The Colorado Health Foundation™

On the Ground in Adams County

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

During our last week of the #HealthiestCO statewide tour, we headed 20 miles north of Denver, to the community of **Brighton** in Adams County. Just far enough outside the city to feel a little more rural and a lot less urban, Brighton has a charming, unique feel.

With an intimate group of 10-12 attendees, Karen started the conversation by asking about the area's assets. Residents immediately pointed out the movement toward integrated health care, as evidenced by the Jefferson Center for Mental Health. They discussed the new hospital and medical facilities, saying that health care access is supported by commissioners who have worked to bring additional health services to the area. The local nonprofit infrastructure also reaches into schools and facilitates integrated health efforts through school nurse programs and school-based health centers such as Kids First Health Care, serving many residents. There is also significant county support for services and programs for special needs children.

In a state with abundant access to outdoor activities, the Brighton tour session attendees shared that their trail system, bike lanes, parks, playgrounds and recreation centers – including pools – are the best in the state. They described a very active, engaged community.

In contrast, the discussion of barriers revealed that although health coverage has increased due to the Affordable Care Act, access to health care is lacking in

several key areas. The demand for behavioral and mental health care services exceeds the available resources, especially for the veteran population and children. Preventive care is not an area of focus, particularly when it comes to dental care and mental/behavioral health. Health insurance literacy is a challenge, as the newly insured and Medicaid beneficiaries are unsure how to access services, and there aren't enough physicians in the area currently accepting Medicaid.

The choice between paying bills and paying for health insurance is a decision that many families are forced to make. Residents reported that there isn't enough affordable housing and that Section 8 vouchers go unused for that reason. A high proportion of school children are on free or reduced lunch program. With the high price of missing work – sometimes at more than one job – and issues with transportation, some families simply don't have time to seek medical care.

Attendees also mentioned that the services that do exist aren't convenient or comfortable and safe to go to, for many families. Although Spanish media really work to get the word out through trusted sources, including radio and television, there are not enough multilingual staff members to meet demand in local health care facilities.

Churn in the health care workforce is seen as a barrier, as the majority of educated health care workers leave – illustrated by the stark fact that 200 out of 300 nurses left the community in the last year alone. Attendees emphasized that the "system is broken" when it comes to health care workers and that it seems that no one is working to address the issue.

As the session wrapped up, the final takeaway with the group was this: It will require community will to address the health barriers in Brighton. Although strides have been made in a few areas, what is needed is a collective culture that views health as a value, invites good health and motivates citizens to stay healthy.

TYPE

Blog

POST DATE

Mar 2, 2016