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OFFICE OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COULD IMPROVE ITS SAFEGUARDING OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT DATA

DENVER—The Colorado Office of the State Auditor has released its performance audit of the Department of Human Services' Office of Behavioral Health (OBH), Management of Substance Abuse Treatment Data, and found that improvements are needed. The audit was performed in response to a legislative request.

During Fiscal Year 2017, almost 700 substance abuse treatment provider locations were licensed in Colorado and approximately 65,000 people were treated. OBH tracks data on substance abuse treatment and individuals treated by licensed providers. OBH uses these data to monitor licensees and trends in substance abuse, plan treatment and prevention programs, help courts track who completes court-ordered treatment, and issue federal and state reports.

Although the audit found that OBH's collection of substance abuse treatment recipient data aligns with statutes and regulations, auditors reported that OBH needs to do more to protect treatment recipient data. The audit found that in 2017, OBH did not terminate access to treatment recipient data for three of its staff when their jobs changed or for 10 of 20 sampled providers whose licenses had expired. In addition, OBH did not maintain data use agreements for seven of its staff and 15 sampled providers, so there was no evidence that

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these users had agreed to protect treatment recipient data. Although no instances of improper data access or disclosure were identified, the risk that treatment recipient data could have been misused was increased.

The audit also found that OBH did not monitor whether the system that holds treatment data had security scans or whether data destruction had occurred, as required by state and OBH policies. This led to a 2-year gap in system security scans between 2015 and 2017. Data destruction occurred only once between Fiscal Years 2012 and 2018. Security scans and data destruction are essential to ensure that systems and data are secure.

The audit makes two recommendations that OBH has agreed to implement.

The full report is available @ www.colorado.gov/auditor.

Under the direction of the state auditor, the OSA is the state's nonpartisan, independent external auditor with broad authority to audit state agencies, departments, institutions of higher education, and the Judicial and Legislative Branches. The OSA's professional staff serve the people of Colorado by addressing relevant public issues through high-quality, objective audits and reviews that promote accountability and positive change in government. Performance audits address whether programs operate in compliance with laws and regulations and in a manner that accomplishes intended program goals. Financial audits include annual audits of the state's basic financial statements and federal grants on a statewide level. IT audits review procedures and technology to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of the state's critical computer systems and taxpayer data. The OSA also tracks about 4,000 Colorado local governments for compliance with the Local Government Audit Law.