Colorado Springs is the most populous city in El Paso County, Colorado. It is located just east of the geographic center of Colorado and 61 miles south of Denver. With an estimated population of 416,427 it is the second biggest city in Colorado.

The majority of residents in Colorado Springs are white. The median household income in Colorado Springs is $56,345 compared to $52,029 for the state of Colorado. The economy of Colorado Springs is based on military installations in the area, the aerospace and electronics industries, and tourism.

Colorado HealthStory began collecting stories in Colorado Springs in 2012. From these stories an important narrative unfolded and themes emerged. Many themes are rooted in access to care, whether due to issues of affordability, accessibility or other factors.
Colorado Springs is home to some of the most spectacular natural sights. From Pikes Peak to Garden of the Gods Park there are various active outings that residents can experience. However, statistics show that residents in greater El Paso County are more physically inactive and have higher rates of drinking and smoking than national averages. In addition, rates of preventive and management screenings for diabetes and breast cancer and lower throughout the County compared to the rest of Colorado.3

“In the beginning of my disease I was going in every two weeks for blood work, every two weeks for a doctor’s visit. Then it became every month. Every month there was blood work and a doctor’s visit. And then it became every three months. I’ve come to, you know, embrace the fact that I’ll have this chronic illness for the rest of my life and it will always be something that I battle.”

“I lost my job a little over two and a half years ago due to my heart problems and COBRA is extremely expensive. It was well over $700 a month but I was out because I couldn’t work and so I couldn’t collect unemployment. And then one day one of the doctors I was seeing ordered some new medication. I found out the new medication was $400 a month and there was just no way I could afford it.”

Many Coloradans struggle to successfully navigate our complex health care system, bouncing from place to place depending on how, where and from whom they are receiving their care. Navigating the various programs, plans, and providers is difficult and can create barriers to care.

While Colorado Springs median income is greater than Colorado’s, yet local residents still struggle with affording their health care. A number of challenges contribute to one’s inability to afford or access health care. El Paso County as a whole has a higher rate of uninsured residents than the national average. Many are dependent on employers to provide affordable coverage or a dependable income to cover out-of-pocket expenses. A high unemployment rate in El Paso County means that this reality particularly affects El Paso County residents’ health insurance coverage.3
Oral Health

Like Colorado as a whole, Colorado Springs residents face significant barriers to managing their dental health. According to state officials, “oral disease, although nearly 100 percent preventable, affects children, adults, and families across the state of Colorado every day.” A pronounced barrier to care is lack of dental insurance. About 35% of El Paso County residents did not have dental insurance in 2011. Only 44% of people without dental insurance coverage reported visiting a dentist, as compared to 77% of those with dental insurance.

Dental insurance, like general health care, is most commonly obtained through an employer. Thus, El Paso County’s higher than average unemployment rate likely contributes to this gap in coverage. Additionally, nearly 37% of Coloradans reported that they did not receive needed dental care because of costs.

Mental Health

Like many parts of Colorado and across the country, mental health is a concern in Colorado Springs. An estimated one in four adults suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. Therefore over 100,000 residents in Colorado Springs are likely affected by a mental health issue. Taken as a whole, mental illness costs the United States over $300 billion annually in disability benefits, health care expenditures, and loss of wages.
Innovative solutions to these complex health care problems are being implemented in both Colorado Springs and the greater El Paso County. We urge you to get involved by learning more about Colorado HealthStory and by joining the conversation about health in your community.


Colorado HealthStory is putting people back into the conversation about health. We believe far too few conversations about health are being grounded in the experiences of everyday Coloradans. Our hope is that when people listen to their neighbor’s story—and share their own—it will foster empathy and understanding, bring communities together, and spark a new, meaningful conversation about the state of health in Colorado.

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