



## Colorado Probation and Parole: Mental Health Training Needs

The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (MHTTC)<sup>i</sup> is a partnership between the University of North Dakota and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education and serves the states of Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming (Region 8). Funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)<sup>ii</sup>, the Mountain Plains MHTTC is a five-year program focused on providing free training, products, and technical assistance to individuals serving persons with mental health disorders. In partnership with SAMHSA and state probation and parole offices, the Mountain Plains MHTTC team conducted an electronic survey in December 2019 to assess mental health training needs among probation and parole officers in the six-state region. Results from the survey will inform the development of new products, training materials, and technical assistance (TA). For more information, read the completed report, [Mental Health Training and Technical Assistance Needs: Findings, Implications, and Summary of a Survey of Probation and Parole Officers in Region 8](#).

### Probation and Parole in Colorado

Approximately 193 probation and parole officers in Colorado completed the electronic survey. Respondents were predominantly female (60%), ages 30-49 (65%), and working in urban (39%) or suburban (32%) settings. A majority (59%) worked only in parole, and 33% had been working in the field between 11 and 20 years.

### Knowledge and Experience

In the last 12 months, a greater proportion of officers in Colorado had attended a training on mental health (86%) than on substance use disorders (78%). However, a greater percentage of parole officers had been trained on mental health (96%) than had those working solely in probation (73%). A greater proportion of those working only in parole rather than probation indicated knowledge of various mental health topics. For example, 81% of parole officers knew how to administer Narcan (Naloxone) to reverse an opioid overdose compared to only 34% of probation officers. See Table 1.

Figure 1. Access to Narcan/Naloxone

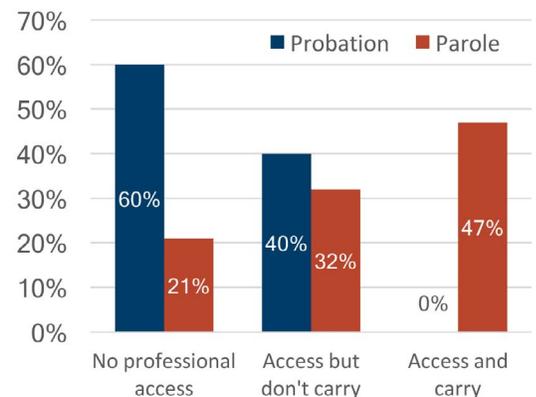


Table 1. Percent of Officers Who Strongly Agree/Agree

	Probation (n=71)	Parole (n=112)	Colorado
I know what trauma-informed care is	83%	98%	93%
I can recognize signs of suicide risk	82%	94%	89%
I know how to help someone calm down from a crisis state of mind	78%	89%	84%
I can recognize the signs of addiction	93%	96%	94%
I can recognize signs of a drug overdose	61%	88%	76%
I know how to administer Narcan to reverse an opioid overdose	34%	81%	62%

## Training and Technical Assistance Needs

Participants identified the priority for training or TA on a variety of topics. Each topic was rated as not a current need, would be helpful, high priority, or not applicable/unsure. Probation and parole officers identified different training needs when exploring topics identified as high priority. See Table 2. When combining helpful or high priority, there were more topic similarities between officers. See Table 3.

**Table 2. Top Topic Priorities Indicated as High Priority**

Colorado	Probation	Parole
1. Mental health and substance abuse (co-occurring)	1. Mental health and substance abuse (co-occurring)	1. Staff retention
2. Staff retention	2. Permanent supportive housing	2. Staff recruitment
3. Permanent supportive housing	3. Understanding the connection between trauma and deviant behavior	3. Leadership skills development

**Table 3. Top Topic Priorities Indicated as Helpful Topics or High Priority**

Colorado	Probation	Parole
1. Mental health and substance abuse (co-occurring)	1. Mental health and substance abuse (co-occurring)	1. Responding to parolees with schizophrenia
2. Mental health and intellectual disabilities (co-occurring)	2. Mental health and intellectual disabilities (co-occurring)	2. Responding to parolees who are hearing voices or experiencing psychosis
3. Permanent supportive housing resources	3. Permanent supportive housing resources <sup>a</sup>	3. Mental health and substance abuse (co-occurring) <sup>b</sup>
	4. Understanding the connection between trauma and deviant behavior <sup>a</sup>	4. Mental health and intellectual disabilities (co-occurring) <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> These topics tied at 94%      <sup>b</sup> These topics tied at 91%

Officers identified which populations (if any) they would like additional training or consultation about to assist in improving their professional efforts in the field of mental health. They could select multiple populations from a list of 25. The top three were the same for probation and parole. See Table 4.

**Table 4. Top Priority Populations**

Top 3 for the State of Colorado	Colorado	Probation	Parole
1. People with serious mental illness (SMI)	60%	72%	55%
2. People who are homeless/transient	58%	72%	50%
3. People with substance use disorder (addiction)	51%	62%	46%

<sup>1</sup>Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center: <https://mhttcnetwork.org/centers/mountain-plains-mhttc/home>.

<sup>2</sup>Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov>.