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Media contact: Deydra Bringas
303-520-9591
denverhealthmedia@dhha.org

New Approach to Connecting Patients with Methamphetamine Use Disorder to Treatment

DENVER (Sept. 2, 2026) — Methamphetamine continues to play a significant role in the nation's overdose crisis. Of more than 309,000 overdose deaths reported in the United States between January 2021 and June 2024, nearly one-third involved methamphetamine. As communities work to address the growing impact of overdose, a new study led by Denver Health researchers examined whether dedicated support and incentives could help connect patients with methamphetamine use disorder to treatment.

The study, "Beginning Early and Assertive Treatment for Methamphetamine Use Disorder," led by researchers Alia Al-Tayyib, PhD, and Deborah Rinehart, PhD, and University of Colorado School of Medicine collaborator Scott Simpson, MD, was published in the [Journal of the American Medical Association Network Open](#). The study found that dedicated care navigation using incentives helped keep patients with methamphetamine use disorder engaged with a care navigator but did not significantly increase the number of patients who connected to treatment within 30 or 90 days.

"Connecting people with methamphetamine use disorder to treatment is complex, especially when they are also facing challenges like unstable housing, unemployment or limited access to a phone," said Al-Tayyib. "While our intervention did not significantly increase treatment linkage, we saw that patients were willing to stay engaged with a care navigator. Maintaining that connection is important because it gives us more opportunities to support patients when they are ready to seek treatment."

The randomized clinical trial followed 192 patients receiving acute care at Denver Health. The intervention used contingency management, which provides incentives to encourage engagement, alongside a dedicated care navigator who helped address individual needs including housing, transportation, food, employment, health care and substance use treatment.



Among patients receiving the intervention, 64% participated in two or more navigation sessions. Many participants also faced significant barriers to care: 85% were unstably housed, 82% were unemployed and 49% did not have regular access to a working phone.

“These findings show us that there isn’t a one-size-fits-all path to treatment,” said Al-Tayyib. “Some patients may need more time and multiple opportunities to connect with care. We need to continue finding ways to meet patients where they are and provide flexible, ongoing support that addresses the health and social needs that can make accessing treatment difficult.”

The findings highlight the importance of creating multiple opportunities for patients to engage with care while continuing to address barriers that may stand between engagement and treatment.

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About Denver Health

[Denver Health](#) is a comprehensive health and hospital system that provides high-quality care and proudly serves as the city’s safety-net hospital. For more than 165 years, Denver Health has been guided by its mission to serve the people of Denver, to educate the next generation of healthcare professionals and to engage in research and community partnerships to better deliver the services that meet our patients’ healthcare needs while strengthening our community.