



Final Report to the General Assembly

*Statewide Health Care Review Committee
December 2023 | Research Publication 800*



Statewide Health Care Review Committee

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This report is also available online at:

<https://leg.colorado.gov/committees/statewide-health-care-review-committee/2023-regular-session>

Committee Charge

Pursuant to Section 10-16-221, C.R.S., the Statewide Health Care Review Committee was created to study health care issues across the state. The committee is authorized to meet two times during each interim, unless additional meetings are authorized by the Executive Committee of the Legislative Council. Two of the meetings may be field trips. The committee is charged with studying health care issues that affect Colorado residents throughout the state, including the following:

- emerging trends in Colorado health care and their effects on consumers, providers, and payers;
- the ability of consumers to obtain and keep adequate, affordable health insurance coverage;
- the effect of changes in the way health care is delivered and paid for;
- trends in health care coverage rates for individuals, employees, and employers and in reimbursement rates for health care services;
- access to and availability of federal funds and waivers of federal law;
- innovations in health care and health care coverage;
- health care issues that arise in or are unique to rural areas of the state;
- access to timely and quality health care and emergency and nonemergency medical transportation;
- options for addressing the needs of uninsured and underinsured populations;
- issues related to the health care workforce, including network adequacy and the adequacy of access to providers; and
- any other health care issue affecting Colorado residents that the committee deems necessary to study.

The committee is not authorized to request legislation.

Committee Activities

The committee conducted one field trip during the 2023 interim. The committee visited the following health facilities in Pueblo during the field trip: Pueblo Fire Station 4, Chávez Huerta School Based Health Center, Parkview Medical Center, and Colorado State University - Pueblo. The following sections discuss the committee's activities during the 2023 interim.

Pueblo Fire Department

Directing Others to Services (D.O.T.S.) Program. The committee met with members of the Pueblo Fire Department to learn about the D.O.T.S Program, which was established in 2016 and is based on the CARES Program in Colorado Springs. The D.O.T.S. Program is focused on reducing the number of non-emergent calls to 911 through referrals to the program. The D.O.T.S. team contacts referred clients, usually during an in-person visit to the client's home, to identify their unique challenges or barriers to care, such as access to food, health care, or transportation. The D.O.T.S. team can provide education and guidance on or connections to

community resources that might benefit the client. During the D.O.T.S. Program's first year it decreased non-emergent 911 calls by 64 percent and in the second year by 54 percent. The Pueblo Fire Department estimates that the program has saved taxpayers over \$700,000 annually.

The D.O.T.S. Program includes a robust network of community partners and resources, including Parkview Medical Center, the Pueblo Community Health Center, the Pueblo Department of Human Services, the Senior Resource Development Agency, and St. Mary Corwin Hospital. During the D.O.T.S. Program presentation, the representatives from the Pueblo Fire Department discussed several individual clients who have benefited from the program. They also discussed how technology has been used to assist the clients involved in the D.O.T.S. Program, especially through 30 grant-funded tablets that were provided to some of the clients to help them access various services.

Tour of Fire Station. The Pueblo Fire Department members provided a tour of Fire Station 4 to the committee. During the tour, the representatives of the fire department discussed how the fire station was designed to provide a healthier environment for the fire department staff. These design elements included how the alarms are sounded and the layout of the sleeping quarters. They discussed how equipment and firefighting gear is kept separate from the living quarters, because it can often absorb toxic chemicals that can be harmful to the firefighters.

Chávez Huerta School Based Health Center

The committee toured the Chávez Huerta School Based Health Center (SBHC) located at Chávez Huerta K-12 Preparatory Academy. The center opened in 2019 and is operated by the Pueblo Community Health Center (PCHC). During the tour, the committee met with staff from Chávez Huerta SBHC, PCHC, and the Youth Healthcare Alliance.

SBHCs provide comprehensive primary and behavioral health care comparable to services received at a family practice physician's office or behavioral health counseling clinic. The Chávez Huerta SBHC staff members discussed how students access the services and the services provided at the center, which include medical, behavioral health, and laboratory services. The staff reviewed patient data, including the most frequent medical and behavioral health diagnoses or reasons for a visit, which include anxiety, depression, sports physicals, and upper respiratory infections. During FY 2022-2023, the Chávez Huerta SBHC provided services to 160 students.

The Chávez Huerta SBHC and PCHC staff discussed the funding for the center, which initially included funding from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. The staff discussed that the clinic uses a sliding fee scale and that clients are not refused services due to an inability to pay. The staff reviewed data on the payment methods of the clinic's clients. In FY 2022-23, 85 percent of the visits were covered by Medicaid, 6.1 percent of the visits were uninsured, and 5.9 percent of the visits were covered by private insurance.

Parkview Medical Center

The committee met with staff members of the Parkview Medical Center and toured the facility. Parkview Medical Center is a private, non-profit hospital that provides acute health care and behavioral health specialty services regardless of ability to pay. The staff reported that 80 percent of the hospital's patients are on Medicare or Medicaid.

Most of the discussion centered around Parkview Medical Center's recent decision to merge with UHealth. The staff discussed how their partnership with UHealth benefited the hospital and their patients during the pandemic. They pointed to insufficient Medicaid reimbursement rates and declining federal financial participation as the root causes of the merger. They discussed developing plans that will allow Parkview Medical Center to maintain as much independence as possible.

The staff also discussed changes to the nursing staff since the pandemic, including the change in the number of contract travel nurses. The hospital staff discussed how before the pandemic between 30 and 40 of the nurses were contract travel nurses, and that the hospital employed about 300 contract travel nurse employees during the pandemic. Currently the hospital employees about 140 contract travel nurses. To receive the higher travel nurse pay rates, contract travel nurses must live 65 miles outside of Pueblo.

Finally, the staff discussed staff safety. They discussed how difficult but common it is to need to confiscate drugs from patients and their visitors. They discussed staff concerns about getting to and from their cars. They cited that between March 2022 and October 2023, 146 staff members were assaulted. Safety concerns lead them to install metal detectors at the entrances, but the staff expressed concerns about how these might unsettle patients.

During the tour, the committee watched a helicopter land on the recently completed helipad. The staffers discussed how the helipad has helped them service patients from surrounding rural areas.

Colorado State University-Pueblo (CSU-Pueblo)

The committee toured the CSU-Pueblo campus, including the School of Nursing. CSU-Pueblo has offered nursing programs since 1964. In 2019, the CSU-Pueblo School of Nursing was established. The School of Nursing offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees through both online and in-person classes.

The committee toured the nursing simulation lab, where students practice in a simulated hospital on mannequins with advanced capabilities. The rooms simulate emergency rooms, intensive care units, and medical surgical units. The staff discussed how mannequins are used to train students on care management, performing nursing tasks, and nurse safety protocols. The School of Nursing staff discussed the benefits of the simulation lab for both undergraduate and graduate students and how the lab may be converted into a functioning hospital in the event of a hospital bed shortage.

Meetings and Topics Discussed

October 11, 2023

- Pueblo Fire Department Presentation on the Directing Others To Services (D.O.T.S.) Program
- Chávez Huerta School Based Health Center Tour
- Parkview Medical Center Tour
- Colorado State University – Pueblo Tour