



Day One on the Ground in Southern Colorado

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

Blizzard warnings and cloudy skies hovered in Denver as the Colorado Health Foundation team headed out on the two-day Southern region leg of the #HealthiestCO listening tour. This tour offers four sessions, multiple site visits and meetings in Trinidad, Walsenburg, Cañon City, Pueblo and Colorado Springs (weather permitting).

Our first tour stop landed us at Mt. Carmel Health, Wellness and Community Center, a beautiful structure nestled in the town of **Trinidad**. Our hosts and guests included an eclectic mix of community members from the fields of education, early childhood, aging populations, public health and health care. They framed community health assets in a conversation about increased access to health care due to dramatic drops in the uninsured. According to a new [Colorado Health Report Card County Spotlight](#), the Las Animas County uninsured rate dropped by 54.5 percent from 2013 to 2015. Attendees also noted increased access to wellness programs and the community's natural surroundings, such as walking trails, farmers' markets and fresh air. Collaboration has been a consistent theme at nearly all tour sessions, and members of the local Early Childhood Councils noted their success in building strong partnerships.

While Las Animas County has made significant strides in cultivating a culture of health, there's still work to do. Finding funding that maintains the positive momentum remains an ongoing challenge. This community, like many others across the state, struggles with substance abuse—with poverty and lack of economic opportunities being key drivers of it. Attendees voiced special concern about its ripple effects, with devastating impacts on individuals, families and the community as a whole. The session concluded with a clear understanding of the

barriers facing Las Animas County and voiced a strong commitment to continued good work.

We had the opportunity to eat as the students do at Eckhart Elementary during our next stop. The school offers scratch cooking to students for breakfast and lunch meals regularly during the school year. Trained through the LiveWell@School Food Initiative, the lunch experts we met with are dedicated to feeding students healthy food. While they admit that kids' personal preferences and hesitance to try new foods can be a challenge, they use creative measures to inspire healthy eating. Enter Spiderman... If it's good enough for the strong superhero Spidey, the kids are more willing to take a bite.

Wintry weather started picking up in parts of Colorado as we ended our day with a visit to the Huerfano Family Resource Center in **Walsenburg**. We met members of the parent engagement program, which includes business owners, a retired special education instructor, a youth mentor and a local parent—also known as a self-proclaimed 'jack of all trades.' We heard about efforts to drive community engagement in supporting local youth. The group started Huerfano Wellness Walkers, a program that brings healthy snacks into schools, offers Friday meals during four-day school weeks, hosts canning presentations and much more. A moment of pride came when they discussed the accomplishment of working with city council to offer more affordable pricing to Walsenburg Wild Waters, a local water park that doubles as a safe place for local children to play and be active. While long-term funding is not currently secured to continue reduced pricing, efforts are underway to address it.

Stay safe and warm!

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