



The Colorado Health Foundation™



Day One on the Ground in Colorado Mountain Towns

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

Every listening tour session begins with a key message from the Foundation's new president and CEO, Karen McNeil-Miller: “The data tell me a little bit, but where I really learn is from you.”

This is the spirit of the statewide listening tour. In the Mountain region, critical conversations are unfolding and are ignited by a [series of localized Colorado Health Report Card Data Spotlights](#). But, the real story unfolds through our guests. The story is in their voice, it's in their passion and their responses to the important questions we bring forward. On the second leg of this 11-region adventure, we continue to listen to people's stories, learning about who they are and where they live. And it's bringing the numbers to life.

Unfortunately, it's not always a pretty picture.

Karen's been on the job for 21 days as of Monday. This week, we've already traveled 164 miles across the state for three main sessions. We visited with folks at a Frisco lodge, on fairgrounds in Fairplay and in a community-owned hospital in Salida. Our guests shared many emotions during the sessions. Some speaking with vigor and pride, while smiling and bouncing off one another's comments. Others with their heads down in frustration. One woman even put a call out to others for clinic space to treat overflow patients with behavioral health issues.

The conversation about assets in a community revealed that some have ample resources. Nearly everyone mentions a spirit of collaboration and the power of partnerships. The legendary landscapes of Colorado drive better health. Built

environment is touted in the communities with major outdoor activity-driven markets.

On day one, the tale of health care is told. Parents have no primary care access when their children are sick. Main Street USA, Fairplay's main primary clinic, has limited capacity. The only pharmacy in town recently closed. One woman told us she relies on a trusting relationship with the school nurse to help manage her children's health. Otherwise, she'll have to take time off from work and drive miles away to the closest provider.

While lack of primary care providers is evident, it is not the only challenge mountain resident's face. Capacity to treat substance abuse and behavioral health issues is a significant issue. Law enforcement play a clear role in managing unhealthy individuals. Median income levels are reported off kilter by transient residents with much larger incomes, offsetting opportunities for grant funding. Available and affordable childcare options are few and far between.

As Foundation staff, the challenges and opportunities are not always clear to us, which is why have embarked on this 11-region journey. "We can't translate the realities you live, we are always the outsiders and that's why we're doing this," said Karen in today's sessions.

So what about the bright spots?

The beauty of the Mountain region is an asset, offering independence, privacy and the comforts of a tight-knit community. Everyone knows one another. They know where the problem areas are: rattling off identified public health assessment needs and routes people take to get better paying jobs or late night doctor visits. They also know their strengths: programs offering summer meals and take-home backpacks of healthy food for kids receiving free and reduced lunch. Some health care providers choose to stay, because "it's a beautiful place to live." Though there may be challenges in communities scattered across Colorado's Mountain

region, we see the will to live the best lives possible.

“I’ve never met a family who isn’t doing the best they know how,” said Karen in a session. “The difference begins with a simple question: what will this community say is unacceptable? You must have the will and audacity to say this isn’t acceptable to move forward.”

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