

# JOHNSON COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



William J. Novotny, III

Robert Perry  
September 19, 2024

Jeff Shelley

Mr. Heath Steel  
Volunteers of America of the Northern Rockies  
1876 South Sheridan Avenue  
Sheridan, WY 82801

Dear Executive Vice President and Chief Business Office Steel:

Normally, I would send this letter to the Director of the Buffalo community mental health center; but to the best of my knowledge the position is either vacant or they have failed to communicate their existence. I am gravely concerned about the lack of reliable and accessible community mental health services for the residents of Johnson County. Since the takeover of Northern Wyoming Mental Health by the Volunteers of America of the Northern Rockies (VOA), services offered in Johnson County have declined substantially or disappeared entirely.

One of the main concerns I voiced during the merger discussions for community mental health was the loss of Johnson County representation on the regional board of directors. I was told by VOA that such representation wasn't commonplace and that we would need to "deal with it." The Johnson County Commissioners also previously received quarterly updates on community mental health trends and services utilized. Since the VOA assumption of management, these quarterly updates have ended. Johnson County also provided financial resources to our community mental health center through general fund appropriations and optional 1% sales tax awards. VOA has never requested any supplemental funding, yet they cite declining financial resources as the main reason for the loss of many services in Johnson County.

I am in receipt of your 2024-2025 contract with the Wyoming Department of Health to provide mental health services in the areas previously serviced by Northern Wyoming Mental Health. The contract is for \$17.3 million. I want to draw your attention to page 5 of Attachment A – Statement of Work, section B, "requirements" items 2 and 4.

**Item 2:** *"Maintain at least one (1) full time office in each county in which the Subrecipient provides services staffed at minimum of forty (40) hours per week with emergency services as applicable. Hours of operation shall be submitted to the Agency and posted in each outpatient facility operated by the Subrecipient."*

**Item 4:** *"Services required by a BHC, either locally or through a formal written agreement with another entity, include:*

- a. Case Management*
- b. Clinical Assessment*
- c. Crisis Clinical Response Services;*
- d. Emergency Care Coordination and Gatekeeping Services;*
- e. Jail-based Assessments, Treatments, and Re-Entry;*
- f. Medication Management Services;*

- a. *Peer Specialist Services;*
- b. *Specialty Services for adults with Serious Mental Illness (SMI), which include:*
- c. *In addition to specialty services for adults with SMI, specialty services for children and adolescences with Serious Emotional Disturbance (SED) are provided according to the System of Care Principles;*
- d. *Agency based Individual and Family Therapy;*
- e. *Community-based Individual and Family Therapy;*
- f. *Group Therapy; and*
- g. *Intense Outpatient Program.*

I do not believe VOA is meeting the spirit of the contract to provide community mental health services in Johnson County. Further, I believe VOA is in breach of contract with the Wyoming Department of Health.

On July 2, 2024, VOA's Dr. Amy Foster made public comment to the Commissioners and placed blame for layoffs at the Buffalo community mental health center on a loss of funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMSA). To date, the Commissioners have not received an update on a restoration of those funds or a plan moving forward.

Following the September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2024, Johnson County Prevention Coalition's "Veterans Reach out to Me" campaign, Emily Hobbs reached out to the Commissioners' office requesting a meeting on two dates that were not possible with my schedule. She was invited to present at the September 17<sup>th</sup> Commissioners meeting. To the best of my knowledge, she did not respond to the request or provide an alternative meeting date.

I extend an open invitation to VOA to present to the Johnson County Commissioners on the current services provided pursuant to your current Wyoming Department of Health Contract and an outline of your plan to provide the critical community mental health services for our county that are currently lacking. Finally, Johnson County has just suffered the largest national disaster in the history of our state. The mental health needs of our community following the House Draw Fire are being discussed openly and honestly by our community. I consider this an incredible step forward in the normalization of mental health being acknowledged and supported. Absent from this discussion or delivery of services to those impacted has been the VOA. .

Please contact the Commissioners' office at 684-7555 or [commissioners@johnsoncowy.gov](mailto:commissioners@johnsoncowy.gov) to make scheduling arrangements. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



William J. Novotny, III  
Chairman, Johnson County Board of Commissioners  
President, Wyoming County Commissioners Association

Cc: Governor Gordon