



Health Department Creation

The birth of a health department

Arapahoe County believes strongly in providing programs and services that enhance the quality of life for our residents. Some of the biggest indicators of quality of life are the health and safety of our community as well as access to programs and services that have a direct impact on day-to-day living. That's why in late 2021, Arapahoe County commissioners began the process of developing a single-county health department to serve the needs of the more than 650,000 residents. This new department replaces the arrangement with the Tri-County Health Department, which served residents in Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas counties for the past 70 years. The change provides the County with the unique opportunity to design—from the ground up—programs and services that meet the specific needs and values of Arapahoe County residents and businesses.

The Board of County Commissioners leads this charge and is working with both internal and external stakeholders to identify, prioritize and stand-up the specific services that support individual and community health. Community input is extremely important to this process and the public will have many opportunities to learn about and weigh in on important public health programs.

What is a public health department?

By statute, Colorado counties must always have a public health department in place. In general, public health focuses broadly on protecting and improving the health of people and communities, rather than the health of an individual. It can include things like promoting healthy lifestyles, researching injury prevention and preventing infections diseases. Public health can take place at an individual level (such as immunizations), a community level (such as restaurant inspections) or a system level (like indoor no-smoking laws).

Public health in Arapahoe County

The Tri-County Health Department has undergone significant changes since 2020, as both Adams and Douglas counties announced their intentions to leave the partnership. While the Arapahoe County Board of Commissioners has tried to take the long view and minimize the political elements of this situation and the debates around it, by fall 2021 it was clear that the County would have to move forward with a single-county public health department.

Arapahoe County is taking this opportunity to explore all options for delivering public health services as we develop the necessary transition plans to our new health department. Arapahoe County will use the following guiding principles as it considers options:

- ▶ The County will make decisions by consulting with appropriate stakeholders and industry leaders at the local, state, and national levels.
- ▶ The County values community and stakeholder input and will design appropriate opportunities for the community to provide input and feedback.
- ▶ Decisions will be fiscally sound and based on industry best practices.
- ▶ The County will produce regular communications to inform and engage stakeholders at every appropriate opportunity.

To guide education and efforts, the County hired a consultant in 2021 and will continue to work with them throughout 2022.

Legal requirements

Colorado law notes several requirements of any public health department. Within each requirement, the health department has opportunities to determine how to best meet the public health needs in the community. Furthermore, the County must consider service capacity and other program-specific standards and requirements in its decision making.

The process

Arapahoe County will stand-up its new health department in January of 2023, which necessitates an aggressive timeline for evaluating and designing new public health services. There are four main parts to this process, which include:

Gather information. At this step, the County will look at legal requirements and wish-lists of programs and services that enhance public health. Consultants are on board to help facilitate this process and make key findings easy to understand and navigate. Key findings from the 2021 Community Health Assessment will be evaluated and researched for additional context.

Determine needs and structure. At this step, the County will design the specifics of a new health department, looking at the needs of our communities and the appropriate structure to build them. Included here is a look at how to launch a new department with existing County resources, such as information technology, human resources and administration.

Evaluate costs and feasibility and determine governance.

Arapahoe County prides itself on being fiscally sustainable and will work to ensure that the new health department can operate efficiently and within the confines of existing revenue sources. This phase takes a hard look at the dollar value of services and how they can be combined to create a sustainable department. Commissioners will also determine the structure of the department's governance: a board of health.

Implement. Public and stakeholder engagement will help inform decisions throughout the process, which will culminate in the implementation of the new department in January 2023.

Timeline

In order to have the new health department in place, Arapahoe County is pursuing the following timeline in 2022:



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