



Community Health Update – June 2025

Activities:

- **Clinical Services:** DCHD has held two immunization events since March, where 88 individuals were provided with standard child and adult vaccines. The Department will be hosting another event on June 10, 2025, at the Lone Tree location, in partnership with the Public Health Institute at Denver Health.

DCHD leadership met with Doctors Care, AdventHealth Parker, Common Spirit Health, Colorado Access, and SECORCares to discuss healthcare accessibility in the County. Although DCHD is working to fill the gap on immunization access, specifically, continuity care for uninsured and underinsured individuals continues to be of concern, as many primary care providers have a cap on the number of patients on Medicaid they can accept and many practice do not offer care to individuals without insurance. To help better understand the community need, DCHD has an intern starting in June who will be focused on developing health zones/heat maps based on available data that will help inform this group as it continues to evaluate options to support the community. This group meets again on July 30, 2025.

- **Behavioral Health:** DCHD and the Douglas County Mental Health Division (DCMHD) have come together to launch a new suicide prevention workgroup that includes membership from Douglas County Human Services, Douglas County School District, law enforcement, aging services, local faith-based organizations, and behavioral health programs. The goals of this group are to:
 - Assess current suicide prevention efforts in Douglas County;
 - Identify gaps in services or outreach;
 - Identify actionable interventions; and
 - Develop a plan for our community.

The workgroup is still early in its planning and is currently reviewing existing resources, including successful suicide prevention models across the state, as well as local data to come up with actionable projects that can be implemented to support individuals and families that may be struggling. The workgroup is hoping to add an individual with lived experience – either a person who had a suicide attempt or an individual that is a survivor of someone who took their life by suicide – to the workgroup so that there is a voice for residents on what is developed.

DCHD and DCMHD also continue to partner on a men's mental health initiative, as middle-aged men have been identified as a priority population in the shared work of behavioral health. Currently, the teams are working with the communications team and

Douglas County Sheriff's Office to identify an officer who might be able to share his personal experiences to help inform the work moving forward.

Lastly, DCHD collaborated with DCMHD and AllHealth Network on a short article about Mental Health First Aid for Douglas County News Press, which you will find at the end of this report.

- **WIC:** DCHD has submitted a partnership request application for the DCHD and Northeast Colorado Health Department WIC partnership. This application request is for continued funding support for the upcoming FY26 grant period, which is necessary for long-term partnership sustainability.
- **Mini Grant Awards:** DCHD received two mini grants during this reporting period which support prevention recommendations from the Child Fatality Review Team and the Maternal Child Health Program:
 - E-470 Transportation Safety Foundation - \$2,500 for car seats and booster seats.
 - Office of Gun Violence Prevention - \$3,650.00 for secure firearm storage devices.

- **Community Partner Highlights:**

The Community Health team participated in the following community presentations and events from March 1 – June 7, 2025:

Date	Event	Location
3/16/2025	Vaccine Sunday Immunization Event at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church	Castle Rock
3/18-3/19/2025	Maternal Mental Health FORUM	Centennial
3/25/2025	Resource Table at SECORCares	Parker
3/28/2025	Community Baby Shower at AdventHealth Castle Rock	Castle Rock
4/4/2025	Health Screenings for Douglas County School District Transportation Department	Castle Rock
4/11/2025	Narcan Administration Training for SECORCares staff and volunteers	Parker
4/15/2025	Neighbors Helping Neighbors – WIC and Tobacco Prevention	Kiowa
4/16/2025	Firearm Injury Prevention LEAD Workshop for LPHAs	Aurora
4/25/2025	CASA Rally for Kids	Lone Tree
4/25/2025	National Drug Takeback with Douglas County Sheriff's Office	Highlands Ranch
4/28/2025	Vaccine Presentation to Sunflower Grange #162	Sedalia
4/30/2025	Immunization Clinic at Sedalia Elementary	Sedalia
5/28/2025	Parker Parks & Recreation Senior Stroll	Parker
6/5/2025	Castle Rock Senior Life Expo	Castle Rock
6/7/2025	Elizabeth Stampede with Elbert County Public Health	Elizabeth

NEWS

Community training lights the way in Douglas County's mental health push

by **Julia King** - Special to Colorado Community Media
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The Douglas County Mental Health Collaborative celebrated its 10-year anniversary last year in Castle Rock. Credit: Courtesy of Drew Bouchard/Douglas County Public Affairs

Community health leaders in Douglas County are laying the groundwork for a stronger, more connected approach to mental wellness.

One tool they're using is Mental Health First Aid — a course originally developed in Australia in 2001 that is designed to help people recognize signs of mental health or substance use struggles and offer support. Not a diagnostic tool, it's about giving people the skills to care for one another, said Melissa Harris, community

engagement manager at AllHealth Network, a nonprofit mental health and substance use treatment agency in Colorado.

“Mental health can be everybody’s business, without being in somebody’s business,” Harris said.

Mental Health First Aid courses are offered several times each month in Douglas County. Each session takes about six to eight hours and can be done in person or virtually. Anyone can participate, not just licensed professionals.

There are several modules available, including Youth Mental Health First Aid, which teaches adults how to support adolescents aged 12 to 18. There are also classes that focus on rural communities, tribal and Indigenous communities, older adults, teens and veterans.

But at the core of these different classes, “the skills are all the same,” Harris said.

Participants are taught to follow “ALGEE,” a five-step action plan for supporting someone in a mental health crisis. The acronym stands for: Assess for risk of harm, Listen, Give reassurance and information, Encourage professional help such as calling 911 or 988, and Encourage self-help strategies like breathing exercises or connecting with loved ones.

Suicide is among the leading causes of death in the United States, and the numbers continue to trend upward. From 2015 to 2019, there were “widespread increases” in depression without equivalent increases in treatment, according to a study by the American Journal of Preventive Medicine.

Health professionals in Douglas County have been weaving a safety net in the hopes of bringing those numbers down and reducing the stigma around mental wellness. Mental Health First Aid training became part of that effort in 2019, when the Mental Health Collaborative, formerly the Douglas County Mental Health Initiative, created a blueprint for a community-based mental health system.

The training was proposed as part of that blueprint “to change the culture in Douglas County around emotional wellness,” said Laura Ciancione, manager of the Douglas County Mental Health Division.

The blueprint identified four demographics — middle-aged men, older adults, transition-aged youth and rural communities — as most likely to benefit from Mental Health First Aid training because they are “at disproportionate risk for suicidal ideation and suicide attempts,” said Ciancione.

Across the country, deaths continue to be more common among boys and men than girls and women, according to **2024 data** from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The highest suicide rate for any group was in men ages 75 and older, at about 44 suicides per 100,000.

Older adults — those in their late 50s to seniors over 70 — face unique challenges like social isolation, loss of family and a lack of support networks, which can contribute to psychological distress, said Laura Larson, the assistant director for community health at the Douglas County Health Department.

Also to contend with is the significant impact of social media and technology on youth, which was particularly clear during the pandemic. The isolation caused by COVID was especially hard for youth, as that time “took them to a place where they no longer had their peers around them,” Larson said.

“We’re continuing to try to figure out how to create safe spaces where people can come in and really feel like they can connect with others who may be walking on the same journey as they are,” Larson added. “So, we’re getting there.”

Community members in Douglas County are attending Mental Health First Aid for reasons “across the board,” according to Jennifer Morris, a licensed therapist who is certified to teach the course. Morris also serves as a school-based mental health specialist with the AllHealth Network.

Sometimes, companies or organizations will suggest that their staff take the training. But typically, people have a personal connection, whether it’s a family member, a friend, or their own mental health journey.

“The interventions themselves are very basic ... it really shows people they do have the skills to support someone,” Morris said. “I think people are often hesitant to help because they don’t know what to do or they don’t want to do the wrong thing.”

The Mental Health First Aid training is made possible through a grant from the Behavioral Health Administration. The training is one piece of the county’s larger initiative. As part of a wider push, the Board of Douglas County Commissioners **in 2023 announced** seven beneficiaries of suicide prevention grants, totaling a \$1.37 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding investment in suicide prevention in the county over three years.

This story has been updated to clarify the titles of Laura Larson and Jennifer Morris.