The Colorado Health Foundation™



Day One on the Ground in Southeast Colorado

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

This leg of the #HealthiestCO tour is our last road trip of 2015. We plan to visit six counties in the Southeast region of Colorado over the next two days.

It's not melon season, but we were still excited for a brief stop in **Rocky Ford** on the way to La Junta. Clear roads and sunny skies meant an early arrival in **Otero County**, giving us an impromptu walking tour opportunity. Karen bought a hat from a man named Don who has been working on Main Street for 60 years. Before heading out, she also met briefly with Doug Miller, a practicing primary care provider in Rocky Ford who doubles as a member of the Foundation's Philanthropy Committee.

Otero Junior College (OJC) hosted us in La Junta, and shared details about innovative programming that trains health navigators and community health workers. The program began as a collaboration with **Southeast Health Group** who recognized the potential health and economic benefits of having a trained workforce available to help patients coordinate community-based health care and other services. The program has grown and now offers both a one-year certificate and a two-year associate degree. College program staff are also educating potential employers in the region about the benefits of hiring community health workers for certain positions.

Across the hall at OJC, a group of community members from both **Otero** and **Kiowa** counties gathered for our listening session, which brought out more local business and government representatives than usual. We learned about momentum around wellness programs, including worksite and community-wide initiatives that are being embraced by the public and private sectors. Adults and kids alike

are taking advantage of active-living amenities such as playgrounds, fitness facilities and youth sports programs.

When it comes to health barriers, a joke about access to delicious Mexican food didn’t dissuade the group from sharing serious concerns. This region’s health insurance costs are exceptionally high and the area suffers from challenges in attracting and retaining health care providers. Residents must travel to the Front Range for care, but economic and transportation issues make it difficult if not impossible. Kiowa County lacks childcare options — there are no licensed daycare centers available. Options for senior care are also limited, and the regional nursing homes are consistently economically challenged. Attendees also shared about struggles with high childhood obesity rates, access to healthy food and poverty. The group cited multi-generational substance abuse issues, from alcohol to heroin. A lack of addiction resources was noted as a key driver of economic instability in the area.

Having such a diverse group of non-traditional health partners in the room led to an assurance that the community is the source for innovation solutions to better heath.

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