



The Colorado Health Foundation™



# Day Two on the Ground in North/Northeastern Colorado

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

Day two of the North/Northeast region began with an early morning drive from Sterling to **Fort Morgan**, where we had our third tour session at Morgan Community College. Apples were the primary decoration around the room, which was a good reminder of what Foundation President and CEO, Karen McNeil-Miller, shared with the residents of Morgan County -- that health is more than what happens at the doctor's office. Of the many assets mentioned, the school system and college connections help keep residents healthy, in addition to the strong and diverse network of health care providers available in the area. However, a chief concern for attendees was that children do not have affordable opportunities for physical activities or sports. Similar to many other rural Colorado communities, affordable housing and childcare, as well as access to health care were also barriers. Another challenge discussed included a "bootstrapper" mentality of residents – the perception that some community members have a "just take care of it on our own" mentality and are resistant to ask for help. After the session, we stopped briefly down the street in Fort Morgan, where the Centennial Mental Health Center is building a new facility. Providers from surrounding clinics will serve patients of all ages in a team-based setting.

In **Fort Lupton**, we visited the administrative offices of Salud Family Health Centers Clinic. Salud, founded in 1970 to serve migrant workers, now has 11 sites in northeast Colorado serving residents "from womb to tomb." As a certified patient-centered medical home, the clinics have successfully integrated primary, behavioral and dental care. However, we heard the struggles of recruiting providers, especially bilingual mental health providers, on the eastern plains.

The Foundation team had the pleasure of touring **Greeley** via shuttle, learning about the history of the area, community assets and challenges to being healthy. In the downtown area, we saw the 8th Avenue rejuvenation project and viewed a new art installation of beautiful tree-like sculptures lining the streets. We drove past several parks on the way to the My Health+Connections Community Outreach and Enrollment Center, where Greeley residents can not only sign up for health insurance, but learn how to connect coverage to care through the North Colorado Health Alliance's variety of services. We then drove to the Sunrise Family Medicine Clinic, and the impressive Rodarte Community Center, a youth health and wellness gathering space that has a boxing arena, a gym and several other gathering spaces for kids. After the shuttle tour, we had a few minutes to stroll through downtown Greeley's Creative District, where we strolled through art-filled alleyways before heading to our final tour session of the day at Kress Cinema and Lounge.

To start the session in downtown Greeley, guests were treated to healthy snacks provided by School District 6 Nutrition Services. Karen shared with the attendees that she is out on the road with the intent of becoming as immersed in the state as she can, but also to help residents broaden the conversation about health. Some of the biggest assets in the area include collaboration, passion and dedication to improve the community. Instead of being paralyzed by the data, which reflects poor health statistics, Weld County residents shared pride in their community. One attendee claimed that this community is the most invested, both head and heart, than any other community she has lived. Other assets include the University of Northern Colorado, a 24/7 crisis center where walk-in services are offered for behavioral health assistance, and faith-based organizations. Barriers to health in Weld include a shortage of providers, especially nurses, and lack of affordable housing due to the economic boom spurred by the oil and gas industry, which also leads to significant economic diversity gaps. One resident commented that affordable housing affects all health outcomes, and that your zip code shouldn't

matter in health.

The people of North and Northeast Colorado are candidly sharing their challenges and barriers to health with us along the tour, but we are also hearing about their pride and desire to be truly healthy in equal measure.

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