

## New River Behavioral Health: Uncertainty

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We're getting conflicting reports on the fate of New River Behavioral Health Care, the mental health agency for nine counties in the mountains and foothills. Our news department's email has had several items from sources saying that New River Behavioral Health Care is "closing."

The current position from New River is "reorganizing," with marketing and communications officer Kate Irwin offering a prepared statement that, "New River is governed by the New River Service Authority Board and a decision to close or cease operation has not and cannot be made without the approval of NRSA. Until further notice, New River will continue to provide the same array of services we have been, including Critical Access Behavioral Healthcare Agency (CABHA) related services." But she also is quoted as saying that some staff cuts have come, but without an outline of the cause. This comes as New River discontinued services to Alexander, Caldwell, and McDowell as of September 9th, with RHA assuming responsibility in those counties.

But we received another call from a vendor, who while checking on an order for New River's Boone office, said that he was told not to deliver as the organization was "closing." Smoky Mountain Center, the 15-county LME or umbrella organization over New River and a number of mental health service organizations, referred calls Friday to Pam Andrews, CEO of New River, and her office said she was out Friday. Shelly Foreman, director of planning for Smoky Mountain, said that they are awaiting a plan from Andrews and New River, but would have no further comment on the matter. Under accepted medical guidelines, the minimum notification requirement to clients for discontinuation or other major service changes is 30 days, and so far, no one has come forward with such a notification.