



AWARE

ANNUAL REPORT

FY23



Helping People Live Independent Lives



AWARE

www.Aware-inc.org





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AWARE is a shining beacon

Dear Stakeholders,

I am pleased to present the 2023 Annual Report for AWARE covering July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023. This report shines with stories of resilience and triumph in the pursuit of our mission, while also portraying the negative effects on community-based behavioral health services from years of underfunding, inflation, and workforce challenges.

Highlights from this year include:

- **SAMHSA Grants:** The federal government has awarded AWARE multi-year grants to expand preventative community-based behavioral health services.
- **Service Expansion:** We've launched Therapeutic Recreation focused on enhancing individual health and well-being, and we continue to be the leading provider of intensive services for individuals with autism/developmental disabilities in Montana.
- **Workforce Development:** AWARE continues to offer the highest wages possible given the nature of our funding. Despite continued challenges and many position vacancies, AWARE continues to overcome workforce shortages by focusing on quality training, development, and competitive wages. Our efforts will continue with demand for our services at an all-time high.
- **Community Engagement:** All throughout, we've remained connected to our community partners to provide critical early childhood, mental health, and developmental disabilities services as we carry out our mission of helping people live independent lives.

Our heartfelt gratitude extends to our remarkable team of employees, dedicated board members, and community partners who are the life force of our organization. We also thank our generous donors and partners for their unwavering support.

Looking ahead, we are enthusiastic about the challenges and opportunities that await us. Committed to moving the needle on human services we envision touching even more lives in pursuit of our mission.

This annual report reflects our collective efforts and the profound transformation we bring to the world. Join us on this inspiring journey as we continue to shape a brighter future.

Your support, trust, and partnership with AWARE is helping people live independent lives!

Sincerely,
Kristy McKay
Board Chair



At AWARE, we believe the people we are honored to serve deserve the highest quality individualized support. Often those we care for are disadvantaged – they may be infants, children, teens, adults or people with mental illness or developmental disabilities.

It's AWARE's goal to support them with appropriate services while fostering and advocating for the inclusion, acknowledgment and respect everyone deserves. We support them to become meaningful and active members of their community.

Right, Rachel McMahon, We Are Agents of Change UCC Award Winner.

WE ARE AGENTS OF CHANGE



We Serve Youth & Adults

WE'VE BEEN DOING THIS A LONG TIME

AWARE was founded in 1974 by a group of parents in Anaconda, Montana, who were sitting around a dining room table developing employment opportunities for their children with disabilities.

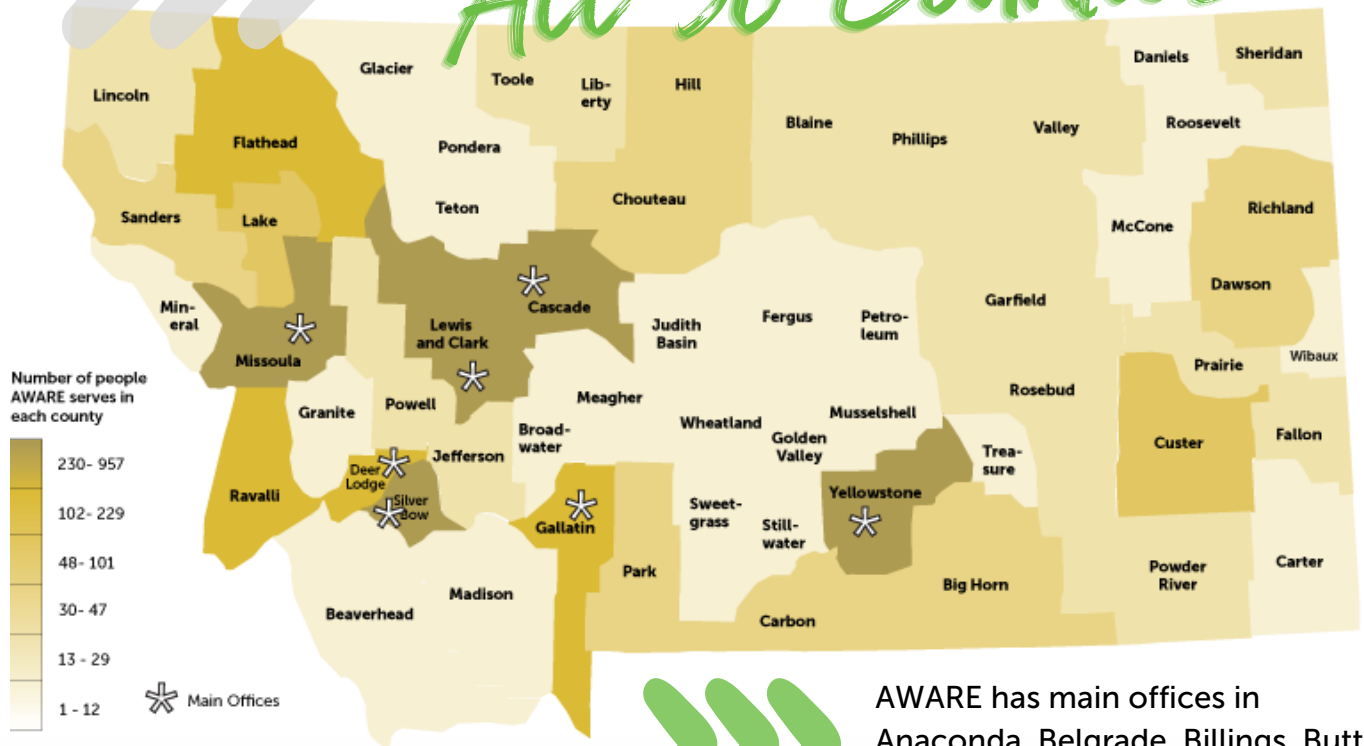
Officially incorporated in 1976, AWARE has evolved into an organization that now provides a full spectrum of services reaching every corner of our great state.

Learn more about our rich history helping Montanans with mental health and/or developmental disabilities at www.Aware-inc.org/history.



IMPACT

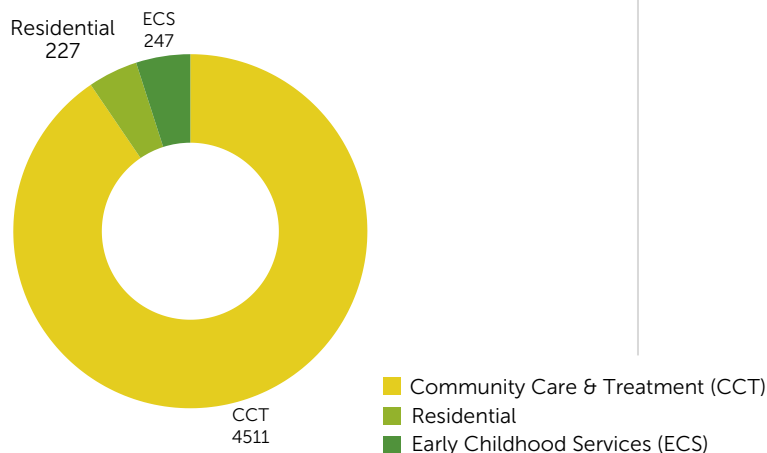
*We Serve
All 56 Counties*



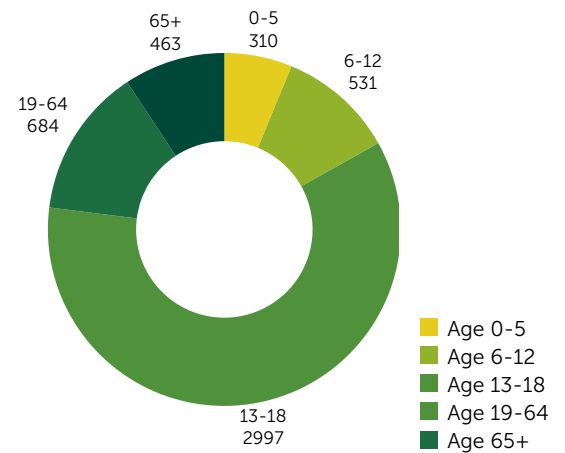
AWARE has main offices in Anaconda, Belgrade, Billings, Butte, Helena, Great Falls and Missoula.

AWARE provided services to
4,985 **unique individuals**

People Served



Ages of People Served



The *Best* Behavioral Health Workforce in Montana

Despite the challenges of the past few years, AWARE's workforce continues to overcome. We sincerely believe we have the best behavioral health workforce in Montana. Our team continues to lean into challenges, learn, grow and accomplish incredible things, most notably – we're helping people live independent lives. It is inspiring to see the commitment our team has to helping the people we serve achieve remarkable things.

Each year at our annual awards banquet, we recognize and honor a group of employees, nominated by their peers, as people who have risen to the challenge and exemplify AWARE's Unconditional Care Principles.

The work our team is doing isn't always easy, but it is always worth it. Because of our dedicated team members, AWARE served nearly 5,000 Montanans in FY23.



Training & Development



AWARE offers professional development sessions each month. Throughout FY23 topics covered included: Reflective Supervision, Mastering Change in the Workplace & How to Handle Resistance, Setting Goals, Time Management & Productivity, Effective Communication, Behavioral Based Interviewing, Improving Emotional Intelligence, Motivating Employees, Performance Management, Building Inclusive Teams, and Resolving Conflict.

AWARE also offers "training on demand" as it relates to professional development.

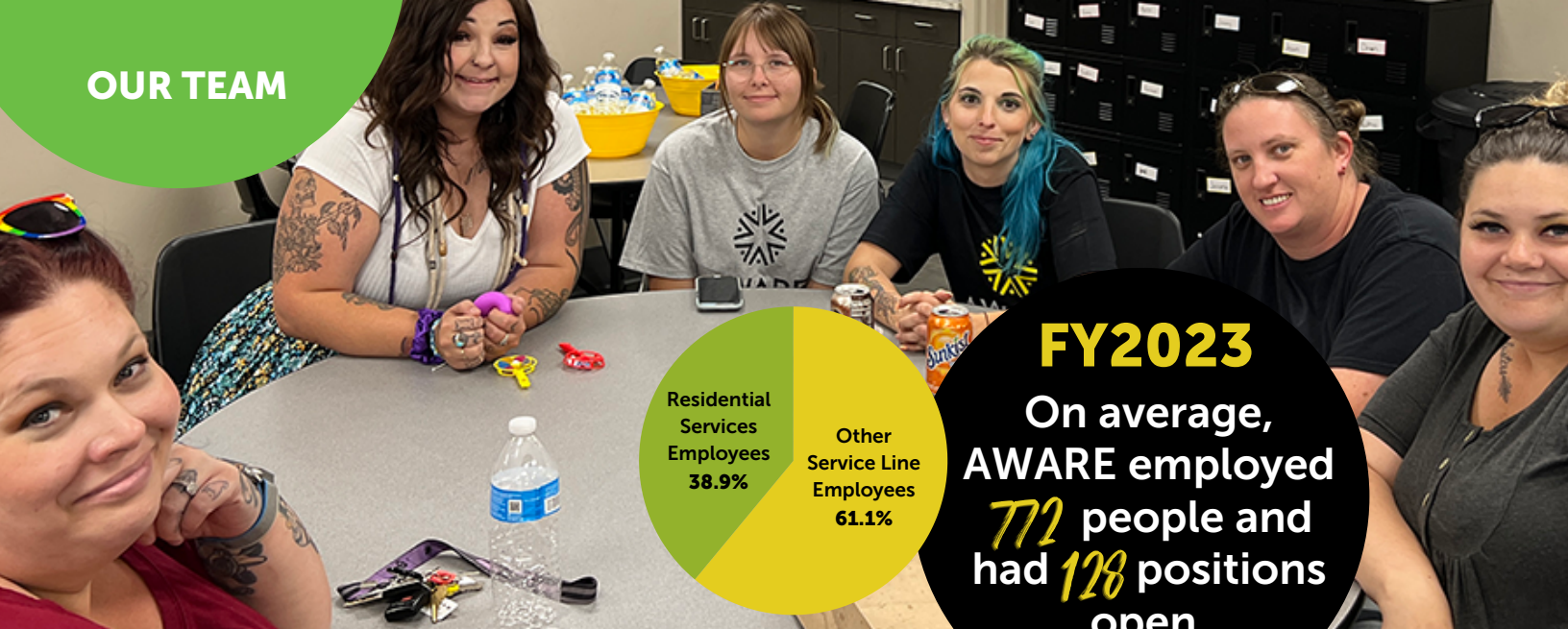
AWARE remained engaged with William Henry to continue the development of the management team, including a series of seminars held in each major community covering: The Art of Supervision and the power of Effectively Evaluating Employees and Would You Work for You leadership development workshops.

In October 2023, AWARE hosted the 2nd Annual Clinical Leadership Summit. This public event is a community-building and professional development opportunity for clinicians and students studying in the field. The lineup of speakers for the 2023 summit was remarkable, featuring keynote speakers from the Holistic Life Foundation.

AWARE is proud to offer this inspirational professional development event that offers continuing education credits for licensed mental health therapists.



OUR TEAM



FY2023

On average,
AWARE employed
772 people and
had **128** positions
open.

Residential services, particularly programs providing intensive behavioral health care in Montana, remain on the brink of collapse. When fully staffed, AWARE's residential services make up over half of our entire team and serve hundreds of Montanans every year who require these intense behavioral health services. We remain steadfast in our belief that with investments in community-based behavioral health, we can help people live independent lives, in the communities of their choosing and out of higher levels of care, saving Montana taxpayer dollars.

It is important to note that while we served fewer people in residential services in FY23, AWARE has seen significant growth to its outpatient services.

In May of 2023 Governor Gianforte signed HB2 into law. The Medicaid increases funded through HB2 were in part a result of the Medicaid rate study commissioned by the 2021 Legislature.

The provider rate increases funded through HB2 will make a difference and help us continue offering access to community-based mental health services. We still face costs that continue to rise as demands for our services are at an all-time high, so the fight continues.

While other community-based behavioral health providers in Montana are shutting down, AWARE remains committed to exhausting all possibilities to overcome the workforce crisis to continue offering these services in Montana. AWARE has the infrastructure and the facilities and with a stable workforce, AWARE is prepared to open additional residential opportunities for adults and children to stay home in Montana.

Creating Opportunities

In the spirit of exhausting all opportunities and innovative thinking, AWARE has developed a public-private partnership with Montana DPHHS. In Anaconda, AWARE operates two residences that are staffed with CNA's hired by the state. This unique partnership allows us to accomplish providing complex services to individuals with very intensive needs who would otherwise be sent out of state.

In June, peer nominated delegates representing each of AWARE's service lines and communities gathered for the 2023 Corporate Congress session. The event took place June 14 to 16 at the Copper King Hotel in Butte, Montana, and was marked by the presence of dedicated representatives who arrived with 29 bills aimed at improving AWARE's services.

For those unfamiliar with AWARE's Corporate Congress, it plays a unique and integral role in our organization's strategic planning process. This platform is designed to gather input from stakeholders, staff, management and the people we serve. By involving delegates representing each of AWARE's services and communities, we ensure comprehensive management of the organization by using feedback from all levels.

As we move forward, we will incorporate the valuable insights and ideas generated during the Corporate Congress into our strategic plan. With the support of our stakeholders, staff, management and the wider community, we are confident in our ability to enhance AWARE's services and make a positive impact on the lives of those we serve.



Delegates began session with **29** bills and passed **15**. To date, **10** are in progress with **5** pending action plans.

In late 2022, AWARE started actively fundraising for the *Best Day Ever*

Best Day Ever funds are intended to create memorable and special experiences for the people we serve. By creating these experiences, we are fostering human connection, mental and physical wellness and celebrations of success.

Here are just a few of the awesome experiences that Best Day Ever funds provided over the course of the year:

- **Circus & Carnivals**
- **Movie Nights**
- **Fishing Trips**
- **Equine Therapy**
- **Holiday Celebrations**
- **Trip to Lady of the Rockies**
- **Art Classes & Juried Art Show**
- **Trip to Museum of the Rockies**
- **Birthday Celebrations**
- **And More...**

Thanks to our donors for making these memories possible.



EARLY CHILDHOOD

AWARE Early Head Start has **28** classrooms at **11** sites in **5** communities, including **4** childcare partners, and serves **206** families.

In early FY24, the Office of Head Start approved a plan to reduce AWARE's total enrollment and shift dollars to focus on workforce retention and recruitment.

AWARE offers early childhood services to families and prenatal children through age five. Our services are available to families of all socio-economic status. Children of all abilities are welcome. Programs include Early Head Start (EHS) and behavioral health services. They are offered in Belgrade, Billings, Butte, Helena and Whitehall.

2022-23 By The Numbers

33,381 Child and Adult Care Food Program meals were served

Housing assistance was provided to **34** families

Emergency/Crisis Interventions were provided to **56** families



Opportunities for EHS Families

- Homelessness/Housing and Rental Support
- Food and Nutrition Services
- Childcare Cost

Child Advocacy FY2023 Impact

The Lewis and Clark County Child Advocacy Center (CAC)

of AWARE continues to assist children and families when there is a concern for child maltreatment in Lewis and Clark, Jefferson and Broadwater counties. The CAC is a team of compassionate professionals, who respond to child victims of abuse using forensically sound protocols and procedures to reduce the traumatization of children.

In September 2023, AWARE's CAC, led by Paula Samms, received notice that our CAC reaccreditation application was recommended for approval. The accreditation process is time consuming and challenging. Paula and team of community partners are diligent to ensure that Lewis and Clark County and surrounding area offers first-rate support to children and families impacted by abuse or neglect.

219 Forensic Interviews

113 Therapy Referrals

286 Advocacy Contacts

34 Referrals to Specialized Medical Providers

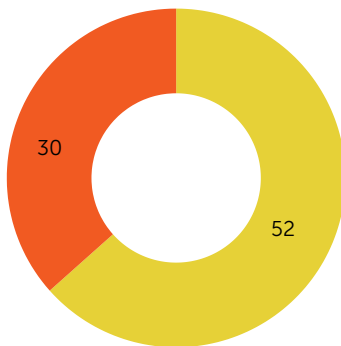
113 Support for Families through Criminal Court Systems

AWARE's residential homes help people live in the communities of their choosing and out of higher levels of care – saving the State of Montana money. AWARE offers residential services for adults and youth. We provide care in more than 40 homes across Montana. Homes are located in Anaconda, Billings, Butte, Great Falls and Missoula. Each home offers a specialized service to support people with autism, developmental disabilities, mental health and special medical needs.

Jerome ««

is one of many inspiring people who benefit from AWARE's residential services. He spent years transitioning from living with his family to various types of institutional and group home settings before moving into his new townhome in Great Falls. With the right support and opportunities to grow toward independence, Jerome's hard work has paid off, and he is reaching milestones regularly!

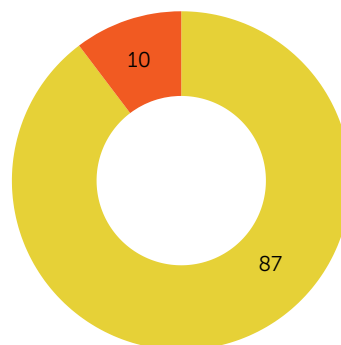
Mental Health Homes



■ People in MH Residential Care
■ Vacant Opportunities

Total Mental Health Residential Care Opportunities: 82

Developmental Disability Homes



■ People in DD Residential Care
■ Vacant Opportunities

Total Developmental Disability Residential Care Opportunities: 97

The data shown in the charts to the left is a snapshot in time as of June 30, 2023.

Vacant opportunities numbers include bed numbers from homes that have been closed due to the workforce crisis. With recent rate improvements, AWARE is optimistic that hiring will improve, allowing for more opportunities to be filled.



Jack's Journey To Stardom

We all have our dream goals in life, those aspirations that fuel our passions and keep us motivated. Today, we'd like to share a heartwarming story about one of our own, Jack, who is chasing his dream of becoming a famous singer.

Jack's journey began in February when he took the courageous step of enrolling in singing lessons. These lessons opened up a world of possibilities for him. With the help of his dedicated instructors, he began working to expand his vocal range. The progress has been remarkable, as he can now hit notes much higher than he ever thought possible.

But Jack's determination doesn't stop there. He's also embarked on the exciting journey of songwriting. Crafting his own songs has been a deeply personal and creative process. It allows him to express his thoughts, emotions and experiences in a way that resonates with his unique voice.

For Jack, singing is not just a skill he's honing; it's also a powerful outlet for building his self-confidence. Through this musical journey, he's learning to manage his anxiety and fully embrace his natural singing ability. It's worth noting that Jack has faced challenges in the past, including bullying incidents aimed at his musical interests. Yet, he's resilient, and with the support of his instructors, he's making great strides in leaving those difficulties behind.



We Promise to Provide the Best Care Possible

We take great pride in the care we provide the people we serve, in particular, those in our residential homes where we continue to face staffing shortages.

We anticipate that with enhanced funding from HB2, we will see a steadier workforce in residential services, but until then, we continue to face the challenges associated with staff turnover and lack of consistency in residential treatment. Despite these challenges, our dedicated team continues to care for our residents and AWARE stands ready to open more residential opportunities. Our organization has the experience and commitment to help keep Montanans in Montana.

**Residential Clients
Referred Out-of-
State by AWARE:** 3

The challenges facing residential care, due to inconsistencies with the workforce, have led to a higher out-of-state referral than normal. AWARE's goal is always to keep Montanans home.



AWARE offers a comprehensive selection of wraparound supports for individuals who do not require placement in a residential setting.

AWARE provided care and positively impacted the lives of more than 4,500 adults and children in FY23 through support at home, school and in various community settings.

Community Care & Treatment Services

- Behavior Analysis / Autism Treatment
- Case Management
- Education & Mental Health Support in Schools
- Home Support
- Outpatient Therapy
- PACT/FACT: Intensive Support for Youth, Adults & Families
- Psychiatry
- Therapeutic Recreation

Helping people live in communities of their choice

AWARE *Launches* Therapeutic Recreation Program

In late 2022, AWARE launched a new Therapeutic Recreation (TR) program.

AWARE's Therapeutic Recreation program is a service that focuses on the lifestyles of the people we serve to help them gain independence and enhance health and well-being based upon their strengths and goals. AWARE's TR team started providing services in February 2023.

In the first 5 months of the program, the TR team served 25 people and expects to enroll another 48 members within the year.

**AWARE has *3*
TR Technicians,
1 Coordinator,
1 Program Director,
serving *7*
communities**

Program for Assertive Community Treatment (PACT)

***85%* of people receiving
PACT services participated
in community events**

**AWARE's PACT team
served *92* people in FY23
and *85%* have housing.**

Family Assertive Community Treatment (FACT)

In 2021, AWARE received a **\$4.5 million**, two-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to expand preventative and mental health services for youth and families in Montana. AWARE's Family Assertive Community Treatment (FACT) services officially launched January 31, 2022.

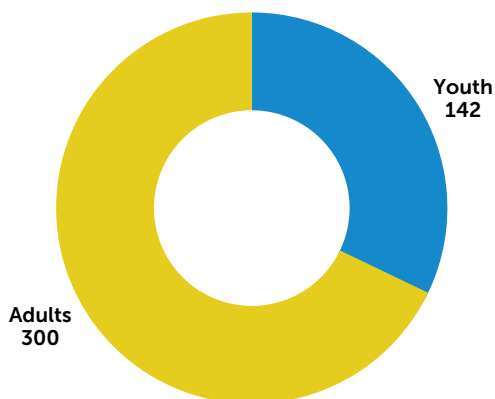
FACT services have proven to be critical in supporting families in our communities. As the 2nd year of the grant concludes, we are proud of the work that has been so far. AWARE's FACT program is trending towards self-sustainability and we are eager to continue growing our teams and the number of families served.



AWARE
currently has
FACT teams, 9
serving **6**
communities

In the first 2-years of this program, AWARE's FACT teams have served 786 people in Montana

Youth & Adults Served FY23



*Total served as of 6/30/23 since launching program in January 2022.
FACT data is based on the federal fiscal year.

The FACT team's wraparound approach to care and treatment facilitates and supports:

- **Stable housing**
- **Increased family engagement**
- **Increased access to psychiatric support for the most vulnerable people in our state to help minimize or prevent the need for more intensive services – saving the state money.**

SDMI Case Management Served 490 People in FY 23

In July 2021, AWARE was awarded the contract for Severe and Disabling Mental Illness (SDMI) Waiver Case Management with the Addictive and Mental Disorders Division of the Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services.

AWARE's top priority is the stabilization of care.

We aim to ease member worries by serving as a primary point of contact, and we're helping providers with prior authorizations and other systematic processes.

Our case managers work with clients and their support systems to identify wants and needs for now and the future. Clients are then connected to the appropriate programs to help fulfill their goals.

SDMI waiver is available to people experiencing a severe and disabling mental illness who require long-term services and support at a level typically provided in a nursing facility to stay within their community.

AWARE became the *first* provider of Behavior Risk Services in Montana in 2021

a specialized service to help people with intensive needs to remain in their community. This service requires the use of Registered Behavior Technicians (RBT) as staff and oversight of all programming by Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA).

AWARE's ABA team currently consists of **3** BCBA's, **5** RBTs and **2.5** RBTs in training.

AWARE's ABA team serves over **85** people across the state in community-based settings and in AWARE's residential homes.



AWARE *Strives* to Keep Kids in School

After a year of navigating the impacts of a change in funding mechanism and management from DPHHS to OPI, AWARE has seen a positive impact and increase in the number of students served, despite some schools opting out of CSCT contracts.

AWARE has **30** CSCT teams in **25** schools in **9** communities in Montana and served **601** Montana students in FY23

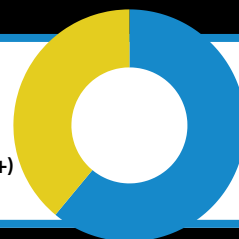
AWARE provides psychiatric services for adults, children and families across *Montana*

We have an unmatched network of mental health professionals with **5** prescribers currently on our team.

AWARE offers in-person psychiatry in Anaconda, Belgrade, Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena and Missoula and offers telehealth to patients outside those communities.

AWARE's Psychiatry Team served **336** individuals in FY23

Adults (18+)
131



Youth (0-17)
205

We provided telehealth to **969** people in FY23

AWARE provided **5,974** hours of telehealth in FY23 through our CSCT, Early Childhood, PACT, FACT, Psychiatry and Youth Case Management services.

AWARE Awarded \$4 Million Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Grant for CCBHC Expansion

In September 2023, it was announced that AWARE received a \$4 million, four-year grant for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC) Planning, Development, and Implementation from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

AWARE's CCBHC project is poised to meet the pressing, unmet health needs and gaps in Lewis & Clark County by revitalizing community-based services under the CCBHC model that will springboard services into a community with proven need.

AWARE's CCBHC will coordinate healthcare services for our community's most vulnerable individuals by investing in a network designed to provide a seamless, integrated process to address each person's unique health needs. This integrated approach will leverage community collaborations to support physical and behavioral health care while offering broader connection to supports not traditionally provided by primary care by connecting clients with housing, employment and other social services.



Tracking HB872 Behavioral Health for Future Generations Commission

The Behavioral Health System for Future Generations Commission was created by House Bill 872 of the 2023 Legislative Session.

This commission will provide recommendations to Governor Gianforte regarding the \$300 million from HB872, which provides a generational investment to reform and improve Montana's behavioral health and developmental disabilities service systems.



Building On Strengths...

Dear Friends,

I am honored to serve as the Chief Executive Officer of AWARE. I am regularly reminded of how fortunate we are to be able to help so many Montanans each year. Each year our annual report provides us the opportunity to review and acknowledge the challenges we faced and celebrate the successes of the people we serve.

As demonstrated throughout this report, we have a lot to be proud of:

- With sheer resiliency and commitment to our mission, the total number of people we serve each year continues to grow.
- Our team continues to pursue innovative ways to combat the workforce crisis, starting with investing in leadership and professional development for the people on our team.
- We continue to assess the demonstrated needs for services and through thoughtful planning have successfully broadened our scope of services.
- After a challenging year with changes to the CSCT funding mechanism, we are thrilled to see the number of children supported through school-based programs increase.
- Once again, AWARE's standing as an incredible provider of community-based behavioral health services was recognized by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration with a \$4 million, four-year grant to launch us into the future.
- Our connection with our communities has grown stronger with intentional outreach and coordination services that help people with mental illness, substance use issues, or developmental disabilities to live as independently as possible, free from institutions.
- We meet people where they are and provide a true wraparound approach to care. Our psychiatrists, therapists, behavioral health specialists and case managers provide care in collaboration with AWARE's Early Head Start and residential programs, in addition to providing in-person and telehealth outpatient services. This wraparound approach allows our team to provide the highest quality of care.



"AWARE's continued success and growth comes down to two distinct factors. We need great people to make up a steady, consistent workforce of loyal, compassionate caregivers and we need the resources and investment from the state to provide the services."

Is The Key To Success

I am particularly proud of the work our team accomplished in FY23. The successes listed above and throughout the report did not come without challenges, primarily due to inadequate funding. Community-based behavioral health in Montana has been on the brink of collapse due to the lack of investment from our government and significant inflation of costs including insurance, real-estate, and transportation. We have been fighting not only the shortage of workers, but the ability to compete with wages and still cover all the expenses associated with providing quality services. These limits certainly impact our ability to be competitive with recruitment and retention, but it doesn't mean we stopped trying.

Throughout the 2023 Legislative Session, many people advocated on behalf of AWARE and other behavioral health providers. I am grateful for the efforts that resulted in long overdue rate increases which will help us keep our doors open. The increase comes after 15 years of an average 1.1% increase per year in provider rates, so while these provider rate increases are historic and gets providers like AWARE close to covering costs for care -- we must continue to advocate for an investment in the future of behavioral health in Montana.

I remain optimistic about the future and am proud of the work our organization performs daily to adapt and grow. I look forward to the day that our workforce is stable and consistent and when we are running at full capacity with the services we offer.

AWARE's *Unconditional Care Principles* **inspire the services we provide to each person who comes to us for care:**

- Building on strengths is the key to success
- We take on and stick with the hardest challenges
- We are agents of change
- Everything is normal until proven otherwise
- Families are our most important resource
- I'm OK, you're OK
- It takes a team
- Our connection with our communities is vital
- We strive to the highest quality of care
- Lighten up and laugh

I hope you can see these philosophies of care woven through this annual report. It is simply a privilege to lead an organization and team that believes in and relies on these guiding principles to inspire the work we do.

On behalf of all of us at AWARE, thank you for your support and thank you for trusting us to be a part of your lives. We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the people of Montana and appreciate you being on our team.





AWARE

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