

2023

ANNUAL REPORT



EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
Colorado



LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

**Our goal is to
cultivate a
healthier, more
resilient community,
and I look forward
to seeing the
continued progress.**

Over the past year, the themes which have grounded our core work were those of recovery, rebuilding, and resilience. In charting the path forward, our overarching goal is to reestablish a strong foundation with the development of the next five-year cycle of our agency's eight-pack of plans. From this extensive planning process emerged several priority areas of workforce and retention; mental health, wellness and burnout; and modernizing data infrastructure. These key themes form the guiding framework for our agency.

People are at the core of our work, and continuing to emphasize the importance of mental health while reducing burnout for our staff has been one of my top priorities. My goal is to equip team members with the resources they need to be successful in their roles, while reducing stress and supporting a greater sense of well-being. Through an ongoing partnership with the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience, we continued to make tailored one-on-one sessions available to our team, which were designed to help staff define their strengths and challenges, set goals, and build a sense of self-efficacy and self-confidence.

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, we implemented strategies to bolster staff recruitment and retention and provided multiple workforce trainings and leadership development, all with sustainability in mind. In recognition of our multi-faceted approach to sustaining the public health workforce, the National Association of Local Boards of Health (NALBOH) invited our agency to its 2023 annual conference to present on how supporting the local public health workforce benefits the communities it serves. The presentation garnered positive feedback, with numerous requests to make the information publicly available.

As part of an innovative approach to modernize and enhance data infrastructure, for the first time, we will be able to pair data visualizations with leading health issues identified in the Community Health Assessment. Modeling the way with strategies to enhance transparency and create easy access to data, much of the 2023 work in this realm focused on finalizing two data dashboards which will feature in-depth information on the topics of suicide and drug overdose deaths.



Susan Wheelan, MBA
Executive Director

As I reflect on where we have been, where we are, and where we are going, I could not be prouder of all that our incredible public health team has achieved.

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2023 BOARD OF HEALTH



TED COLLAS
PRESIDENT



DORIS RALSTON
VICE PRESIDENT



DR. RICHARD VU



DR. DEBORA
CHAN



DAVE DONELSON



GLANT HAVENAR



JACK BRIGGS



CAMI BREMER



LONGINOS
GONZALEZ, JR.

El Paso County Public Health is governed by a nine-member Board of Health, which establishes policy, approves the agency's budget, and appoints the public health director.

Each member serves in a voluntary capacity for a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms (or two-year terms for elected officials) upon appointment by the El Paso County Board of Commissioners. The Board is made up of two current county commissioners, one Colorado Springs city council member, one elected official from another municipality within El Paso County, an active or retired physician, an active or retired medical professional, a business or financial professional, a nonprofit/private organization or public education professional and a citizen-at-large member. The Board meets regularly each month, and additionally as needed.

ABOUT EL PASO COUNTY

PUBLIC HEALTH

Our agency divisions, programs and services are aligned with Colorado's seven core public health services to assure high-quality public health services to all El Paso County residents and to fulfill our agency's mission and vision.



ADMINISTRATION & GOVERNANCE

Establish and maintain programs, personnel and operations; implement public health laws, policies and procedures; secure and manage financial resources.

ASSESSMENT, PLANNING & COMMUNICATION

Analyze local, regional and state data sources; create Community Health Assessments and Public Health Improvement Plans; develop public health messaging and communications.

DISEASE PREVENTION, INVESTIGATION & CONTROL

Monitor, detect and report disease; investigate and control diseases and outbreaks; assure immunizations using established standards.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE

Promote preparedness by participating in all-hazards planning and training; prepare for and respond to emergencies; implement an emergency communication strategy; coordinate with other responders.

ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH

Assure food safety; protect and improve air, land and water quality; assist with regulatory compliance; mitigate effects of environmental hazards.

PREVENTION AND POPULATION HEALTH PROMOTION

Promote healthy living through policies and programs; promote physical and behavioral health with an emphasis on health equity; develop community-specific solutions to address prevention priorities.

VITAL RECORDS & STATISTICS

Record and report vital events (births and deaths); issue birth certificates and death certificates.



MISSION

Our mission is to promote and protect public health and environmental quality across El Paso County through people, prevention and partnerships.

VISION

Our vision is for all El Paso County residents to live in thriving communities where every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health.

VALUES



Accountability



Collaboration



Innovation



Integrity



Respect



Transparency

Since 1872

El Paso County Public Health was established in 1872 as a city health department, and then became an organized county health department in 1939. Public Health provides a broad spectrum of services to address ongoing and critical public health and safety issues for the estimated 756,951 residents of El Paso County.

This year marked one of transition, following several years of intense pandemic response. Focused on the themes of recovery, rebuilding and resilience, our agency forged a new path forward in 2023 through the strategic development of several key agency plans, in addition to continuing to fulfill public health statutory obligations to the community through core services.



AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

GOVERNMENT FINANCE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION (GFOA) CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT FOR EXCELLENCE IN FINANCIAL REPORTING

GFOA presented EPCPH with the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition for governmental accounting and financial reporting. EPCPH has been recognized with the Certificate for four consecutive years, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to financial excellence.

GFOA OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT IN POPULAR ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORTING

GFOA presented EPCPH with the Outstanding Achievement in Popular Annual Financial Reporting (PAFR Award). This award represents a significant achievement, with eligibility criteria dependent upon submission and receipt of the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the current fiscal year.

GFOA DISTINGUISHED BUDGET PRESENTATION AWARD

GFOA presented EPCPH with the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for EPCPH's 2023 Budget Book, marking the fourth consecutive year EPCPH received this prestigious recognition. The award reflects the commitment of the governing body and staff to meeting the highest principles of governmental budgeting and confirms that EPCPH satisfied nationally recognized guidelines for effective budget presentation.

National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award – *Care Coordination*

NACo recognized EPCPH with an Achievement Award for the second straight year. The award honors innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents. The 2023 award recognizes the EPCPH Care Coordination program, which was launched in 2022 as a response to the growing need from community members to access tools to support their physical and mental health. Care coordinators work within communities to reduce barriers and increase easy access to care by connecting individuals to resources and assisting them in effectively navigating complex systems.

PROJECT PUBLIC HEALTH READY (PPHR)

EPCPH was recognized by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) for its ability to plan for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies. EPCPH demonstrated these capabilities by meeting the comprehensive preparedness benchmarks required by PPHR, a unique partnership between NACCHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. EPCPH is the only local public health agency in Colorado with current PPHR recognition.

PUBLIC HEALTH CHAMP AWARD – SAMMI JO LAWSON

Sammi Jo Lawson, retail food program manager, was honored at the 2023 Public Health in the Rockies conference with the Public Health Champ Award. Lawson was granted the prestigious award for her dedication and transformative impact on the field, her leadership skills and collaboration, and her dedication to addressing health disparities and implementing interventions that promote health equity for underserved communities.



Lawson & Director Wheelan



Public Health in the Rockies



Care Coordinators



Project Public Health Ready

ADMINISTRATION & GOVERNANCE

DEVELOPMENT OFFICE

In 2023, our agency received four awards, with a priority of maintaining current multi-year funding while also increasing annual awards. The focus of these efforts is to enhance and support long-term funding and workforce needs.

In 2022, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) awarded our agency a five-year Public Health Infrastructure Grant, intended to address the need to build and strengthen public health workforce and infrastructure. This \$7.8 million in funding is the largest grant our agency has been awarded in its history. A component of this grant is focused on supporting public health's foundational capabilities. In 2023, this component was funded at \$360,299 and is funded on an annual basis. For 2023, the funding is included in the CDC 2022 award of \$7.8 million. For 2023, our agency focused on the foundational capability of strengthening community partnerships.

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT GRANTS (PEG)

Seeking to strengthen community partnerships and as part of the grant funds noted above, our agency offered \$324,000 in grant funding to local community organizations through its innovative 2023 Partner Engagement Grants.

After receiving 43 grant applications, EPCPH selected 10 grantees to receive up to \$36,000 each in

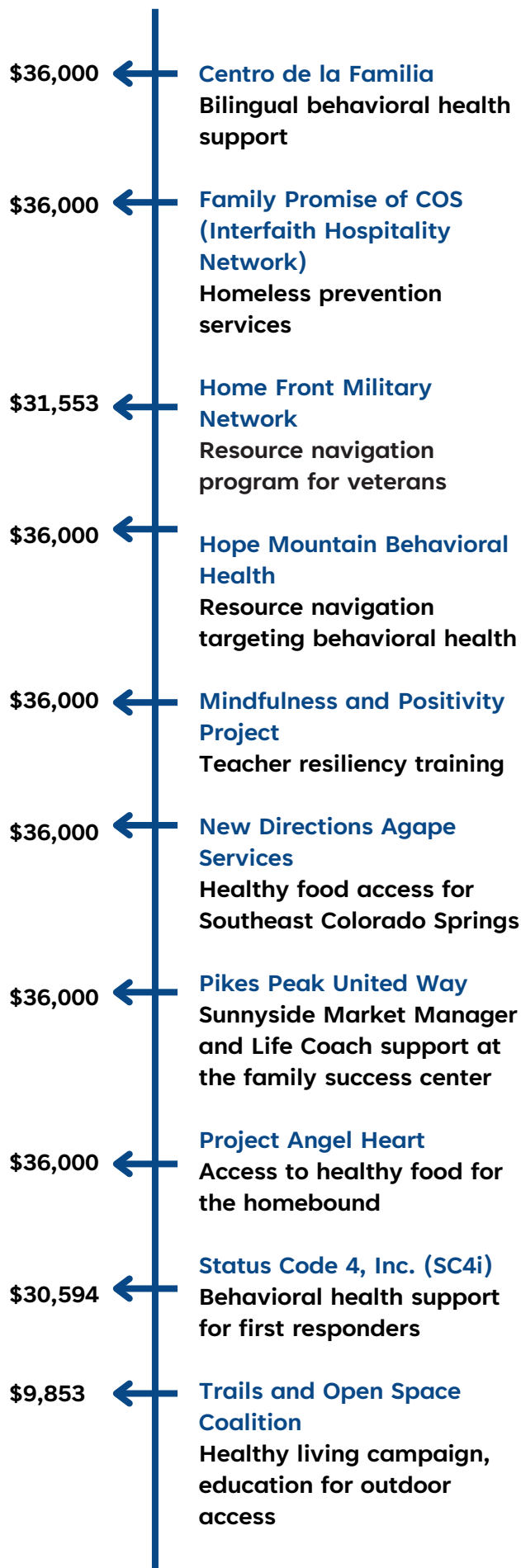


Mindfulness and Positivity Project

“The PEG grant had an incredible impact on teachers from Harrison School District 2 as well as Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8. The Mindfulness and Positivity Project was able to spend the day with these amazing educators as they worked on the practices and skills to lead healthier, happier lives! They will take these evidence-based practices back to the classroom and share with their students.”

— Meg Fredrick

Executive Director, Mindfulness and Positivity Project



one-time federal funding from the CDC Strengthening U.S. Public Health Infrastructure, Workforce and Data Systems grant, which was awarded to EPCPH in December 2022. Grantees showed a clear focus in at least one of the following areas:

- Improve collaborative processes with behavioral health partners or provide behavioral health services.
- Connect communities to services that support the whole person by providing robust linkages and navigation for community resources.

The overarching goal of the program was to create robust public health infrastructure that serves residents of El Paso County. The grant sought to achieve this by supporting local organizations that work collaboratively with EPCPH and share our vision for all El Paso County residents to live in thriving communities where every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health.

“This innovative approach is focused on the importance of building the public health system to improve community health collectively through strategic partnerships,” EPCPH Director Susan Wheelan, M.B.A., said. “It’s a phenomenal opportunity to evaluate activities and demonstrate meaningful outcomes throughout El Paso County.”

To better understand how effective the program was at reaching its objectives, EPCPH created a strong evaluation framework that included a third-party analysis by Dr. Tatiana Bailey, executive director of Data-Driven Economic Strategies.

EPCPH Development Officer Carolyn Gery, who headed up the grant program, noted that understanding how the grants performed informs how EPCPH will work with community partners in the future. “The intent of the Partner Engagement Grants was to look at isolating how we partner best in terms of best practice,” she explained.

ASSESSMENT, PLANNING & COMMUNICATION

BUILDING A STRONG GUIDING FRAMEWORK: THE DEVELOPMENT OF KEY AGENCY PLANS

During 2023, our agency was heavily engaged in building and developing the next iteration of our five-year plans. These plans provide a key strong foundation for our work, setting our agency up for long-term success well into the future. These guiding plans include:

- Community Health Assessment (CHA)
- Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP)
- Strategic Plan
- Annual Work Plan, to include performance measures
- Workforce Development Plan
- Quality Improvement (QI) Plan
- Organizational Branding Strategy



El Paso County Public Health Staff



“Strategic planning is key to provide a strong direction and framework, while enhancing decision-making, improving resource management and increasing operational efficiencies.

—DeAnn Ryberg
Deputy Director

Modernizing data infrastructure explores ways to enhance access to objective, credible local data.

CHARTING THE PATH FORWARD WITH A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

Over the course of 2023, our agency was actively engaged in planning and implementation activities for the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, which will serve as a critical tool and framework to guide our work well into the future. The new Strategic Plan, slated to launch in early 2024, is grounded in the themes of recovery, rebuilding and resilience. It supports our agency's mission of promoting and protecting public health by investing in continued efforts to strengthen our workforce; modernizing our data infrastructure; building trust within the community through people, prevention and partnerships; and supporting innovations to enhance operational efficiencies and service delivery models. The plan is built around four key pillars: health data & communication; community trust & engagement; partnerships; and workforce.

COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT

As a foundational component of the planning and development process for the Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan, EPCPH convened the Healthy Community Collaborative (HCC)—a group of more than 60 cross-sector partners—which works in tandem to identify, assess and implement strategies to address top community health issues. In 2023, EPCPH and the HCC solidified the priority areas for the 2023-2027 Community Health Assessment (CHA) and Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP), which are statutorily required to be completed every five years. These community-driven plans identify the top health needs of El Paso County communities, while also focusing on strategies to address these health concerns. The top four priority areas are suicide prevention, barriers to accessing health care, drug overdose, and housing. EPCPH will launch the completed CHA and CHIP in early 2024.

DATA DASHBOARDS

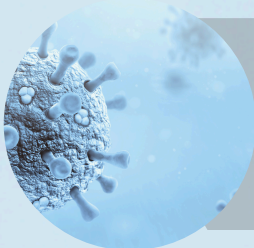
In 2023, the Public Health Data & Analytics (PHDA) program finalized two public-facing data dashboards which feature in-depth information on the topics of suicide and drug overdose deaths. For the first time, the public will be able to visualize and have interactive components to support the El Paso County, Colorado Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Plan. The primary goal of the dashboards is to enhance transparency and increase access to timely and actionable local data. This data provides context around local trends, creating a more in-depth understanding of health issues while also helping to inform data-driven strategies. A full public launch of both dashboards is planned for early 2024.

The goal of the public health data dashboards—which are aligned with EPCPH's Strategic Plan and Community Health Assessment—is to enhance transparency and increase access to timely, relevant, and credible information.

DISEASE PREVENTION, INVESTIGATION & CONTROL

WEST NILE VIRUS

In summer 2023, there was a significant increase in cases of West Nile virus (WNV) across El Paso County and Colorado. El Paso County reported 51 cases of the virus, representing the highest number of cases reported since 2003. With the most severe season of WNV in two decades, our agency's communicable disease team implemented a multi-pronged approach to increase awareness about the virus and emphasize the importance of prevention. A key component of the strategic response included working diligently with local media, medical providers, and community partners to expand targeted messaging efforts. The goal was to assure residents were aware of the presence of WNV, the associated risks, and most importantly, tangible prevention steps to protect themselves and their loved ones.



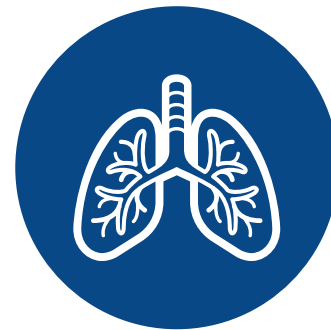
EPCPH's Communicable Disease program is responsible for monitoring over 90 different reportable diseases and conditions, providing 24/7 expert consultation for health care providers and managing outbreaks associated with a variety of settings.



204
CONFIRMED
INFECTIOUS DISEASE
OUTBREAKS (INCLUDES
COVID AND NON-
COVID OUTBREAKS)



11,329
IMMUNIZATIONS
PROVIDED



43
ACTIVE AND LATENT
TB CASES TREATED BY
EPCPH



1,091
COVID-19
HOSPITALIZATIONS

END OF THE COVID-19 FEDERAL EMERGENCY DECLARATION

May 11, 2023, marked a significant milestone in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Following three years of intensive pandemic response, the national public health emergency declaration came to an end. This shift was the culmination of an ongoing and gradual transition toward routine disease response.

Throughout the pandemic, our agency prioritized easy access to essential resources such as testing, treatment and vaccinations. As of April 23, 2023, over 1.3 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine were administered to residents of El Paso County. Additionally, around 35,000 COVID-19 rapid at-home test kits were distributed in El Paso County communities as of May 11, 2023. Between August 2020 and January 2023, more than 429,000 COVID-19 PCR tests were conducted across community-based test sites in El Paso County. These impressive numbers represent a small snapshot of the collective accomplishments of our entire Public Health team, who served our community with unwavering dedication during the most challenging public health crisis of our time.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS & RESPONSE



PROJECT PUBLIC HEALTH READY

In February 2023, our agency was recognized by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) for its ability to plan for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies. Our agency demonstrated these capabilities by meeting the comprehensive preparedness benchmarks required by Project Public Health Ready (PPHR), a unique partnership between NACCHO and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. PPHR recognition demonstrates that our agency has a thorough and coordinated emergency response plan and staff have the training to protect the health of the community during an emergency. Local health departments recognized by PPHR must undergo a rigorous evaluation process to assess their ability to meet a set of national standards for public health preparedness. Notably, our agency is currently the only local public health agency in Colorado to hold PPHR recognition.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PRESENTS AT NATIONAL PREPAREDNESS CONFERENCE

At the National Association of County and City Health Officials' (NACCHO) 2023 National Preparedness Summit, Emergency Preparedness and Response Program Manager Janel McNair presented a session featuring a comprehensive guide her team developed for onboarding new employees into a public health emergency preparedness and response program. McNair presented to a packed room, with standing room only, and the guide has since been requested by local public health agencies across the nation. McNair and team demonstrated how our agency's Emergency Preparedness and Response program is leading the way with innovative solutions that have been implemented throughout the nation.

MATERNAL, CHILD, ADOLESCENT & FAMILY HEALTH



Reproductive Health Clinic staff members



1,981

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH VISITS



3,594

TESTS PERFORMED FOR STIS



13,389

WIC AVERAGE MONTHLY ENROLLMENT



2,685

NURSE-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP HOME VISITS

CONGENITAL SYPHILIS GRANT

In response to an increase in cases of congenital syphilis, our agency's Reproductive Health Clinic (RHC) was awarded funding for a new syphilis prevention grant. The grant aims to reduce new cases of congenital syphilis by screening, identifying, and treating syphilis in women of reproductive age at the Criminal Justice Center (CJC). The funding expands a pilot testing program—which was initiated in Pueblo County—to expand to additional jurisdictions, including El Paso County. The funding allowed our agency to provide a trained public health nurse to provide STI (sexually transmitted infections) screening and treatment protocols in the CJC in coordination with CJC's clinical team. The project seeks to increase early identification of syphilis, access to treatment and referrals, and linkage to prenatal care services, which will positively impact the risk of syphilis transmission between mother and child.



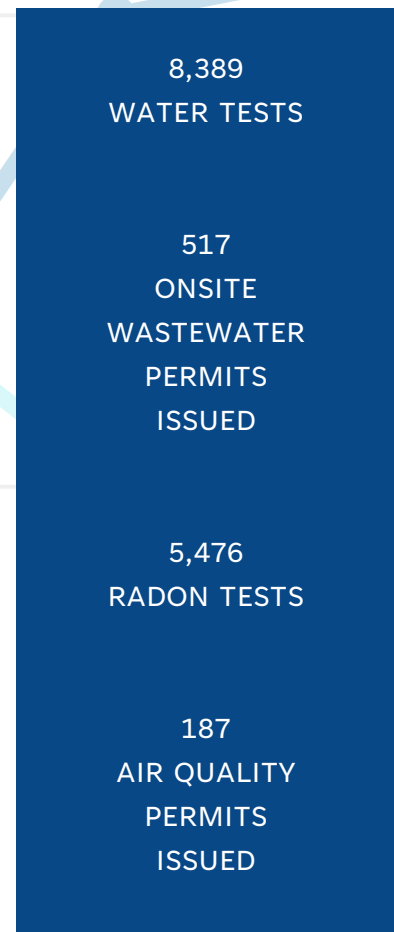
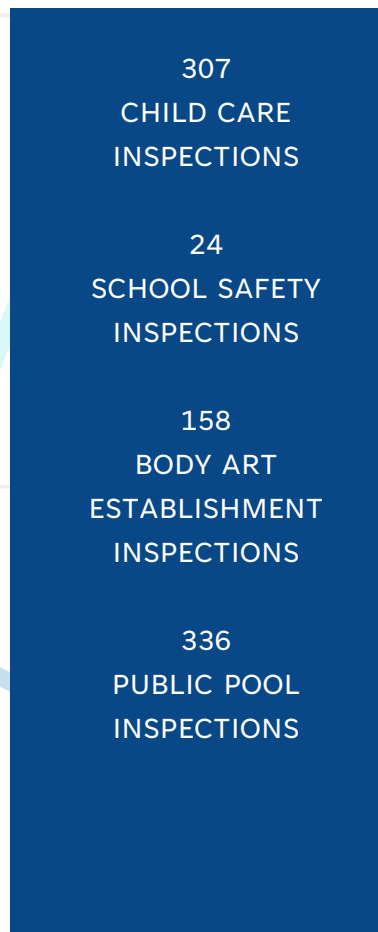
Environmental Health staff members

ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH LAUNCHES A USER-FRIENDLY ONLINE PLATFORM

Tying into agency-wide efforts to support the modernization of data systems and infrastructure, in 2023, Environmental Health (EH) launched a more user-friendly platform for the public. Working closely with the state, the ultimate goal was to support data transparency by providing more consistent and unified data reporting across the state. The new digital database, which is designed specifically for environmental health agencies, provides easy access to inspection reports, permits issued, and the ability to make payments for fees and renewals. The platform aims to streamline and enhance the customer experience, while increasing transparency and supporting better information sharing. Since going live in early 2023, the public can now easily select, sort and pull reports in a user-friendly and convenient format.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS



VITAL RECORDS BY THE NUMBERS

El Paso County Public Health Vital Records & Statistics provides certified copies of birth and death records for vital events that occurred in Colorado.



2023 BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN EL PASO COUNTY



22,324
BIRTH CERTIFICATES ISSUED



60,026
DEATH CERTIFICATES ISSUED

CHRONIC DISEASE, INJURY PREVENTION & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH PROMOTION

COMMUNITIES THAT CARE

In September 2023, Fountain Valley Communities That Care (FV-CTC), convened by EPCPH, kicked off their Connect Me 2 FV initiative with an event at Fountain Valley Regional Park. Connect Me 2 FV increases opportunities, programs and resources for youth in the Fountain area to prevent substance use. The event brought together community members and businesses to connect youth and families to local resources.

Along with their kickoff event, several EPCPH team members presented at the 2nd annual Colorado Drug Information Opportunity Symposium. The event brought together law enforcement and public health agencies across the state to provide a unique platform to engage in cross-sector dialogue regarding strategies to reduce drug overdose deaths. EPCPH's deputy director presented data on the local impact of drug overdoses, with a focus on fentanyl. Bridging from data to action, two members of EPCPH's FV-CTC presented information on how FV-CTC engages in primary prevention efforts for youth substance misuse.



Communities That Care staff members

CARE COORDINATION

142 REFERRALS FOR CARE COORDINATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH SPECIAL HEALTH CARE NEEDS

873 REFERRALS | **41** OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

RISE EVOLUTION

This year marked an exciting evolution for RISE | Southeast (RISE), as the coalition made the transition to a community-based 501(c)(3) known as RISE Elevate.

The story of RISE began in 2016, when EPCPH received El Pomar Foundation's Possibilities grant, which provided a seven-year commitment to support RISE, an innovative approach to



enhance southeast Colorado Springs through resident-led change. The EPCPH and El Pomar collaboration is an example of what can be achieved when private and public resources are paired to serve the public.

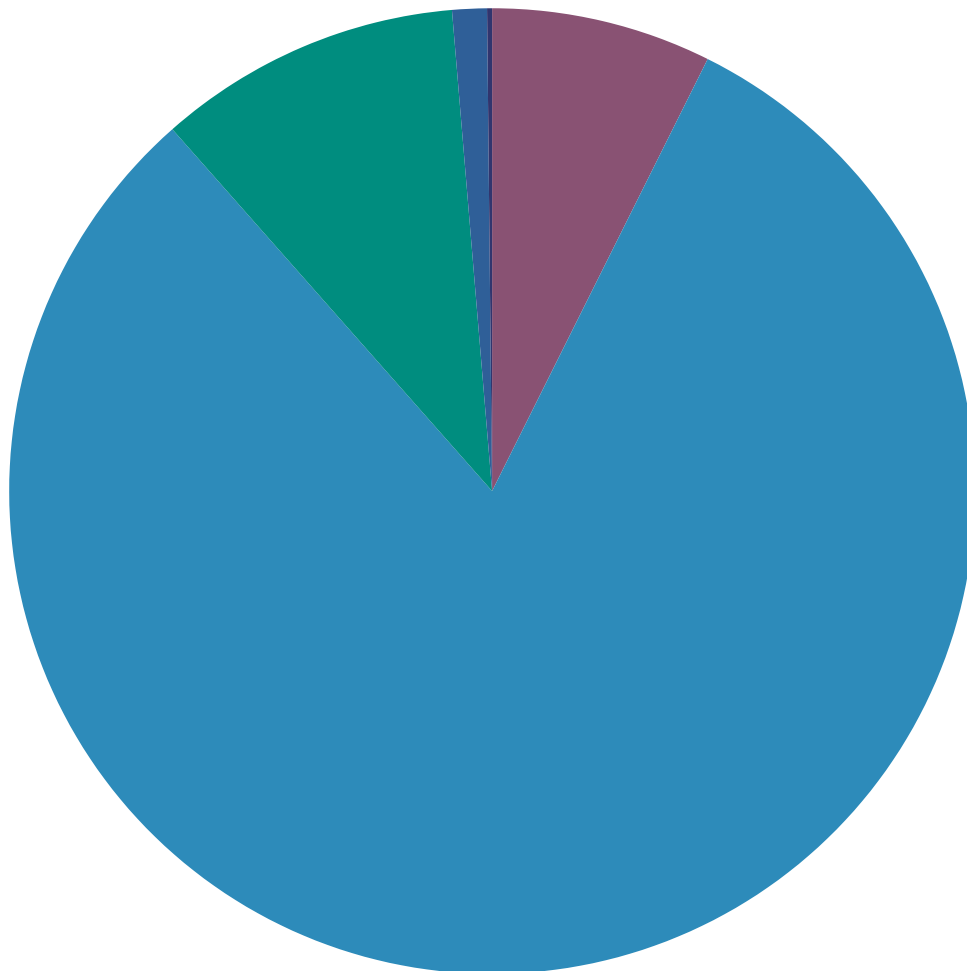
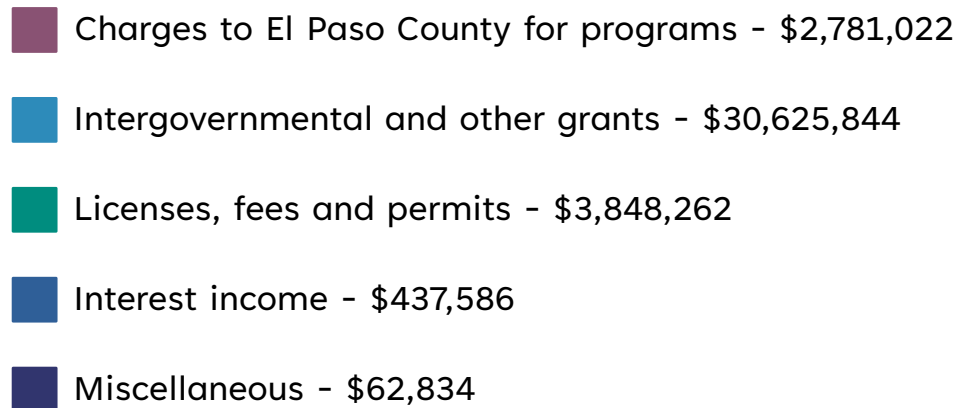
Over the last seven years, RISE has engaged the community through its coalition, resident leaders, and a youth advisory council. Leveraging its initial funding, RISE succeeded in procuring additional investments and partnerships in southeast Colorado Springs. A snapshot of notable projects includes:

- \$1.1 million for Healthy Places Southeast Colorado Springs, an initiative to promote and enhance connectedness and improve the built environment
- \$3 million over three years in redirected funds from the Department of Corrections to support safety initiatives. Grant funds were awarded to 21 grantees in southeast Colorado Springs
- \$8.5 million in funding and in-kind donations secured through collaborative efforts to support the largest neighborhood park renovation in Colorado Springs' history - Panorama Park

The funding from El Pomar Foundation ended in October and EPCPH continued its support through Dec. 31. Through ongoing funding, support, and community engagement, RISE Elevate will continue to make a positive impact on the health and well-being of residents in southeast Colorado Springs.

BUDGET & FINANCIALS

According to a 2022 national profile of local health departments by the National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), local health departments serving populations of 500,000 to 999,999 have on average 309 full-time equivalents (FTEs). In 2023, El Paso County Public Health had 203 authorized FTEs.



“Public health is about giving back to the community and helping to build a better tomorrow.”

- DeAnn Ryberg, EPCPH Deputy Director

Providing educational materials at the
El Paso County Fair





1675 W. Garden of the Gods Rd., Suite 2044
Colorado Springs, CO 80907
(719) 578-3199
ElPasoCountyHealth.org



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