

Optimizing Investments in Youth Mental & Behavioral Health through Quality Implementation Drivers



Policy and practice visions are the first step in improving Colorado youth's mental and behavioral health through bold solutions. Colorado's next step is to deploy these policy solutions based on the evidence of what works in the real world.

Key Takeaways

Implementation can **make or break** a policy solution in the real world and its **ability to effectively scale** to Colorado's vast geographic landscape.

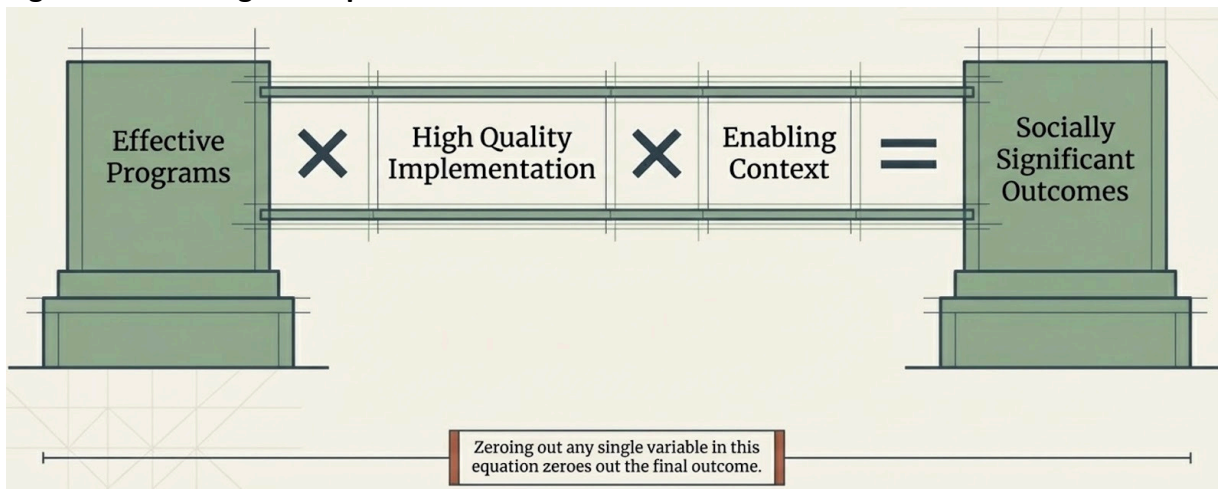
1. High-quality implementation is the bridge to community reach.
2. Incentivizing evidence-based practices helps drive access and outcomes.
3. Building scalable, long-term returns can be done with low and moderate cost solutions.

Evidence Insights

Insight 1. High-quality implementation is the bridge to community reach.

Effective programs for youth only achieve desired outcomes when paired with high-quality implementation that is tailored to the local communities (Figure 1). Lifting an intervention without simultaneously resourcing factors like training and quality checks is not cost savings. It is spending money without moving outcomes.

Figure 1. The Bridge to Impact



Citation: Fixsen, D., & Blase, K. (2016, October 7). Active implementation practice and science. National Implementation Research Network.

A Case Study in Quality: Multisystemic Therapy (MST)

MST is one of the most rigorously studied behavioral health interventions proven to reduce out-of-home placements, recidivism, and substance use for at-risk youth when delivered with quality. While maintaining quality delivery through intensive supervision and monitoring incurs higher upfront costs, it is the mechanism through which the intervention works. While removing implementation supports appears to save money on program delivery, it is ultimately fiscally counterproductive as it results in less effective outcomes.

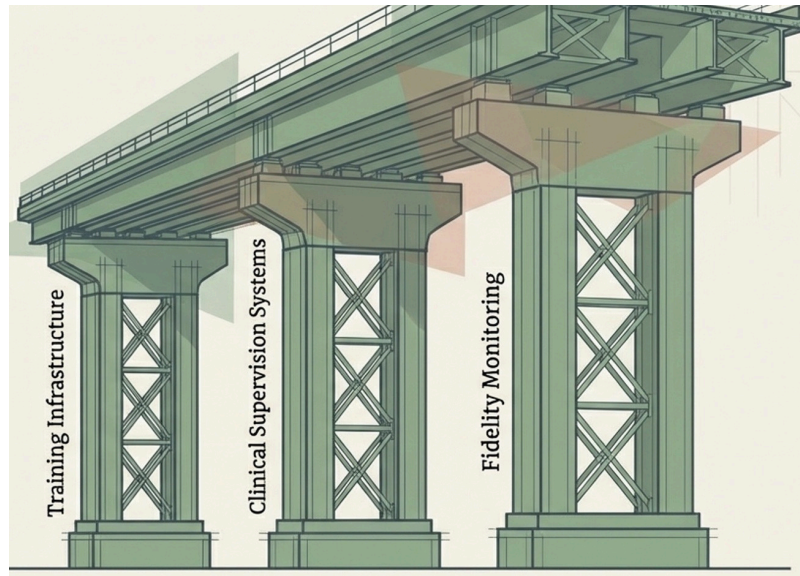
Insight 2. Incentivizing evidence-based practices helps drive outcomes.

Effective practices have years of rigorous research behind them. This evidence tells us *who* the intervention is most likely to help, *what* specific outcomes it will drive, and *how* it must be delivered to achieve impact. For a practice to remain effective in the real world, three implementation supports must be in place (Figure 2):

- **Training** infrastructure for a qualified workforce.
- **Clinical supervision** systems for continuous improvement.
- **Fidelity monitoring** for the practice to be delivered as intended for impact.

Incentives for providers and systems to deliver evidence-based practices include adequate reimbursement rates, dedicated funding for implementation supports, and building grant-funded programs of promise into the state’s funding structure for scale.

Figure 2. Implementation Infrastructure



Insight 3. Building scalable, long-term returns can be done with low- and moderate-cost solutions.

Optimizing *existing* Colorado investments means sustaining implementation supports. Delivering an evidence-based program with low fidelity costs the state more in the long run without moving the needle on outcomes. High-fidelity delivery has more incremental upfront costs, but provides significant savings through reduced systems involvement and better mental health for youth. Building *future* returns means investments in scale and tailoring implementation to each community.

Policy Implications & Actions

The following are options to match state policy and practice to implementation science. For long-term success, Colorado must fund the entire system, not just the service.

Lower-Cost Policy Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustain telehealth policies. • Monitor parity policy implementation. • Implement universal screening. • Leverage past investments. • Enable cross-system information sharing. • Enforce data accountability. • Explore safe ways to expand scope of practice requirements.
Moderate-Cost Policy Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed successful grant funded-programs into the state funding structure for scale and lower implementation costs. • Ensure adequate insurance rates and incentives for behavioral health providers to deliver evidence-based interventions (offsetting their higher training/delivery costs).
Higher-Cost Policy Solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scale integrated care statewide. • Build a robust infant and early childhood mental health system.



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