

# Better By Design

Building Colorado Communities with Health in Mind



Walkability



Financing



Food Access



Housing



Transportation



SEPTEMBER 2016

# Introduction

*As we shape our physical surroundings, we also shape our health. Sidewalks, roads, parks, buildings and public transit — aspects of what is collectively known as the “built environment” — affect people’s well-being in countless ways.*

*The city of Denver notes that the built environment “is a relatively new concept in the world of health but has an enormous impact on a person’s ability to live a healthy lifestyle.”*

Skeptical that infrastructure belongs in the health realm? We know that the design of our streets and neighborhoods affects how likely kids are to walk to school, whether older adults are more prone to falls and if families have access to fresh, local food. These in turn influence important health outcomes, from obesity rates to mental health status.

That’s why the Colorado Health Institute (CHI) is conducting research on the relationship between health and the built environment.

We dove into the issue with five introductory briefs published over the past months. This publication is a compilation of all five briefs:

- **Walking in a Healthy Wonderland**  
The ease of getting from one place to the next by foot — the “walkability” of a community — is important no matter what season. Walkability impacts neighborhoods, the environment and the health of residents.
- **Show Me the Money**  
Healthy living is playing a bigger role in property developments, from neighborhood facelifts to communitywide improvements. And finding a creative way to finance these projects — to secure the money to marry well-built with well-

being — is critical to their success.

- **Fresh Ideas for Healthy Food**  
Residents of low-income neighborhoods and rural areas, in particular, often don’t have access to affordable, nutritious food. Supermarkets may be too far away, especially for people without a car, and neighborhood corner stores may lack healthy items on their shelves.
- **Home is Where Your Health Is**  
Safe, clean homes can contribute to better health outcomes. On the flip side, people who live in subpar housing or lack a permanent residence are at greater risk of illness, injury and stress.
- **A Drive Toward Walking, Riding**  
For most people, getting from Point A to Point B is as simple as turning the ignition key and stepping on the gas. Transportation is a universal aspect of our daily lives, but it isn’t universally healthy.

In addition to highlighting why each of these areas is worthy of study by urban planners and health policy experts, we look at initiatives and organizations working to address problems in Colorado. Each brief also spotlights a project that exemplifies how better design can lead to better health.

***Have ideas, tips or questions as CHI continues to focus on the built environment and health?***

Contact the authors of this series, Allie Morgan (720.382.7083 / [morgana@coloradohealthinstitute.org](mailto:morgana@coloradohealthinstitute.org)) and Maggie Bailey (720.382.7074 / [baileym@coloradohealthinstitute.org](mailto:baileym@coloradohealthinstitute.org)).

# Walking in a Healthy Wonderland

JANUARY 2016

*Believe it or not, winter is the perfect time to focus on the walkability of our neighborhoods. It often makes more sense to walk, if possible, than to drive on icy roads.*

*But the ease of getting from one place to the next by foot — the “walkability” of a community — is important no matter what the season. Walkability impacts neighborhoods, the environment and the health of residents.*

*This is the first in a series of reports by the Colorado Health Institute examining the built environment and its connection to health. We will delve into the building blocks of a healthy environment, evidence-based solutions to common barriers, what’s going on in Colorado and how it all affects health.*

So, what makes a community walkable?

If you can run most of your daily errands on foot, then your neighborhood is considered walkable. It seems simple, but think about where you go each day. Grocery stores, banks, the gym and many other daily destinations need to be within walking distance for a neighborhood to fit the definition. Walkable areas also need good sidewalks, crosswalks and stop signs as well as low traffic density.

The connection to health is important. Studies have shown that a walkable neighborhood decreases obesity rates and increases the daily physical activity of its residents.

Boulder and Denver are tied for Colorado’s highest-ranked walkability score, according to Walk Score, a walkability index. Still, they manage only 56 out of a possible 100. New York City, by comparison, has a walkability score of 87.6, the nation’s highest. Pueblo

West is Colorado’s least walkable city, with a score of six.

Neighborhoods in the same city often have very different walkability scores. Denver’s most walkable neighborhoods are Lodo, the Golden Triangle and Capitol Hill, according to Walk Score. The least walkable are Stapleton, Green Valley Ranch and southwestern Denver.

But even though walkability is one key to better health, it’s not always easy to achieve, especially in established communities. Often the sheer amount of traffic is an obstacle. Other barriers include a neighborhood’s location – Colorado is a big state and cars are often necessary – and even opposition by residents to change.

And those aren’t the only challenges. Finding a stable funding source is often difficult, depending on city policies. In Denver, for example, maintaining and

91

CHI’s neighborhood  
walkability score

***Want to know how walkable your neighborhood is?***

Check out [WalkScore.com](http://WalkScore.com) to see how your community matches up to others in your city. The website ranks communities on a scale of 0 to 100 for walkability where scores align with the latest research.

reconstructing sidewalks falls to private property owners, even if the sidewalk is used by the public.

But Westminster pays for sidewalk reconstruction through monthly utility taxes –\$6 per address or apartment. And Lakewood includes sidewalk construction and repair in its maintenance budget.

It is easy to envision a city that is entirely walkable. Europe has many examples. But in Colorado, efforts are starting with smaller steps that focus on a radius as small as a block or where vehicles can be left in the garage.

Organizations like LiveWell Colorado are working to increase awareness of the importance of having walk- and bike-friendly streets and neighborhoods. Campaigns like Viva Streets, where streets become car-free for a day, are increasing public activity and highlighting the benefits of car-independent lifestyles.

## Parklets

Converting curbside parking into vibrant seating areas is the new thing.

These small spaces provide room for bike racks, greenery and a place to relax in a bustling city environment. They are products of partnerships between businesses, residents and the city to help create a more social, walkable community.



SPOTLIGHT  
COMMUNITY

# Montrose

Tactical Urbanism in a Rural Colorado City

Main Street in Montrose wasn't very walkable.

A four-lane highway ran through town, there was limited parking and stepping off the sidewalk posed a safety threat. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA) set out to add parklets – curbside seating created from former parking spots – and to downsize the road that also served as Main Street from four lanes to two.

It was a textbook example of tactical urbanism. Reconstruction happened quickly, and on a low budget. But first there was plenty of input, education of residents who worried about a loss of parking, and an ownership swap of the street from the state to the city.

On a \$9,000 budget, the development authority and the city transformed the area over a couple of days in September 2015.

Diagonal parking spaces were freed up when the lanes were halved, leading to better customer access to local businesses. Trees and parklets added aesthetic value. And overall safety was improved with new crosswalks and fewer traffic lanes. By coupling resident input with a small budget and a vision for the future, the Montrose project is helping to create a friendlier, safer and more walkable downtown.

## Main Street: Before and After



**Above:** Before the project, Main Street was a busy four-lane road. **Below:** After renovations, Main Street became friendlier to pedestrians and safer for everyone.

# Show Me the Money

## Financing Health-Oriented Developments

FEBRUARY 2016

*Healthy living is playing a bigger role in property developments, from neighborhood facelifts to communitywide improvements. And finding a creative way to finance these projects — to secure the money to marry well-built with well-being — is critical to their success.*

Integrating health-promoting elements into projects can range from increasing natural light in an office building to installing wide, well-lit sidewalks so people can walk or bike to their destination. Many communities are adding more greenery to provide places for people

to rest or play amid expanses of uninviting asphalt and concrete.

Leaders in the movement are experimenting with incentives, financial or otherwise, as well as a mix of funding sources to encourage health-minded projects.

SPOTLIGHT  
COMMUNITY

## National Western Center Making the Old West New

The National Western Stock Show in Denver is getting a new home after 110 years. The new National Western Center (NWC) provides a case study in cross-sector collaboration and creative financing for a major project.

The NWC promises to become a year-round destination, fusing entertainment and education with safer and greener neighborhoods. It will feature better pathways for pedestrians and bicyclists, a cleaner South Platte River, farmers markets, and 46 acres of public outdoor space. It promises to connect and revitalize the isolated Globeville, Elyria and Swansea neighborhoods.

The project's leadership includes government (Denver), higher education (Colorado State University), nonprofits (the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and History Colorado), and local residents and business owners. The multi-use design that includes a focus on health helped the NWC secure funding from a diverse set of backers.

Colorado visitors will also chip in. Denver voters in November 2015 approved Measure 2C, which extended a hotel and rental car tax to help fund the project. This "tourism tax," combined with major investments from CSU, the Western Stock Show Association and the state's Economic Development Commission, allowed the NWC to meet its fundraising goal of more than \$1 billion.



Plans for the National Western complex call for open, walkable spaces.

Here's a look at some carrots — and sticks — that are being used to promote safe and healthy places:

- Communities and philanthropic organizations are supporting health-focused elements through **grants or subsidies**. **Tax breaks** — in the form of exemptions, deductions or credits — save developers money in return for features that promote health. Tax incentives are available for renovating buildings, and states are offering tax credits to encourage the redevelopment of “brownfields,” contaminated former industrial sites, into clean and safe places.



Participants in the Healthy Places Initiative in Lamar.

- **Example:** The Colorado Health Foundation has supported communities such as Lamar and Denver's Westwood neighborhood with funding and planning through its multimillion-dollar Healthy Places initiative.
- Organizations are offering help in navigating the often-complicated **permit process** or providing **free technical or marketing assistance** for desirable initiatives. Local governments also are cutting red tape in return for health-oriented features. Cities and counties are granting **waivers** from some regulations, such as building heights or lot density.
  - **Example:** The Health Links program at the Colorado School of Public Health supports businesses that champion worksite wellness and safety. The program also provides free advising for small businesses.
- **Donating land**, either permanently or temporarily, so that it can be converted into a vibrant public space is gaining traction.

## Making a BID for Better

Many cities are creating Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) to help fund local improvement projects such as bike lanes, enhanced lighting, flower displays and street cleaning. BIDs levy an additional tax on businesses in a defined area to pay for amenities that make areas more attractive to residents and shoppers. Downtown Denver's BID, launched in 1992, now includes more than 400 private commercial property owners. It pays for such things as sidewalk sweeping, trash clean-up and graffiti removal. Learn about it at

[www.downtowndenver.com/category/about-the-bid](http://www.downtowndenver.com/category/about-the-bid).



- **Example:** The city of Philadelphia has had great success with this strategy, turning vacant lots into pop-up gardens that offer live music, yoga and other outdoor activities each summer.
- Providing **recognition** — from small tokens of appreciation to naming rights — is becoming an attractive incentive. Everyone enjoys a pat on the back, especially in front of an audience. Additionally, **designations** from widely recognized programs are increasingly sought-after by developers.
  - **Example:** The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program and the WELL Building Standard recognize healthy buildings. Colorado ranks among the top states in the country for LEED construction, with 95 new certified projects in 2015. WELL considers criteria in seven categories, including “nourishment,” “fitness” and “comfort.”
- As much as carrots are getting the job done, sometimes there's a need for the “stick.” Communities are combining **regulations and penalties** with incentives. They are requiring things like crosswalks and bike paths and threatening to penalize builders when their projects are inaccessible or unsafe.

20-60%

Children who live in neighborhoods with no access to sidewalks, parks or recreation centers have a **20 percent to 60 percent** higher chance of being overweight.

Source: The Colorado Health Foundation

# Fresh Ideas for Healthy Food

## Good Nutrition on Colorado's Menu

MARCH 2016

*It's easier to buy burgers and fries than fruits and vegetables in many Colorado communities.*

*Residents of low-income neighborhoods and rural areas, in particular, often don't have access to affordable, nutritious food. Supermarkets may be too far away, especially for people without a car, and neighborhood corner stores may not have many healthy items on their shelves.*

It's well documented that a poor diet can lead to obesity and other health problems. That's one reason governments, nonprofit groups, volunteers and community residents are taking steps to make healthy food options part of the built environment. They are recruiting grocers, supporting farmers' markets and encouraging residents to grow their own food in community and backyard gardens.

Still, one of seven Coloradans struggles with food insecurity, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports.

The state's "food deserts" — defined as areas where urban residents are more than one mile from a supermarket and rural residents more than 10 miles — are primarily concentrated on the Eastern Plains, the San Luis Valley and U.S. Census tracts bordering western and eastern Denver County, according to the USDA.

Areas in Colorado with the highest concentration of food deserts have an average obesity and overweight rate of almost 29.5 percent. That's 8.2 percentage points higher than the statewide rate of 21.3 percent.



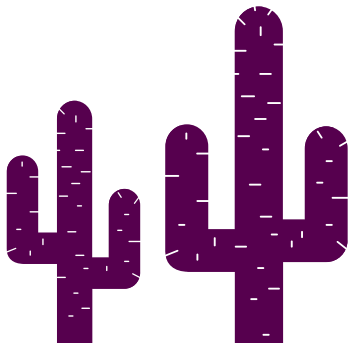
Farmers' markets offer a way to introduce fresh food into communities that lack access to grocery stores.

Colorado's population is projected to increase by almost 50 percent by 2040, growing from 5.4 million in 2015 to almost 8 million. The number of Denver residents is expected to climb by more than 30 percent, from about 650,000 to almost 870,000 by then. Providing fresh, healthy options to all those people will be a challenge.

**759,000 Coloradans**  
lived in a food desert in 2010

This included **80,000 children**

Sources: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Colorado Children's Campaign



SPOTLIGHT  
COMMUNITY

# Westwood: A Food Desert in Bloom

Leaders of a Denver nonprofit started their search for a low-income neighborhood in need of a health overhaul by counting trees.

The two University of Denver graduates who founded the nonprofit, Re:Vision, were inspired by a study indicating a relationship between a sparse tree canopy and low-income neighborhoods. So they pulled up satellite images of Denver and noticed that Westwood stood out.

Westwood fit the profile of a community in need. The neighborhood, bounded by four major roads in west Denver, has a large immigrant population where roughly one of three residents live in poverty and the obesity rate is higher than the state average.

Westwood hasn't had a grocery store since the 1990s, one reason why it is considered a food desert.

But Westwood is literally changing that from the ground up.

With help from Re:Vision, the community has spent the past six years developing a network of 400 or so backyard gardens and more than a dozen promotoras — residents hired by Re:Vision to provide health screenings and education about urban agriculture and healthy living. The project is one of the largest urban farming programs led by a low-income community in the nation, according to Re:Vision.

Re:Vision received \$1.3 million from the Denver Office of Economic Development in 2014 to acquire a 1.7-acre former junkyard along Morrison Road that will be the site of the WestwoodHUB. It will include the Westwood Food Co-op, a 2,200-square-foot grocery store; a 3,000-square-foot greenhouse; a fitness center and outdoor recreation area; a kitchen available for public use; and even a place to cultivate nutritious edible insects such as crickets.

This year the project will focus on fundraising and converting buildings into the kitchen, community plaza, education center and greenhouse.

The co-op, scheduled to open sometime next year, is projected to create 30 local jobs, generate \$2.5 million



PHOTO BY RE:VISION

A former junkyard along Morrison Road is being transformed into WestwoodHUB, which will include a food co-op, a recreation center, a greenhouse and a kitchen open for public use. The southwest Denver neighborhood hasn't had a grocery store since the 1990s.

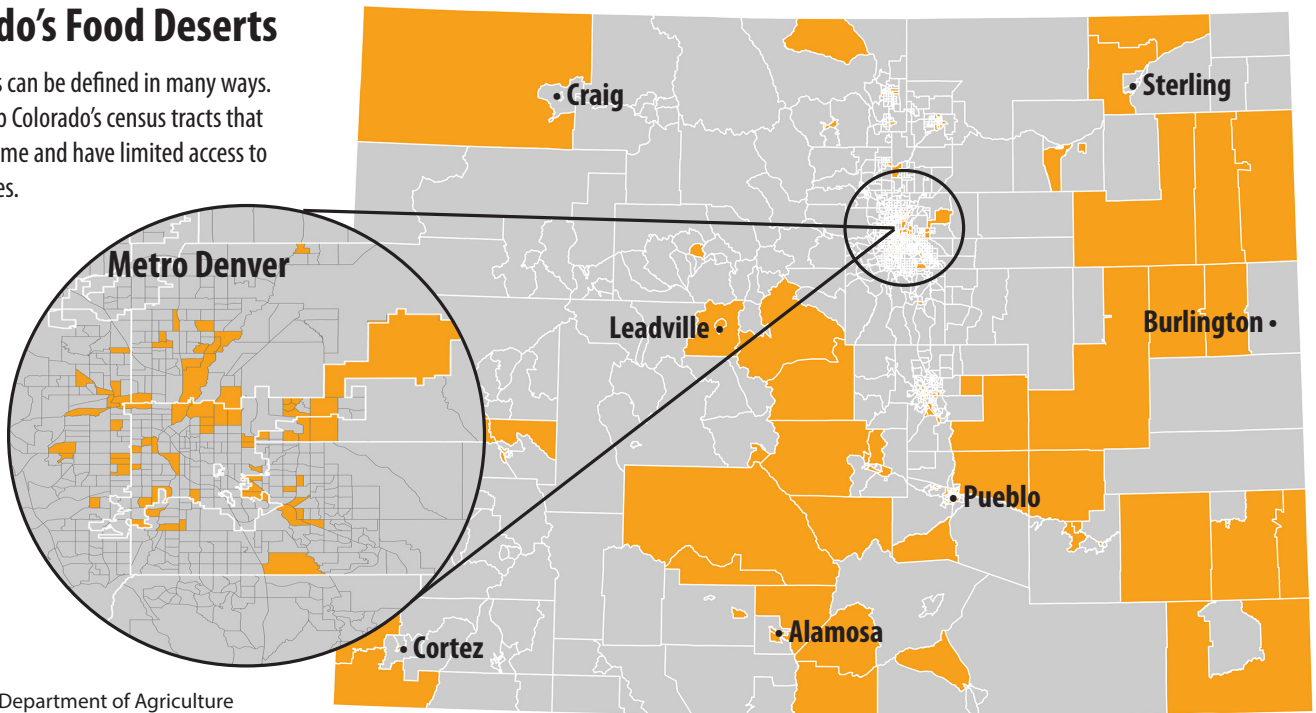
in annual revenue and increase access to healthy food for 20,000 residents. Residents can pay \$40 annually or \$200 for a lifetime membership. The perks? They'll receive an ownership share in the project, a dividend and discounts on fresh foods. So far the co-op has 225 members with a goal of 1,500 members by the time the grocery store opens.

Re:Vision co-founder Joseph Teipel said by promoting community leadership and demonstrating how people can create change for themselves, Westwood will fulfill Re:Vision's mission of building self-sustaining, resilient neighborhoods.



## Colorado's Food Deserts

Food deserts can be defined in many ways. Here we map Colorado's census tracts that are low-income and have limited access to grocery stores.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

### Ongoing Efforts in Colorado and the U.S.

Several organizations are leading the charge for better nutrition. Among them:

The **Colorado Fresh Food Financing Fund (CO4F)**, funded by the Colorado Health Foundation and the Colorado Enterprise Fund, provides financing to help retailers offer nutritious options in underserved communities. CO4F was developed in response to "Healthy Food for All: Encouraging Grocery Investment in Colorado," a report published in 2011 by the Denver Food Access Task Force, a group composed of leaders from the food industry, state and local governments, public health agencies and nonprofit organizations. The report highlighted policy recommendations to promote economic development and healthy food access for all.

The **Colorado Enterprise Fund**, established in 1976, uses federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) grant money to support local food production, small grocery stores and healthy food projects such as farmers' markets. HFFI was advanced by the Obama Administration in 2010 to increase food options in underserved communities.

The White House launched the **Local Foods, Local Places initiative** in 2014 to help communities integrate

locally sourced food into economic development projects. Six federal agencies are supporting 27 communities across the nation, including Denver and Greeley. **Denver** will focus on revitalizing the National Western Center to create a greener area with farmers' markets and outdoor space. **The University of Northern Colorado** in Greeley is partnering with the city and local businesses to promote sustainable, local food systems and address food deserts in the area. A more detailed plan will come this spring.

Other efforts to promote healthier eating include:

- **Urban Gardens.** Denver Urban Gardens, established in 1985, operates more than 145 community gardens, with 40 on school grounds.
- **Farmers' Markets.** More than 15 markets operate in the metro Denver area during the warmer months. You can find one in your community at [www.ColoradoFarmers.org](http://www.ColoradoFarmers.org).
- **Healthy Corner Store Initiatives.** The Denver Healthy Corner Store Initiative (HCSI) provides technical assistance and funding to 13 stores to encourage owners to promote and expand their fresh food options. HCSI plans to aid 50 stores by the end of 2017.

# Home Is Where Your Health Is

## Safe Dwellings Protect Against Illness, Injury and Stress

MAY 2016



*Imagine that you live in an apartment with poor ventilation or mold on the walls, or in a home with exposed wires and lead-tainted paint. Perhaps you have no home at all.*

*Now think about how your housing situation impacts your health.*

More than a decade ago, an article in the journal *Environmental Health Perspectives* declared that “housing is perhaps the ultimate nexus between the built environment and health disparities.” The connection between where we live and how well we feel is widely accepted. Safe, clean homes can contribute to better health outcomes. On the flip side, people who live in rundown housing or lack a permanent residence are at greater risk of illness, injury and stress.

As a result, governments, nonprofits and other organizations in Colorado and across the nation are supporting programs to promote healthier homes and neighborhoods.

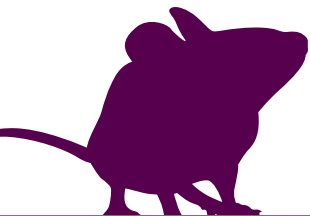
### **Housing and Health**

Perhaps the greatest health disparities are faced by people without permanent housing. The U.S.

Department of Housing and Urban Development estimates that there are about 10,000 homeless people in Colorado — a figure many homeless advocates believe is too low.

Whatever the number, it is clear that a lack of housing threatens physical and mental well-being. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that the homeless have higher rates of medical problems, mental health issues and premature death. Homeless women face especially high health risks.

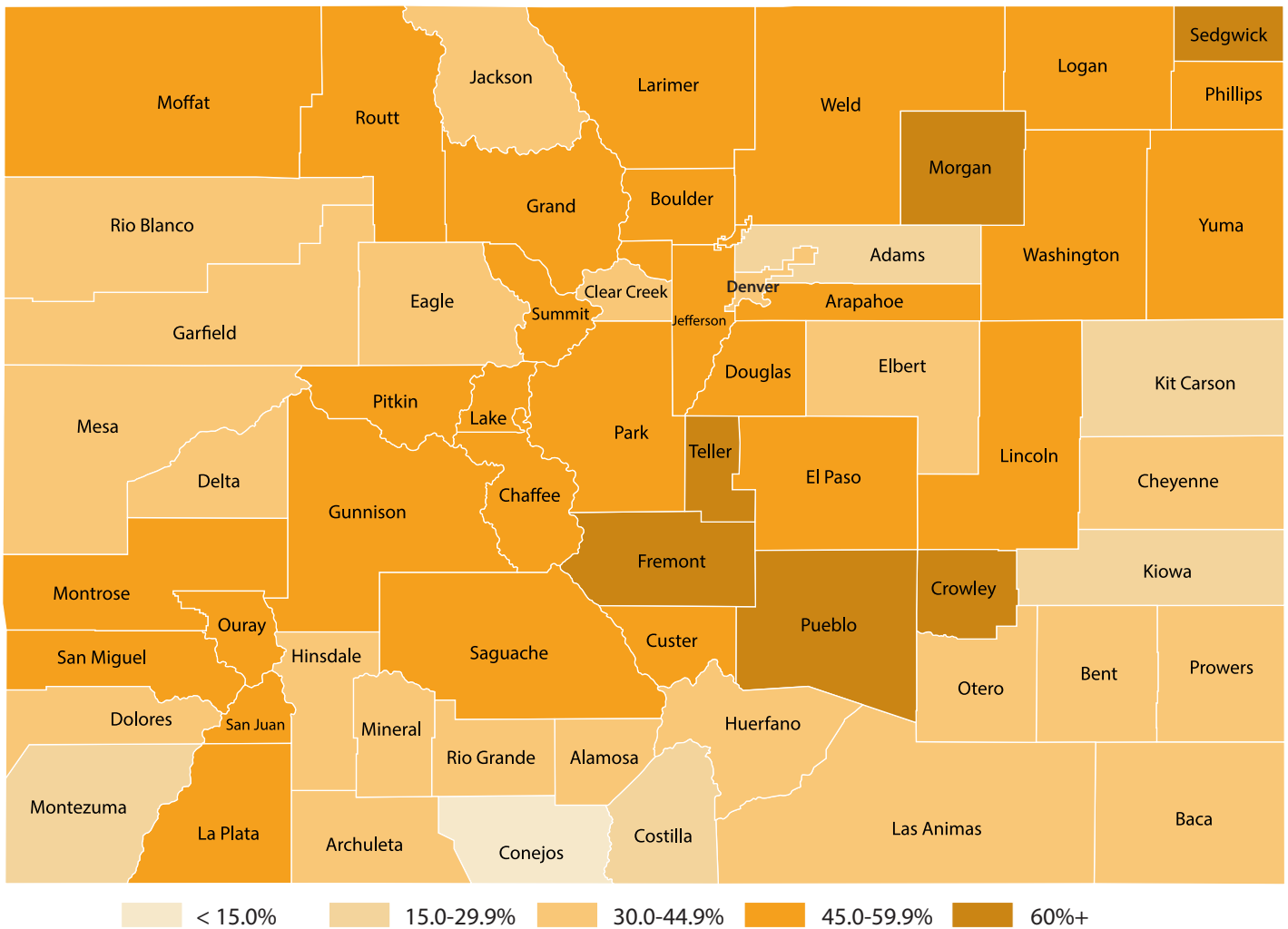
Even people with a roof over their heads can be at risk. Low-income Coloradans may have to choose between repairing a safety hazard and filling a prescription. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation notes that “families with fewer financial resources are most likely to experience unhealthy and unsafe housing conditions and typically are least able to remedy them.” When



## Common Environmental Hazards in the Home

- Rodents
- Allergens
- Mold
- Lead
- Asbestos
- Radon

**Radon In Colorado.** Percentage of Indoor Radon Tests Above the Federal Maximum Recommended Level of 4 pCi/L by County, 2005-2012



Source: Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

people are financially insecure, health care can feel like a luxury and fixing a furnace or leaky roof can seem out of reach.

Children and seniors are particularly vulnerable to accidents and injury because of hazards in the home. Safety devices such as latches and locks can prevent a child from getting into household cleaners or falling from a window, and a grab bar inside a bath or shower can prevent a devastating fall.

Environmental hazards in the home — such as allergens, mold, rodents, lead and asbestos — can also result in serious illness or disease. Exposure to high levels of radon is a particular cause for worry in Colorado. Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer among non-smokers, according to the Environmental Protection Agency, and Colorado is in the most severe category for indoor radon.

Beyond environmental hazards and safety concerns, most homes still have room for improvement. Houses that lack enough natural light can worsen depression; apartments that don't provide opportunities for exercise make it harder to fight obesity. Ultimately, spaces that are both functional and beautiful can boost our everyday happiness.

In addition to conditions in the home, neighborhood factors — such as sidewalks and safe streets to encourage exercise — can have strong impacts on health.

A 2004 study found that neighborhood conditions can worsen the effects of poverty on residents' health and behaviors. People who feel unsafe are 40 percent more likely to experience poor health, while those who feel secure in their neighborhood are more likely to venture outside to play, socialize, or bike to school or work.

SPOTLIGHT  
COMMUNITY

## Dwelling in Durango: Mercy Housing Provides a Solid Foundation

Piñon Terrace, a multifamily affordable housing community in Durango, has been serving low-income families, seniors and people with special needs since 2008. These populations often struggle to find stable, safe and accessible places to live.

Piñon Terrace is home to 140 people, 40 percent of whom are 17 or younger, and their median household income is just over \$18,000 per year. The community is funded primarily through the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit program.

The land for the project was donated by Mercy Regional Medical Center, a local hospital and the largest medical facility in southwest Colorado. Piñon Terrace features more than 60 units along with a playground, community room and gardens. It includes accessible walkways, which are wide with a gradual slope and handrails for support. The community is within walking distance to outdoor recreation, shops and restaurants, and it offers convenient access to Durango's trolley line, which is free to ride.



Piñon Terrace is owned and managed by Mercy Housing, a national nonprofit that is one of the country's largest affordable housing organizations. Its goal is not only to alleviate poverty, but to promote health. Founded by the Sisters of Mercy in Nebraska in the early 1980s, Mercy Housing serves vulnerable populations in 20 states, including Colorado, where it houses about 2,000 low- to moderate-income people. The organization's national headquarters is in Denver.

To date, Mercy Housing has helped create more than 48,000 affordable homes for people with low incomes.

In addition to amenities like parks and playgrounds, Mercy Housing's communities feature programmatic benefits. Piñon Terrace has a free after-school program for its young residents that offers healthy snacks, at least 30 minutes of physical activity and tutoring to help them read at grade-level and feel confident in school. The community also has a computer lab, which adult residents use frequently for education and job applications.

Along with Mercy Housing's 11 other Colorado developments, Piñon Terrace provides a firm housing foundation for vulnerable residents that promotes physical and mental well-being.



Piñon Terrace in Durango is located within walking distance of outdoor recreation and public transportation. The community has wide sidewalks and a playground.

PHOTOS BY MERCY HOUSING

# “The basic equation is no longer all that controversial: **Housing is health care.** We know that poor health can lead to homelessness. We know that homelessness is a major cause of poor health.”

David Wertheimer, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and **Bill Pitkin**, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, 2014

And it's important not to overlook gentrification: the displacement of established residents as development attracts more affluent people. The phenomenon is pushing low- and middle-income Coloradans farther out of city centers, where they can no longer afford to live, disrupting communities and increasing stress.

Some worry that Denver is on its way to becoming a prohibitively expensive “San Francisco of the Plains,” which would create challenges for affordable housing and the city’s social, economic and ethnic diversity.

## **Ongoing Efforts in Colorado and the U.S.**

Scores of initiatives are in place to promote better housing and better health. Among them:

- An estimated 450 communities nationwide have developed 10-year plans to end homelessness. Among them is **Homeward 2020**, a program in Fort Collins that seeks to provide affordable housing while working to address related issues such as mental health, domestic violence and substance use.
- **Habitat for Humanity**, an international organization established in 1976, builds or renovates “simple, decent houses” in partnership with volunteers and the individual or family in need. In Colorado, 27 organizational affiliates are providing homes for low-income families in 42 communities.
- Other groups work more broadly. The **Community Resources and Housing Development Corporation** (CRHDC) has helped Colorado residents for more than 40 years. The nonprofit, which has offices in Denver and the San Luis Valley, offers financial counseling, affordable rentals and new multifamily developments. It was originally founded to help migrants and seasonal farm workers.
- The **City of Aurora** provides radon mitigation help for low-income homeowners. Radon assistance



**Denver’s Road Home**, a plan approved in 2005, aims to develop nearly 3,200 housing opportunities for the homeless and link people in need to shelters and other community resources. People can donate to its efforts at repurposed parking meters around central Denver.

is also available through the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** and the **U.S. Department of Agriculture**.

- Dedicated government funding for preserving and maintaining affordable housing is crucial, especially in a state with few protections for renters. **Denver Mayor Michael Hancock** and others hope the city will dedicate \$150 million for this purpose over the next 10 years, and Boulder residents are lobbying for similar funding.

# A Drive Toward Walking, Riding

## Healthier Transportation Options Clear the Air and Promote Fitness

AUGUST 2016



*For most people, getting from Point A to Point B is as simple as turning the ignition key and stepping on the gas. Transportation is a universal aspect of our daily lives, but it isn't universally healthy.*

"There is a growing awareness across communities that transportation systems impact quality of life and health," the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) says. "Government and non-government agencies are seeking innovative policies and programs that protect and promote health while accomplishing the primary transportation objectives."

To that end, the U.S. Department of Transportation, the CDC, the American Planning Association, public health agencies, nonprofits and many others have developed strategies and tools to address key transportation and health issues. Among the goals: to reduce air pollution; minimize traffic injuries and deaths; and lower rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer by supporting alternatives to the car.

Several programs in Colorado promote public transit and active transportation — getting around by walking, cycling, using a wheelchair and other forms of people power. Examples include:

- **Bustang**, which began in July 2015, is an express bus services managed by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) with a home base at Denver's Union Station. Buses travel along Interstates 70 and 25 daily and once on weekends, carrying commuters to and from Denver, Colorado Springs, Fort Collins, Glenwood Springs and more. Each bus provides amenities for commuting, including Wi-Fi, USB ports and restrooms.
- **Safe Routes to School**, administered by CDOT, awards grants to encourage students to walk and bike to school. Money has been used to build sidewalks or painted crosswalks to enhance safety and support educational programs to motivate children to be active.
- **FasTracks** is a multibillion dollar project approved by voters in 2004 to expand public transportation in the Denver metro region. Among other things, it calls for 122 miles of new commuter rail and light

**84.8%**

of Colorado workers over the age of 16 commute to work by driving.



**3 of 4**  
Commuters drive alone.

Almost half of commutes are 20 minutes or less.



**3.2%**

of Colorado workers over the age of 16 use public transit to get to work.

rail, 18 miles of bus rapid transit and enhanced bus/rail connections. In April, the University of Colorado A Line opened between Denver Union Station and Denver International Airport.

- **Mile High Connects** is a coalition of public, private and nonprofit organizations that aims to create “paths to opportunity through local transit.” Its Affordable Fares Task Force, consisting of partners from more than 100 organizations, is proposing a 50 percent fare reduction for people making up to 150 percent of the federal poverty level, about \$35,000 for a family of four.

Affordable and active transportation also can influence the economy. According to the Urban Land Institute’s *Trends in Active Transportation*, bike-friendly cities generate more tourism revenue, and neighborhoods with a nearby bike path have higher home values than those that don’t. Property values in an Indianapolis neighborhood increased by 148 percent since 2008 when an eight-mile bike lane opened within a block of the area, the report said.



### **Biking in Denver**

Denver is **ninth in the nation** for bicycle commuting rates for large U.S. cities at **2.5 percent**, according to a recent publication by the Urban Land Institute. The highest rate of bicycle commuting is Portland, Oregon, at 7.2 percent.

SPOTLIGHT PROGRAM

## **Colorado Pedals Project:** Planning for a More Bike-Friendly State

Governor John Hickenlooper aims to make Colorado the healthiest state in the nation. He also wants Colorado to be the best state to ride a bike.

Last fall, Hickenlooper, an avid cyclist, announced the Colorado Pedals Project. The \$100 million initiative will be implemented over four years with funding from the federal government and Great Outdoors Colorado.

It will support added bicycle and pedestrian projects, better understanding and marketing of the cycling industry and efforts to promote safety through awareness and education.

Since the announcement, Hickenlooper has traveled the state to scope out where biking thrives and where it could be improved. Hickenlooper hopes that adding trails will encourage cyclists to explore more parts of the state, reducing overuse and alleviating traffic jams.

While the Colorado Pedals Project will reach peak



activity in coming years, it has already made moves toward friendlier biking.

By the end of 2015, accomplishments included fully funding Safe Routes to School, incorporating bikes and pedestrians into CDOT planning projects and presenting and listening to communities across the state.

Organizations like CDOT, the Colorado Tourism Office and the Department of Natural Resources are already putting plans into action for 2016. Projects include completing bike trail links between communities and developing tourism campaigns to promote biking opportunities in Colorado.

## CHI staff members contributing to this report:

### Research and Writing

Maggie Bailey  
Allie Morgan

### Editing

Cliff Foster  
Deborah Goeken

### Design

Brian Clark  
Joe Hanel



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303 E. 17th Ave., Suite 930, Denver, CO 80203 • 303.831.4200  
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