

# Happier About Health

## Colorado's Mood Improves

AUGUST 2016

***Coloradans are feeling better about the state's health care system these days.***

***Three of four residents now think the system does a good job of caring for their families, according to the 2015 Colorado Health Access Survey (CHAS). That's an upward shift of more than eight percentage points from four years earlier.***

***Colorado's improving view of the health care system has coincided with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and its role in pushing health insurance coverage to record levels in the state.***

***Even so, the positive feelings aren't shared by all.***

Not having health insurance makes a big difference in outlook, with the uninsured almost three times as unhappy with the system as the insured. Coloradans in poor health view the system much less favorably than the healthy. And where you live makes a difference in how you feel about health care: just 63.8 percent of Four Corners residents feel good about the system compared with the 81.3 percent rate of health system happiness in suburban Douglas County.

However, when the question is whether the health care system meets the needs of all Coloradans — which is more about personal opinion than personal experience — the answer is more pessimistic.

Slightly more than half (51.2 percent) of Coloradans think the system is doing a good job for everyone — 23 points below the 74.6 percent of those who say the system does a good job for their families. Still, there has been a notable improvement in this category as well, increasing 15.7 points from 35.5 percent in 2011.

This brief, which is based on CHAS data from the 2011, 2013 and 2015 surveys, delves into the views of Coloradans about the state's health care system and how those perceptions have changed over time.

As policymakers evaluate the impact of the ACA and continue to work on reforming how health care is delivered and paid for in Colorado, this information highlights how the changes are being perceived and helps to identify areas where Coloradans continue to have strong concerns.

### Questions and Answers

The CHAS asks two questions that relate to how Coloradans feel about the state's health care system:

- **Does it meet the needs of your family?**
- **Does it meet the needs of all Coloradans?**

Each question has four choices for the answer: strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree.

In this brief, we have combined the "agree" answers to indicate Coloradans who are feeling good about the health system. We have combined the "disagree" answers to indicate Coloradans who are disappointed with the health system.



Dr. Melissa Helms, a primary care physician, examines a patient at the Applewood Internal Medicine Clinic in Golden. PHOTO BY CHRIS SCHNEIDER

## Question One: Does the Health Care System Meet the Needs of Your Family?

**What the CHAS Tells Us:**  
Most Coloradans Think the Health Care System  
Works for Their Families

A primary care doctor who spends a bit of extra time with your sick child. A clinic that stays open longer hours so you can go after work. A pharmacist who is careful to go over the instructions for a new medication. Affordable premiums. Online appointments. Maybe even incentives to lose those extra pounds.

There is no precise definition of a perfectly working health care system, especially from the viewpoint of individual consumers. Often, one trusted care provider can make all the difference.

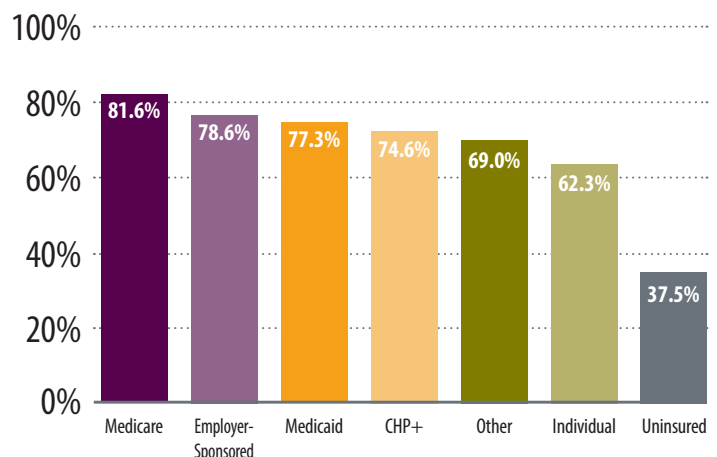
In general, however, researchers are finding that people with publicly-financed insurance such as Medicare and Medicaid — which have no premiums and little

cost-sharing — tend to have the best views of how the system is working for their families.<sup>1</sup> Coloradans back up this observation.

Colorado's Medicare enrollees are the happiest among all insurance types, with 81.6 percent reporting a positive view. Clients of two other public insurance programs, Medicaid and Colorado Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+), also are among the most positive. (See Figure 1.)

The least happy in 2015? Uninsured Coloradans at 37.5 percent.

**Figure 1. Happiness Level by Type of Insurance**





Here's how other groups view the health system in relation to the needs of their families.

### Age:

Seniors aged 65 and older — all of whom are eligible for Medicare — are the happiest age group, with 84.2 percent expressing positive views about how well the system works for their families. This reinforces the connection between public insurance and a positive view of the system. (See Figure 2.)

But members of the next oldest age group, Coloradans between 50 and 64, are the least happy age group, with 70.9 percent reporting that the system meets the need of their families. That's 13 points lower than the senior age group. The early retirees in this group, who are not yet eligible for Medicare, often must buy their insurance on the individual market and pay higher premiums because of their age.

### Income:

Income levels don't make as much difference as might be expected. (See Figure 3.)

Among the state's highest earners, 80.6 percent feel good about how well the system meets the needs of their families. At the other end of the scale, 74.0 percent of those below the poverty line have a positive view, a difference of only about six points. The lowest earners, in fact, are second only to the highest earners in happiness with the health system.

The lowest-income Coloradans have changed their view the most, climbing 15 percentage points from four years ago. It's likely that many in this group gained Medicaid coverage as the program expanded eligibility. By contrast, the highest earners — an income group that wasn't targeted with any policy changes such as tax subsidies to make coverage more affordable — are just four points happier than four years ago.

### Race/Ethnicity:

There's little difference in how people of different races or ethnicities view the state's health care system. (See Figure 4.)

Happiness with the system ranges from 73.3 percent for Hispanics to 81.6 percent for blacks. Among whites, it is 75.0 percent. The outlook among blacks has improved the most in the past four years, increasing almost 12 percentage points.

## Health System Happiness\*

Figure 2. Age

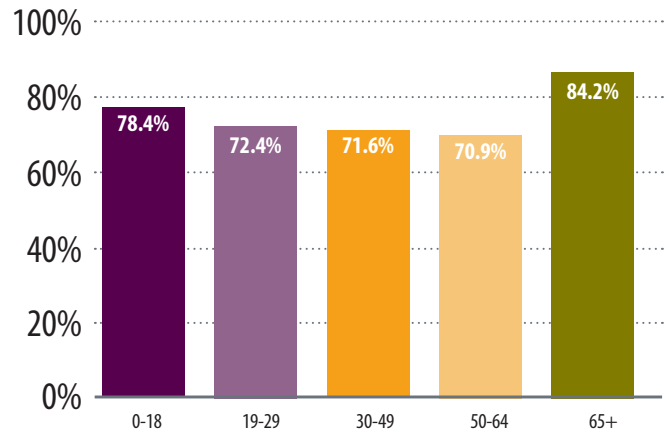


Figure 3. Income

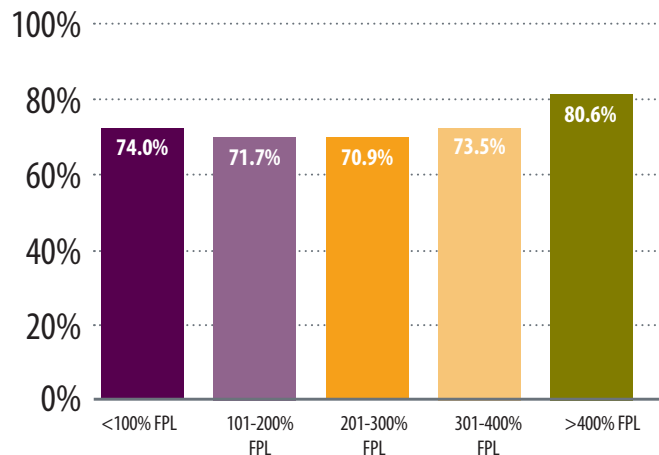
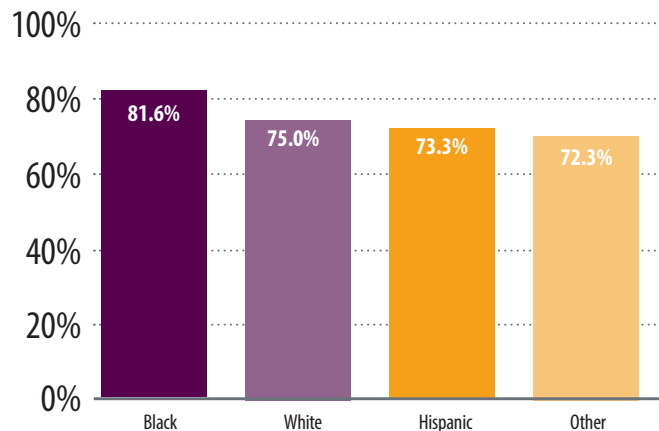


Figure 4. Race/Ethnicity



\* Percentage with positive views about how well the system works for their families

## Location:

If you live in Douglas County, you and your neighbors are the happiest with the health care system. But head to the Four Corners area and you will find the Coloradans who are unhappiest with the system. (See Map 1.)

Four of the five health statistics regions (HSRs) with the best outlook are in metro Denver, led by Douglas County (HSR 3) with a happiness level of 81.3 percent. By contrast, all five regions with the most pessimistic outlook about the health system are in rural or mountainous areas.

The biggest upward shifts between 2011 and 2015 were posted by the region of Park, Teller, Clear Creek and Gilpin counties (HSR 17), which climbed from 19th to second, and the southeastern region of Baca, Bent, Crowley, Huerfano, Kiowa, Las Animas, Otero and Prowers counties (HSR 6), which jumped from 21st to seventh.

Over that four-year period, the northeastern Colorado region of Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington and Yuma counties (HSR 1) dropped from first place to 12th place, even though the views of its residents improved slightly from 70.9 percent in 2011 to 71.3 percent in 2015. Mesa County (HSR 19) fell from 10th place to 19th place.

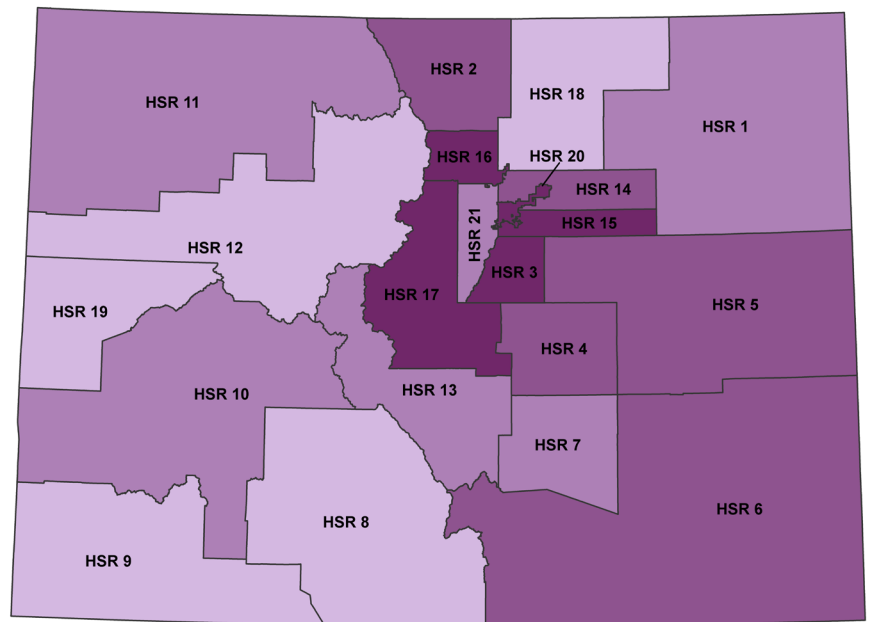
These regions dropped in place because other regions showed a bigger uptick in happiness with the system.

**Urban vs. Rural:** Urban residents are only about five points more positive about the health care system than their rural counterparts. But rural residents have shown a bigger upswing, climbing 11.2 points compared with a 7.5 point increase for urbanites.

**Physical Health:** The healthier you are, the happier you are with the system. The happiness rate for people in good health is 76.9 percent compared with 59.8 percent for those in fair or poor health, a 17.1 point difference. The Colorado average is 74.6 percent.

**Mental Health:** Good mental health makes an even bigger difference in outlook. There's a nearly 20 point difference between people reporting good mental health and those who say they're struggling.

Map 1. Where Coloradans are Happiest with Health Care for Their Families.



The Percentage Who Agree the Health Care System Meets the Needs of Their Families



Source: Colorado Health Access Survey, 2015

**Affordability:** If you can afford health care, you are much more likely to view the system favorably. In fact, you are twice as likely to think it's working well for you and your family than those who have had to skip getting care from a doctor because it cost too much.

## Snapshot of the Coloradans Most Unhappy With the Health Care System . . .



### FOR THEIR FAMILY

- Uninsured
- Weld County resident
- Between the ages of 50 and 64
- Poor physical and mental health
- Just above the poverty level



### FOR ALL COLORADO

- Individual insurance
- Mesa County resident
- Between the ages of 50 and 64
- Good physical and mental health
- Annual income \$73,000-\$97,000 (family of four)

## Question 2: Does the Health Care System Meet the Needs of All Coloradans?

### What the CHAS Tells Us:

Not As Many Coloradans Think the Health Care System Works for Everyone Else

Switching to views on whether the health system meets the needs of all Coloradans, people are more pessimistic.

Just slightly more than half (51.2 percent) of Coloradans give the system a thumbs up. That's 23 points lower than the view on whether the system meets the needs of their families. Even so, there has been notable improvement in this category, jumping from 35.5 percent in 2011.

The gap between the insured and the uninsured on this question is only 10 points. Among the insured, 51.9 percent think the health care system is good for all Coloradans. Among the uninsured, it's 41.2 percent.

### Additional highlights from this question:

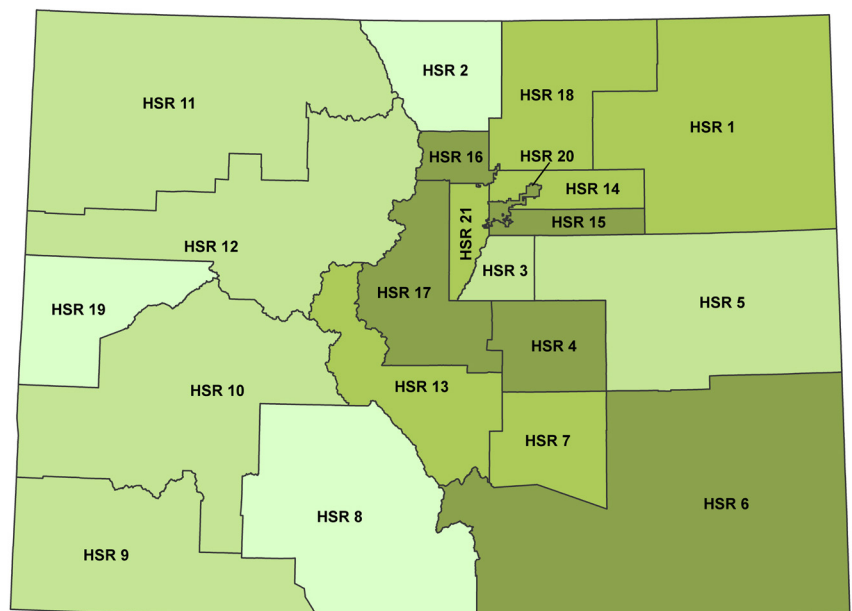
- **Income:** The lowest earners have the highest opinion of the system at 56.0 percent.
- **Insurance:** CHP+ beneficiaries are most likely to think the system is good for the state, at 61.9 percent. Individual insurance enrollees are the least likely, at 41.1 percent.
- **Age:** There's little difference between age groups, with all hovering around 50 percent. But there's wide variation between personal views and statewide views. Seniors, for example, have a 32 point difference, with 84.2 percent thinking the system works for their families but only 52.4 percent thinking it works for the state.
- **Location:** Best views about the health care system statewide? Arapahoe County, followed by Denver and El Paso counties. Worst views? Larimer County, where just 43.1 percent of residents think the system meets the needs of all Coloradans. Mesa County

posted the biggest downward swing, falling from fifth place in 2011 to 20th place in 2015. Douglas County dropped from third place to 17th place. On the other hand, Arapahoe County showed a big upward swing, moving from 11th place to first place. (See Map 2.)

Again, the data find wide variation between personal views and statewide views. Douglas County residents, for example, have the most positive outlook in the state when it comes to health care for their families at 81.3 percent. But only 47.3 percent give the system good marks for all Coloradans, a 34 point swing.

- **Rural vs. Urban:** There's little difference in outlook, with 48.8 percent of rural residents saying that the system is good for the state compared with 51.6 percent of urbanites. The viewpoint among rural residents has improved a bit more, climbing 16.9 points compared with 15.8 points for urbanites.
- **Physical Health:** Health status doesn't make much difference in this category. The positive outlook is at 52.1 percent for those in good physical health compared with 45.4 percent for those in poor physical health.
- **Mental Health:** There's not much variation by mental health status, either, with 52.0 percent of those in good mental health approving of the system compared with 46.0 percent for those in poor mental health.

Map 2. Where Coloradans are Happiest with Health Care for All Coloradans.



The Percentage Who Agree the Health Care System Meets the Needs of All Coloradans



Source: Colorado Health Access Survey, 2015

## Coloradans A Bit Happier With the Health Care System Than the Rest of the Nation

Coloradans appear to be a bit more pleased with the health care system than the rest of the nation.

Nationally, 67 percent of Americans are satisfied with the way the health care system works for them, according to a Gallup poll released in November 2015<sup>2</sup>, about seven percentage points below the personal satisfaction level of Coloradans. The two surveys, Gallup and the CHAS, don't ask the question precisely the same way and use different methodologies, so it's

important to view the comparison with caution.

When it comes to views about the ACA, known by many as Obamacare, again there is no direct comparison. But if we consider the CHAS question about whether the health care system meets the needs of all Coloradans to be somewhat comparable with views on Obamacare, Coloradans again are a bit more likely to have a positive outlook.

A tracking poll by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation found that 41 percent of all adults viewed Obamacare favorably in March 2016.<sup>3</sup> The CHAS found that 51.2 percent of Coloradans viewed the health care system favorably.

By Deborah Goeken, Vice President, Colorado Health Institute

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Gallup. "Americans With Government Health Plans Most Satisfied." November 6, 2015. Retrieved April 21, 2016. [http://www.gallup.com/poll/186527/americans-government-health-plans-satisfied.aspx?g\\_source=CATEGORY\\_HEALTHCARE&g\\_medium=topic&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/186527/americans-government-health-plans-satisfied.aspx?g_source=CATEGORY_HEALTHCARE&g_medium=topic&g_campaign=tiles)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation Health Tracking Poll. Retrieved April 21, 2016. <http://kff.org/interactive/kaiser-health-tracking-poll-the-publics-views-on-the-aca/#?response=Favorable--Unfavorable&aRange=twoYear>

### CHAS Analysis:

<http://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/key-issues/detail/health-coverage-and-the-uninsured/colorado-health-access-survey-1>

### CHAS Data:

[coloradohealthinstitute.org/data-repository/category/colorado-health-access-survey](http://coloradohealthinstitute.org/data-repository/category/colorado-health-access-survey)

## About the Colorado Health Access Survey

The CHAS is the premier source of information on health insurance coverage, access to health care and use of health services in Colorado. Every other year since 2009, more than 10,000 households in the state complete the telephone interview, which is administered in both English and Spanish. For the 2015 survey, 10,136 interviews were completed on both cell phones and landlines between March 2 and June 26. Visit [www.coloradohealthinstitute.org](http://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org) for more analyses, data and information about the survey.



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