



The Colorado
Health Foundation™

CHF Statewide Listening Tour
Eastern Plains Tour Executive Summary
February 22 - 23, 2016

Purpose of Tour: The new Foundation President and CEO, Karen McNeil-Miller, is touring Colorado in order to learn about health needs and concerns within communities across the state. The statewide #HealthiestCO Listening Tour is an opportunity for grantees, community residents and local leaders to come together and share their perspectives on health. Karen is interested in speaking with community members about the major assets as well as concerns and barriers to good health that exist within communities across Colorado. Karen believes that health is everyone's business, not just for individuals that work directly in healthcare, and hopes to engage community members across all sectors.

Who participated? The delegation included six staff members from The Colorado Health Foundation and two staff members from Community Resource Center. The Eastern Plains tour reached approximately 30 persons in the region, including tour session attendees as well as site visit hosts and participants.

Where did we go? The Eastern Plains Regional Listening Tour took place on February 22 – 23, 2016. The delegation met with representatives from Cheyenne, Elbert, Kit Carson and Lincoln Counties. The tour consisted of two sessions hosted in the communities of Kiowa and Limon, Colorado. Additionally, the delegation participated in site visits of the Fawn Valley Community Park in Kiowa, Prairie Family Center in Burlington and Keefe Memorial Hospital in Cheyenne Wells. A full itinerary of the tour is available in Appendix A.

What did we do? The Foundation hopes to start an on-going conversation with communities across Colorado to effectively address the needs of the state. In open discussions, community leaders described the region's character, existing needs, and efforts currently underway to address a variety of health related concerns.

What did we hear? At each tour session we heard concerns of community members and various barriers to achieving overall health and wellness. While every community presents its own unique perspective and set of challenges, we heard several themes that were similar across the Eastern Plains region as a whole. Session attendees described their region as being resourceful, community-driven and appreciative of the fresh air and sprawling open space that the Eastern Plains offers. The top three issue areas that we heard were centered on the lack of recreation centers and opportunities, the limitations to accessing health services and the need for more qualified healthcare professionals.

Regional Themes

Recreation Centers: Session attendees in Kiowa expressed a severe need for a recreation center within their community and within Elbert County at large. The nearest fitness center is in Castle Rock, which is about an hour from Kiowa. Many residents of Elbert County struggle to find ways to stay active within their local communities. Attendees stated that their communities need a "center of gravity" which would ideally consist of a recreation center in which exercise classes are offered for all ages and where community members could gather for health education courses,



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cooking classes and after school programs. The idea would be to create a community center that helps to present an entire health agenda within the county. Kiowa attendees additionally expressed high interest in community and school gardens in order to address the lack of healthy food options. Similarly, Lincoln County residents expressed the need for a community center in which residents can access exercise classes, health classes and cooking classes. Limon does a good job of partnering with local businesses and hotels, such as the Comfort Inn and Quality Inn, in order to provide services and classes at low cost. However, it is still difficult for residents to access those classes on a consistent basis. Residents felt that a community or recreation center would be especially valuable to their growing senior population, giving them a place to socialize, connect with resources and improve their physical fitness.

Access to Health Services: Attendees in Kiowa spoke of the need for more after-hours clinics and urgent care facilities. With one clinic in Kiowa and one physician's office in Elizabeth, Elbert County residents often struggle to access these service locations and have difficulty scheduling appointments at times that are convenient to them. The lack of transportation in the county makes it especially difficult for seniors to access same-day service and often rely on emergency services to meet their needs. Residents in Lincoln County must go outside of the county for specialty care services, often traveling as far as Colorado Springs. Attendees in Limon discussed the lack of awareness and knowledge of services available within the county and the stigma that persists in accessing those services. Although many residents qualify for safety net services such as free-and-reduced priced lunch and Medicaid, few access these services due to the stigma attached and the perceived judgement from fellow community members. Both communities described themselves as having "small-town pride," which sometimes keeps people from seeking help or assistance.

Healthcare Professionals: As in many rural parts of the state, both Elbert and Lincoln counties are faced with the consistent challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified healthcare professionals within their communities. The public health department in Kiowa has almost entirely disappeared in recent years due to its diminishing workforce. One nurse practitioner has been brought back into the community, however there is still as strong need for more community-based health professionals and physicians in general. Attendees in Limon discussed the high turnover of physicians, nurses and administrators in hospitals and nursing homes in Lincoln County. Additionally, there exists a high turnover rate of health professionals at Centennial Mental Health Center, one of the county's only mental health providers. The challenge of recruiting new healthcare professionals into the region persists due to this instability of employment opportunities.

Assets: Community members spoke of the plentiful and significant assets that exist within their communities. Attendees in Kiowa spoke of the benefits of living in a small community and the connection to neighbors and the feeling of safety that comes along with that. Kiowa offers many afterschool programs and clubs for school-aged children to get involved with. Limon attendees highlighted the quality of critical care, emergency care and their county health department. Residents regularly comes together to put on presentations about health care needs and issues pertinent to the community. A variety of classes and educational opportunities are available within the community, focusing on topics such as suicide prevention and healthy aging.

Topics and Projects Unique to Specific Counties

Kiowa (Elbert County): There is a large disparity that exists between the eastern and the western ends of Elbert County. The population of the eastern end of the county is largely made up of families and residents that have been there for several generations, while the western end is made up of a wealthier, younger and more transient population. These stark differences cause much of the data collected within the county to be skewed and unrepresentative of the total population.

Limon (Lincoln County): Limon County has worked hard to offer a variety of services to help facilitate healthy lifestyles. Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) baskets are available to community members as an affordable price, helping to promote home cooking and balanced nutrition. “Simply Eating” classes are also offered to children, adults and developmentally disabled individuals in order to educate community members on the “how” and “why” of healthy cooking. These classes also serve to connect community members, as all cooking is done family-style.

Appendices

Appendix A. Listening Tour Itinerary

Monday, February 22

10:30 – 11:30 AM: Elbert County Tour Session @ Kiowa Town Hall

11:45 AM – 12:00 PM: Site Visit @ Fawn Valley Community Park in Kiowa

2:00 – 3:00 PM: Lincoln County Tour Session @ Limon Community Building

4:30 – 5:00 PM: Site Visit @ Prairie Family Center in Burlington

Tuesday, February 23

9:30 – 10:30 AM: Site Visit @ Keefe Memorial Hospital in Cheyenne Wells

Appendix B. Session Attendees

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Tour Session
Karen	Berends	Town of Kiowa	Kiowa
Lore	Densen	CSU Extension Office-Elbert County	Kiowa
Michelle	Oeser	Town of Kiowa	Kiowa
Larry	Perreault	Town of Kiowa	Kiowa
Pam	Witucki	Elbert County Coalition for Outreach	Kiowa
Gretchen	Blackwelder	Baby Bear Hugs	Limon
Melody	Bolton	Limon Workforce Center	Limon
Troy	McCue	Lincoln County Economic Development Corporation	Limon
Kim	Schallenberger	Plains to Peaks RETAC	Limon
Matthew	Vogl	National Behavioral Health Innovation Center	Limon