



BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Medicaid Expansion Drives Real Jobs in Real Colorado Communities

In the two years since implementation, Medicaid expansion in Colorado has added 31,074 jobs, increased economic activity by \$3.8 billion and raised average annual household earnings by \$643. That's according to a new independent analysis, "[Assessing the Economic and Budgetary Impact of Medicaid Expansion in Colorado: FY 2015-16 through FY 2034-35.](#)" However, these numbers do not tell the complete story of Medicaid expansion.

Dozens of Colorado communities have felt real and substantial impacts from the economic activity sparked by Medicaid expansion. Across the state, a healthier Colorado economy is rising on a foundation of community health spending. Here are some of those real stories.

Grand Junction

There are at least 50 new hires attributable directly to Medicaid expansion at Mind Springs Health, the primary mental and behavioral health care provider in a sprawling 10-county region on the Western Slope. Mind Springs recently finished out new office space for expansion in Routt County, in addition to refurbishing offices and adding a new rental building in Grand Junction, to accommodate Medicaid growth. Executive Vice President Michelle Hoy said Mind Springs has hired 145 full-time equivalent positions since January of 2014, when Medicaid expansion began, and at least 50 of those are to directly serve Medicaid clients. Chris Lawrence is one of those hires, a recovery case manager for Mind Springs Medicaid clients and also a graduate student of counseling and health care administration. Lawrence assists clients with multiple medical, addiction and social services that enable them to get back on their feet. "We have learned so much about mental health and behavioral health care," Lawrence said. "I helped one client get into an apartment who had numerous barriers because of past criminal and substance use issues. We got that person to a property management company that was willing to work with the situation. This person was living in a car, as a parent."

►Michelle Hoy can be reached at 970.683.7082 or 970.618.4426.

►Chris Lawrence can be reached at 970.312.4885.

La Junta

Local leaders in southeastern Colorado proudly proclaim themselves a “rural frontier.” The remoteness presents challenges in luring new doctors, but it also magnifies the impact of dozens of new, well-paid health care jobs that come with vital benefits. Southeast Health Group – the predominant mental and behavioral health provider in the Arkansas River region and a growing provider of primary medical care – has added dozens of new positions as a result of Medicaid expansion. Director of Operations J.C. Carrica said Medicaid clients have grown from 12,850 to 17,366 since Medicaid expansion went into effect. To serve them, Carrica said, “You need more providers; you also need more front desk support, IT support staff. As a result of building expansion, we increased our maintenance staff; business services increased, especially the billing department; the compliance department increased. That’s one or two employees in each area.” They have also added 16 “peer” positions, three of them full-time: Drivers trained in multiple health needs that transport patients throughout the region for specialized care, including frequent runs to Pueblo. Southeast Health Group’s employment has gone from 84 to 123, with most of those jobs attributable to expanded Medicaid, Carrica said. They have also used local contractors to build 4,000 square feet of newly constructed provider offices and meeting space.

► J.C. Carrica can be reached at 719.384.5446.

Walsenburg

Spanish Peaks Regional Health Center is one of the largest employers in southern Colorado, a key economic driver in Huerfano and surrounding counties. Medicaid expansion has further anchored the health center at the heart of the local economy, responsible for most of the 16 new full-time positions added since 2014. A new clinic added in the tiny town of La Veta is a prime example, requiring three full-time jobs as desk staff and medical assistants. Spanish Peaks is also adding full-time physician staff and mid-level providers to handle increased Medicaid patient volume. Meanwhile, better access to Medicaid has meant a “bottoming out” of the bureaucratic and low-reimbursing Colorado Indigent Care Program (CICP) at Spanish Peaks. “It’s so much better for us, we lose much less money on Medicaid than on CICP,” said Spanish Peaks President and CEO Todd Oberheu. More economic activity in Walsenburg could result from an effort to adapt to new Medicaid patient habits, Oberhue said. Spanish Peaks has found some newly insured patients use the hospital emergency department (ED) for minor complaints, not knowing where else to go. A building across from the ED may be renovated into an urgent care and primary care clinic space. They have also been able to switch one staff member from billing for CICP patients full-time to more productive functions in the multi-building facility.

► Todd Oberheu can be reached at 719.738.5135.

The study, [“Assessing the Economic and Budgetary Impact of Medicaid Expansion in Colorado: FY 2015-16 through FY 2034-35,”](#) is available at www.ColoradoHealth.org. Contact Taryn Fort, Colorado Health Foundation director of communications, for more information.