The Colorado Health Foundation™



Day Two on the Ground in Colorado Mountain Towns

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

Today, during our stop in Edwards, we had a reporter join us at Colorado Mountain College. He said, “So are we going to talk about how we need to be more healthy, and that we need more affordable health coverage?” Our response was, “Yes and yes, but stick around and listen to the conversation. There is more.”

Indeed, yesterday we recapped how the new Colorado Health Foundation President and CEO Karen McNeil-Miller is tackling tour conversations by tapping into the stories behind the county-specific, health-related data. And the primary idea emerging from this tour is simple: health is everybody’s business. And, that means everybody’s in the health business together.

The reporter was right, by the way: unaffordable health insurance was affirmed as a barrier in resort communities, but it’s not the only barrier.

In **Leadville**, if you’re in education or law enforcement – you’re in the health business. In fact, the community has a new school-based health clinic that’s a mere seven days old. Assets? Meeting attendees described Leadville as having a “broader version of health through desire for access to nutritious food, safe sidewalks and walkable neighborhoods.” Another described Leadville’s younger population as both an asset and opportunity, if they can be supported and mentored as the community’s next generation workforce. In a community with 80 percent open space, Leadville still faces economic instability, with many traveling to neighboring towns for work and to shop.

In **Edwards**, the shadow of being a successful resort community presents a challenge for good health. “There are families who don’t have the luxury of worrying about their kids’ health. They’ve got 99 problems, but health care ain’t one,” Karen commented while recapping the meeting. Middle-tier populations face issues with access to care because of high insurance costs. And for the first time on the tour, health literacy was brought up as a challenge. One guest commented that he’s continually surprised how the community’s median income is more than $70,000, given the health literacy issues he sees with patients.

In **Steamboat Springs**, attendees shared a positive outlook, noting they are equipped with a strong primary care workforce (that accepts Medicaid) and solid after school programs. Yet, communities outside of the city face much larger challenges.

On day two, we had two site visits. The first stop was at St. Vincent Hospital in Leadville. This hospital was recently supported through a nonprofit PRI loan through the Foundation’s private sector investment arm. The second visit, at a school-based health center in Avon, is currently serving more than 1,300 kids and hoping to add parents to their patient list soon.

At the end of each tour day, our path of reflection takes us to the same place: how can we help our youngest live healthy lives? We have parents facing affordability challenges and early childcare and primary care shortages. They are traveling long distances just to get a pay check, working two to three jobs a day and have limited ability to spend time with their children. Time that is crucial for their development and for the family. Time that allows parents to be parents by taking care of their kin.

In all of our community meetings so far, Karen has observed, “Kids are carrying around ‘adult problems’—not getting their siblings to school, running a household and ensuring everyone is fed—and kids should be dealing with ‘kid problems.’ In a place as beautiful as we live, finding those bright spots to improve children’s

lives surely can’t be that hard for community’s to find the will to get behind.”

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Blog

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