



## **Health Care Infrastructure in Colorado Springs**

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### **Executive Summary**

Health care is a vigorously debated issue at the national, state, local, and personal levels. From payment models to prescription coverage to the types of available care, the topic causes widespread concern.

This report provides an overview of the Colorado Springs health care infrastructure compared to other cities nationwide. WSC define health care infrastructure as the network of facilities, individuals, and programs providing physical, dental, and mental health care to the community.

#### Key Findings:

- El Paso County Department of Health and Environment funding has not kept pace with the increased service requirements of a growing population. Budget shortfalls have resulted in staff shortages and reductions in public health programs.
- While emergency response systems within the city work well, more effective interactions between the criminal justice system and individuals with severe mental illness may be possible.
- Safety net programs developed by local health care leaders are effective and innovative, yet the number of local uninsured individuals far exceeds the capacity of the programs to provide care.
- While the two local hospital systems meet high standards of care, hospital bed capacity is low relative to other cities.
- Colorado Springs has a shortage of primary care physicians, nurses, and psychiatrists. Projected national shortages in health care personnel make this a cause for concern.
- Two military oriented health care systems (Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs) provide care for local active duty personnel, family members, retirees, and veterans. Efforts are underway to enhance

coordination between military and civilian systems in light of the upcoming Fort Carson expansion.

Based on our research, WSC suggests five Courses of Action to improve the local health care infrastructure:

- Create a comprehensive written index of local safety net organizations to aid law enforcement and other organizations.
- Create a mental health triage system to decrease emergency room usage and improve continuity of care for individuals with severe mental illness.
- Increase El Paso County Department of Health and Environment funding to maintain services.
- Expand local educational opportunities for health care providers.
- Actively recruit health care personnel in needed specialties.

Health care infrastructure in Colorado Springs is very good in many ways. This report provides the basic information necessary for informed community discussion about how to improve our local health care systems even further. It is up to our local elected officials and community leaders to carry out the next steps.