

# Aurora's Health Care System

Problems. Solutions. Action.

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## Working Together for a Healthier Aurora

Aurora is home to some of the best medical facilities and providers in Colorado. With all of these resources, Aurora should be the healthiest community in the state. Yet, **1 in 3 Aurora residents have significant barriers to accessing their basic health care needs.**

To improve our community's health and fulfill our potential to be a great city we must make a commitment, as a community, to create a health care system that meets the needs of everyone in Aurora. We must work together to ensure that everyone has access to a health care home where they can afford to go to when they are sick and get screenings for things like cancer or heart disease, so we can catch these diseases early. We must also broaden our view and stop thinking of health as something we get at the doctor's office, but instead something that starts in our families, in our schools and workplaces, and in our playgrounds and parks.

Aurora Health Access is a coalition of health care providers, advocates, and volunteer community members working to do just this. Through community engagement and research, Aurora Health Access has been working hard to strengthen the health care system in Aurora. Join us.

### A Health Care Home For All

Aurora Health Access places a high priority on finding a "health care home" for all residents of Aurora. A health care home is a doctor's office, a community clinic, or a local health department where you and your family go for all of your health care needs, including checkups, sick visits, accidents, treatment for chronic diseases, and immunizations. Most importantly, the staff at your health care home knows you and understands your health needs.

We advocate for health care homes because they work. Patients with a sustained health care home have better satisfaction with their care, take advantage of more preventive care measures, and utilize the emergency department less frequently.<sup>1</sup>

### Health Insurance Coverage

In Colorado's third biggest city, access to a health care home is increasingly difficult to secure. In 2009, nearly one quarter of Aurora residents did not have health insurance; that is over 85,000 people, more people than can fit into Invesco Field at Mile High (see Table 1).<sup>2</sup> Of large cities, Aurora has the 15th worst rate of uninsurance in the United States. Additionally, an estimated 32,000 Aurora residents are underinsured, meaning they have insurance, but they cannot afford to pay out-of-pocket expenses associated with their care—like co-payments and coinsurance bills.<sup>3</sup>

Being uninsured and underinsured has dire health consequences. Not only do people without health insurance die more, they also experience more physical and mental health care

challenges than insured individuals.<sup>4,5</sup> Uninsured people also receive less preventive health services than their insured counterparts.<sup>4</sup>

Going without health insurance is particularly challenging for children. Uninsured children are six times more likely than insured children to go

Table 1. Rate of uninsurance in major Colorado cities, 2009

	Percent	Number
<b>Aurora</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>72,616</b>
Colorado Springs	14.6	56,002
Denver	19.7	118,786
Fort Collins	14.0	19,143
Lakewood	16.1	22,293
Colorado	15.8	777,794
United States	15.1	45,664,741

without needed medical or dental care and 30 percent less likely to receive care for injuries. Even simple things like vision and hearing tests truly make a difference in a child's ability to succeed in school by catching problems early before they interfere with a child's development.

## Health Care

Health insurance coverage is not the only major health care problem in Aurora. Access is also severely limited despite having world-class health care providers, community health care systems—like the Metro Community Provider Network (MCPN) and Kaiser Permanente—and hospitals—like University Hospital, The Children's Hospital, and the Medical Center of Aurora. Even with these rich resources, there just aren't enough providers in Aurora to meet the needs of the community.

Scientists say that Adams County has only **one-third** of the number of primary care providers that it should and Arapahoe County has only three-quarters of the providers it should.<sup>6</sup> This lack of primary care providers results in fewer visits to primary care providers and more visits to the

Table 2. Selected demographic statistics, Aurora, CO, 2009

	Aurora	Colorado
Population	323,288	5,024,748
Median Age	32.8 yrs	35.7 yrs
Median Income	\$45,904	\$55,430
Graduation Rate	82.5 %	89.3 %
Race		
White	68.9 %	84.6 %
Latino	30.6 %	20.3 %
Black	15.0 %	3.9 %
Asian	3.2 %	2.6 %
Native	1.8 %	1.0 %

hospital emergency department, the most expensive and inefficient place to get care. Adams and Arapahoe Counties also have high rates of preventable hospitalizations, suggesting the area's primary care network is insufficient.<sup>6</sup>

In our work we've also learned of key problems with health care integration and coordination in Aurora. This problem is not unique to our community. Many communities in Colorado are struggling with limited capacity for after hours care other than the hospital emergency departments. Good communication and information sharing between health care homes and specialty providers is also needed. There are a lot of opportunities to use technology better and find easier ways for all health care sectors to work together.

## Health in the Community

With a population of 323,000 people, Aurora residents boast that their city is bigger than Pittsburg, PA and New Orleans, LA. The Gateway to the Rockies—as Aurora is endearingly nicknamed—is also proud to be one of the most diverse cities in the country (see Table 2). Among its many strengths, Aurora already has some of the best health and wellness initiatives in the region. LiveWell Northwest Aurora promotes healthy eating and active living through innovative programs like the “walking school bus,” which encourages parents to take turns walking groups of students to school to promote health, safety, and education among the group. Healthier Beginnings is working to support Aurora's African American community to have healthier babies. And the Tri-County Health Department is launching a new initiative called Communities Putting Prevention to Work, which will target community-level change to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

Even with these incredible initiatives, Aurora still struggles in key areas that

impact our community health. The city has high poverty rates, low access to healthy foods, and too many students who don't graduate high school (see Table 2).<sup>2,4</sup> Scientists are increasingly finding that these seemingly unrelated community issues have an enormous impact on our health, long before we ever see a doctor. It's time we expand the way we think about health to include how to keep it, not just how to get it back.

## Take Action!

Aurora has the chance to be an even greater city. We must work together to improve our community health system to reach our fullest potential. By joining Aurora Health Access, you can take the first step toward realizing the goal of creating a health care system in Aurora that meets the needs of all its residents.

## References

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