The Colorado Health Foundation™



Connecting to Understand

The beauty of Colorado originates from its diversity. Our state is interlaced by rugged mountains, vast plains, grasslands and wetlands, cavernous canyons, mesas and the tallest sand dunes in North America. When we apply a different lens and look beyond geography – at county, city and community level data – we see even greater variation across the state.

Colorado's median income is $63,945 compared to Costilla County at $27,944. Looking at the city level, Aurora Public Schools serve students from 130 countries and who speak more than 150 languages. Thirty-six percent of their students are second language learners and 82 percent of them are Spanish-speakers. Drilling down to the community level, the median age in Colorado is 36.3; however, if you live in the 81640 ZIP code, the average age is 52.6.

> *The Colorado Health Foundation has been developing a new approach to engaging with communities across the state. In this blog post, the Colorado Health Foundation's portfolio directors, Jehan Benton-Clark, Khanh Nguyen and Erica Snow, share their perspectives on why this practice is key to helping achieve the Foundation's mission of improving the health of Coloradans.*

From data to our own personal experiences, it is clear that the needs across the state – in every county and community – are as unique as the diverse geography. Coloradans clearly know what the barriers and opportunities to health are in their own communities. And our vision is that across Colorado each of us can say: "We have all we need to live healthy lives." Drawing on local knowledge from diverse voices and organizations across the state creates solutions that are practical and effective.

We see engaging residents is vital for communities to thrive. Bringing in new voices and supporting local champions taps into the inherent power in communities and helps create equitable, sustainable and healthy communities.

Earlier this year, Amy Latham, our vice president of philanthropy introduced this refined approach in her blog post, How and Why We'll Be Engaging Deeper in Communities Across Colorado. We've been listening to voices across Colorado: both through our #HeathiestCO Statewide Listening Tour and through program staff. Based on what we heard from Colorado communities, we opened two new funding opportunities for our February 2017 deadline:

- Advancing Behavioral Health
- Supporting Immigrant and Refugee Communities

While the Listening Tour provided essential insights, we are actively building upon that information and spending more time paying attention to your statewide and local voices. Our program staff are engaging with communities in a much more intentional style and working closely with community members to identify new opportunities to bring health in reach and address where things are polarized and unjust, ultimately contributing to healthier and more vibrant communities.

We want to create conditions for residents to be civically engaged. As we look to improve health across Colorado, we know that community members are better equipped and more readily able to identify and advocate for what is needed in

their community.

By supporting residents at the local level, we hope to empower and integrate people from different backgrounds. Groups that have been underrepresented in the past will have the opportunity to engage and gain greater control over their lives and their communities. We want to work with communities to create a safe space where others can develop a voice and become an advocate for their community.

At the Foundation, community engagement is both a process and an outcome. It involves working at all levels of community, from legislators and policymakers to community leaders to residents with the highest needs. Solutions are multi-faceted and require all of us to work together.

Going forward, we will focus on:

- Fostering existing relationships and building new ones
- Listening
- Understanding each community better
- Creating a feedback loop
- Creating opportunities to connect one-on-one
- Encouraging engagement of diverse voices
- Being inclusive

We believe health is a basic human right. And we are working to bring that basic right within reach for all Coloradans. Refer to this interactive map of our state to find program staff working in your area. They look forward to connecting with you and learning what will bring health in reach for you, your family and your community.

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Blog

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