jails instead of treatment centers?**

Across the country, jails and prisons are fast becoming the new mental health institutions. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), approximately 20% state prisoners and 21% of local jail prisoners have "a recent history" of a mental health condition. Seventy percent of youth in juvenile justice systems have at least one mental health condition, and at least 20% live with a severe mental illness. ([http://www.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.nami.org/factsheets/mentalillness_factsheet.pdf))

**Here in Southeast Colorado, we are upgrading our system** to address the needs of individuals with behavioral health problems who end up in our local jails.



For decades, we have been providing Emergency Services 24/7/365 to evaluate individuals in crises related to mental illness and substance use. In 2013, we received a grant from the Daniels Fund to purchase a wheelchair-accessible van and hire a driver. This grant has enabled us to work more closely with law enforcement when they have identified someone who needs emergency transportation to detox or inpatient treatment services. This program will help to reduce the number of folks that would often need to be handcuffed and transported in a law enforcement vehicle. **We now have the capacity to transport people in an unmarked, private vehicle**, which de-criminalizes those who are in need of medical services. It also takes some of the pressure off of Police and Sheriff Departments that have limited personnel and resources.

With support from Colorado Department of Human Services, **we will be strengthening our Jail-based Behavioral Health Services** to screen people entering county jails across the region, and providing mental health and substance use disorder services within the jail setting during incarceration. This new program will help identify people who need early intervention in regards to health care treatment, continued care upon release, and address recidivism rates throughout the counties of Crowley, Otero, Bent, Prowers, Kiowa, and Baca.

If you have any questions about these programs, or want to discuss how it will work in your county, please call me at 1-800-511-5446.