



## On the Ground in Douglas County

#HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour

A small but engaged group of community members joined us at an event center tucked away in the beautiful pine forest of **Douglas County** for this morning's listening tour session. The session was attended by residents of many of the different communities in the county as well as those interested in health around the metro region. This made for great conversation and, in fact – one of the health assets this group mentioned was the fact that the Denver metro area identifies strongly as one big community ready to tackle big problems.

The attendees had no trouble naming a plethora of assets in Douglas County, citing tangibles such as well-planned and accessible trail systems and recreation centers, a commitment to youth sports, and great health care infrastructure – there are three hospitals in the county and plenty of primary and urgent care facilities. They also pointed to the county's high education rates, high incomes, strong school system and lack of crime as less tangible things that help the county come out on top of health rankings.

But there are also barriers. Douglas County has a large senior population and it is growing quickly. Housing prices make it difficult for many seniors to stay in the county and a lack of public transportation – most of the southern part of the county is not serviced by RTD – makes it difficult for the elderly or disabled to be independent. Access to health care, especially specialized care, is often available only in Denver. And even when health care is available, it is often hard to find a

provider who will accept Medicaid.

The attendees also acknowledged that though Douglas County is a wealthy area, there are disparities, and those who are struggling economically have a relative lack of resources: there is very little low-income housing and long waiting lists for the housing that does exist, there is a lack of knowledge of available resources, and existing aid programs have difficulty finding funding because of the overall demographics of the county. The attendees did point to both the Parker Task Force and the Douglas/Elbert Task force as strong, community-supported resources for the less affluent in the area.

Behavioral health was also cited as an area of concern. Douglas County has a high suicide rate, especially among adult males and teenagers. The group spoke of strong community will to address mental health, especially teen suicide, but said they struggle to know what to do. In addition there is a gap between demand for behavioral health care in the area and actual providers. There are few behavioral health care providers and even fewer who take insurance.

The conversation in Douglas County was a little different because of the relative wealth and privilege of most in the area, but the group was aware of disparities and challenges they face and were vocal in letting us know that they want to work toward being the healthiest county in the nation.

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