mericans are feeling anxious. At least 40 percent of U.S. adults have experienced high levels of psychological distress at least once since the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak, according to the Pew Research Center. The pandemic shone a light on just how many people were living with some level of anxiety even before the virus brought a deluge of new worries.

Anxiety—feeling dread, tension, restlessness—can take a serious toll on our mental and physical health, so understanding the symptoms and finding ways to cope is critical to our well-being, experts say.

“There were a lot of unknowns with the pandemic, and unknowns are not good for a human’s stress level,” says Jen Head, behavioral health provider for the Health District’s Connections adult mental health and substance use program. “The isolation also threatened our internal system for wanting to connect—we are wired to be social creatures. Some people realized they experienced anxiety in the past but didn’t know what to call it. Now they feel freer to discuss it.”

That’s due in part to the decrease in stigma around mental health during the pandemic, when it became more socially acceptable to talk about not being OK, and celebrities, pro athletes, and even everyday folks began publicly sharing their struggles.

What exactly is anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion. It is more than just fear, which is our body’s natural response when there’s a specific threat to our well-being. Fear helps keep us safe and protected in the moment. Anxiety, on the other hand, is “when we start worrying about things that are not really threats, or it’s out of proportion to the actual threat—it’s just how the brain is interpreting what we are experiencing,” Head says.

Unlike fear, anxiety persists with no real resolution. Sufferers describe it as negative thoughts looping continuously about something that happened in the past or distress about the future.

Symptoms of anxiety include your mind racing, or feeling overwhelmed and your mind going blank, difficulty concentrating and making decisions, feeling restless or “off,” sleep disturbances, and even behavioral changes like avoiding crowds or social situations as a response to feeling anxious.

There are also physical signs of anxiety such as your heart racing, nausea, dry mouth, stomach pain (sometimes with vomiting), muscle tension in the neck or back, hyperventilating, and shortness of breath. Even dizziness and

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continued on page 6
Health District Board Election
May 2, 2023

Voters in this election will elect two directors for a four-year term on the Health District board.

Voting in the May 2 election will take place 7 a.m.–7 p.m. at two polling places (Health District offices, 120 Bristlecone Dr.; and Spirit of Joy Lutheran Church, 4501 S. Lemay Ave.) or by absentee mail ballot. An Application for Absentee Ballot is included on page 5 or is available online at healthdistrict.org/2023-board-election.

For more information on the Health District Board of Directors election, visit healthdistrict.org/2023-board-election or contact Chris Sheafor, designated election official, at 970-224-5209.

To vote in this election, a person must be an eligible elector in the Health District, someone who is:

- Registered to vote in Colorado; and
- A resident of the district or someone who owns, or whose spouse or civil union partner owns, taxable real or personal property within the district, regardless of whether he or she lives in the district.

Because Special District election regulations are different than other elections, those who have not previously requested to be on the Health District’s permanent absentee voter list will not automatically receive a ballot in the mail, even if they normally vote by mail in all other local elections.

If you want to vote by mail you must use an absentee ballot, even if you plan to be in town during the election. This is the only way to vote by mail.

If you voted by mail in a previous Health District Board of Directors election, AND you requested to be on the permanent absentee voter list, the Health District will automatically send you a ballot for this and all future board elections.

If you are not already on the permanent absentee list and want to vote by mail, you will need to request a ballot by completing and submitting an Application for Absentee Ballot. If you don’t have access to a computer and need another absentee ballot application, call 970-224-5209.

1. Clip and complete the Application for Absentee Ballot on page 5 or download an application from healthdistrict.org/2023-board-election. If you have questions, call 970-224-5209.

2. Sign and return the application to the Health District by Tuesday, April 25.

You may return your application by mail to Chris Sheafor, 120 Bristlecone Dr., Fort Collins, CO 80524; by fax at 970-530-1705; or by email (as a scanned attachment) to kfang@healthdistrict.org.

3. Mail your completed ballot. Or drop it off in the lobby ballot box at Health District offices, 120 Bristlecone Dr., Fort Collins, 8 a.m.–5 p.m., M–F. On Election Day, ballots can also be dropped off at either polling place 7 a.m.–7 p.m.

Your ballot must be received by 7 p.m. on Election Day, May 2, 2023, in order to be counted.
This April brings not just rain showers, but the end of guaranteed coverage for thousands of Medicaid recipients under the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Some 60,000 people in Larimer County rely on Health First Colorado—the state’s Medicaid program—to provide medical, dental, and behavioral health benefits because they live on a lower income or with a disability. But beginning in May, if you no longer meet eligibility requirements, or don’t sign and return renewal forms by the due date (ongoing through June 2024, depending on your enrollment anniversary), you will lose your health insurance within a month.

Many individuals qualified for Health First Colorado due to an economic or health crisis during the worst of the pandemic, leading to a larger percentage of insured residents across the state. Recipients were able to continue with their coverage even if they returned to work or no longer qualified for other reasons, until recent Congressional legislation ended the practice.

It’s a situation that worries area service providers. “This is the largest change to U.S. health insurance coverage since the Affordable Care Act, and many Colorado Medicaid recipients have never had to complete a renewal,” says Vanessa Fewell, division manager for the Larimer County Department of Human Services Benefits and Community Support Division.

That’s because prior to the pandemic, Coloradans with no change in their status were automatically renewed and did not have to undergo a review. Starting in May, renewal packets up to 60 pages long will be sent to members by their preferred method (mail, email, text notification) about 60-70 days before their enrollment anniversary. The process, known as the “unwinding” of the Public Health Emergency (PHE) continuous Medicaid coverage, will continue through June 2024.

There is particular concern that individuals who are dropped from Medicaid will skip needed medical care or stop taking prescription medications because they can’t afford to pay out of pocket.

As the number of uninsured people increases, “there will be worse health outcomes in our community, no doubt about it,” warns Dr. Joseph Prows, a family medicine doctor in Fort Collins and a member of the Health District’s Board of Directors.

Next steps

While renewal packets related to the PHE unwinding will be sent through June of next year, annual eligibility reviews will become the norm in Colorado. It’s an adjustment, but the renewal process doesn’t have to be hard if you remember a few things:

- **Keep your contact information current** with Health First Colorado. If your circumstances change, contact Health First Colorado within 10 days.
- **If you are auto-renewed** because Health First Colorado has up-to-date information proving you still qualify, you’ll receive a letter saying that you are approved for coverage. Nothing else needs to be done.
- **If you receive a renewal packet, TAKE ACTION!** Don’t wait for the deadline, send it in as soon as you can—even if you don’t think you still qualify for Medicaid. If you are disenrolled, you’ll get a letter stating that you no longer have health insurance coverage. **Insurance companies require this letter as proof** that you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period, which allows you 60 days to enroll in a new plan (some employer-sponsored plans allow only 30 days). While you can’t renew before your anniversary date, you can get a jump on enrolling in a plan to begin when your Medicaid coverage ends.
- **If you forget to renew**, you will get a letter stating that your coverage is ending. **Keep this letter as proof** that you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period, then enroll in a new plan, or reapply to Medicaid if you think you are still eligible.

Help is available. The Health District’s Larimer Health Connect program provides free assistance to find the best insurance option to meet a family’s needs and budget, including Medicare (65+). The Health District also offers a Prescription Assistance program for uninsured or underinsured individuals who meet other requirements. And its Family Dental Clinic accepts patients with no insurance and offers a sliding fee scale for those who qualify. Se habla español.
APPLICATION FOR ABSENTEE BALLOT

IMPORTANT!

- Application must be filed by the close of business on Tuesday, April 25, 2023.
- Absentee ballot must be received by Election Judge or Designated Election official by 7:30 p.m. on Election Day, Tuesday, May 2, 2023, to be counted.
- Applications may be mailed to: Health District of Northern Larimer County, ATTN: Designated Election Official, 120 Briarstone Drive, Fort Collins, CO 80524; faxed to 970-530-1705, or emailed (as a scanned attachment) to vote@healthdistrict.org.

TO: Designated Election Official

Health District of Northern Larimer County ("District"): I

[ ] myself, whose date of birth is _____________________________, or

[ ] _____________________________ (enter name), a family member related by blood, marriage, civil union or adoption to the applicant, whose date of birth is _____________________________,

who is an eligible elector of the Health District of Northern Larimer County, State of Colorado, eligible by virtue of:

[ ] Being a resident of the District, with an elector residence address of:

[Address] [City] [ZIP] [County], CO

[ ] Ownership (or spouse or civil union partner) of the taxable real or personal property (described below) situated within the boundaries of the District, or a person who is obligated to pay taxes under a contract to purchase taxable property within the District.

[Address] [City] [ZIP] [County], CO

[ ] [ ] [ ]

Check box if elector wishes to be on District's permanent absentee voter list.

Applicant will receive an absentee ballot for every election conducted by the District if checked.

Mail elector's absentee ballot to this address:

[Address] [City] [State] [ZIP]

I am applying for an absentee ballot for use by me or the person noted above per §1-13-1002(1)(a)(ii) in voting at the District's regular election to be held on the 2nd day of May, 2023.

Signature Name Printed

Date

[ ] Witnessed By

[ ] In case of elector's inability to sign her/his name, the elector's mark shall be witnessed by another person.

SDO: Division of Local Government – Department of Local Affairs – 2023 Election (Revised 1/2/23)

fcgov.com/fctv en español en el sitio healthdistrict.org/2023-board-election.
headaches may be caused by anxiety. Children are also experiencing high rates of anxiety, but symptoms and diagnoses are often different than for adults.

So, what’s making us so anxious? Experts point to factors including poor sleep habits, overuse of social media, worries over the economy, social and political divisions, and fear of getting sick—made worse by a global pandemic that has so far killed more than 6.8 million people worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

An increasing number of people are being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, when anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. The National Institute of Mental Health reports that 19 percent of U.S. adults have been told they suffer from an anxiety disorder, most commonly panic attacks, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Locally, the Health District’s triennial Community Health Survey bears this out. Respondents who reported receiving an anxiety diagnosis from a mental health professional increased by 9 percentage points between 2016 and 2022, while there was a 13-point jump in those who said they were “currently experiencing anxiety, depression, or other mental health problem” in the past six years.

“We’ve definitely seen an increase in patients with anxiety,” says the Health District’s Andrea Holt, behavioral health provider at UCHealth’s Family Medicine Center (FMC). “There are people who had underlying anxiety prior to the pandemic and saw it rise to the surface, and the pandemic created new versions of anxiety in those who didn’t have it before.”

Holt manages the Health District’s Integrated Care Program, which pairs mental health and substance use specialists with physicians at FMC and Salud in Fort Collins to help patients in the moment without them having to wait for an appointment or travel to a different location.

Coping and treatment

If you have an anxiety disorder, it is highly treatable with therapy, medications, and skills you can learn to manage symptoms. Holt suggests talking with a trained mental health therapist to figure out the underlying issues around your anxiety, and what’s contributing to it, so you can address it holistically.

No matter what your anxiety level, there are steps you can take to manage it. The “5 Senses Technique” has helped Head’s clients become grounded in the present moment.

Here’s how it works: Stop and say out loud (or in your head) five things you can see around you—and be specific (I see a girl wearing a blue ribbon in her hair). Next, identify four things you feel (the chair underneath me, my soft sweater), then three things you can hear (talking, keyboard clatter), two things you can smell around you, and one thing you can taste or, if that’s a challenge, one thing you know to be true. (I am safe. I am loved. This moment will pass.)

“This technique offers a way to connect to our body and slow down,” she explains. Meditation apps on a phone can also draw attention to our breathing, calming ourselves physically and mentally.

One trap to avoid is using alcohol, marijuana, or other drugs to cope with anxiety, because that can make things worse. “Substances are used by some to try to numb the feelings or the intensity of the anxiety,” Head says. “It may help in the short term, but it can cause longer term issues. Substances won’t help with getting to the root of the issue, and often get in the way of learning and using other tools.”

Where to find help

- **Mental Health and Substance Use Connections**
  Provides assessments, referrals, and support for adults with behavioral health issues. 970-221-5551
  healthdistrict.org/services/connections-adult-services

- **Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) Team**
  Early identification and treatment of mental health and substance use disorders affecting young people. 970-221-3308
  healthdistrict.org/cayac

- **If you’re experiencing a mental health crisis**
  SummitStone Health Partners provides a crisis line available 24/7 at 970-494-4200, and a walk-in Behavioral Health Urgent Care treating all ages at 1217 Riverside Ave., Fort Collins, open 7 days a week, 8 a.m. to midnight. Or text “Talk” to 38255 for Colorado Crisis Services.
**Key Health District service changes in 2023**

The Health District strives to meet evolving local health-care needs, seeking the most efficient and impactful way to use its limited resources to enhance the health of the community.

Because our community health needs continually change, Health District services must also change to meet our community’s most pressing needs. As a result, new programs may be developed, while existing services transition to other community partners or sunset. In 2023, two Health District programs will experience significant changes.

**Larimer County Extension takes over Larimer Advance Care Planning services**

On April 1, Larimer County Extension assumed operation of the Larimer Advance Care Planning program. Larimer County Extension is a partnership between Larimer County and Colorado State University that serves as an information resource for the community.

Started in 2016 with grant assistance from more than a half-dozen local organizations, Larimer Advance Care Planning set out to make advance care planning—wishes about your medical care if you can’t speak for yourself—a natural and expected part of the continuum of health care in Larimer County. At the time, only 30 percent of Larimer County residents had completed their advance care directives, and only a third of those had shared their decisions with their health-care provider.

Over the years, this program educated more than 18,000 people on the importance of making and documenting decisions about end-of-life care, sparking conversations with loved ones around coffee tables rather than around a hospital bed. The program did more than just drive the conversation, though. More than 5,300 people completed their advance care directives, and more than 1,300 health-care providers received specialized training on the subject.

The Health District is indebted to Program Manager Mindy Rickard for her guidance and passion, and to all of the staff, partners, and funders who were critical in this program’s success. We are excited to see Larimer County Extension carry on this work in the community.

For more information on Larimer Advance Care Planning, call 970-498-6000 or visit larimer.gov/acp.

**Changes ahead for Cholesterol, Blood Pressure, Diabetes Screening**

The Health District’s heart health screening service will also see big changes later this year. For more than two decades, Health District registered nurses provided over 30,000 free or low-cost cholesterol, blood pressure, and diabetes screenings at convenient sites around the community, explaining results to individuals, and offering referrals to other local resources.

The community screenings as they have been provided will transition and change focus after June 30—see the schedule on page 8. More information will be available in the next few months, but if you have questions, please call and speak to a Health District nurse at 970-224-5209.

The Health District is so grateful to the many clients who have cared enough about their heart health to seek out this service and “know their numbers.” We encourage people to talk to their health-care provider about cholesterol and blood pressure numbers, and how often they should be tested. People can also get their cholesterol tested at any UCHealth lab for a small fee without a doctor’s referral. A list of those lab services, and the associated fees, can be found by searching “List of Direct Laboratory Services UCHealth” online.

The Health District extends its gratitude to the nursing and support staff behind this service, as well as to our community partners who hosted monthly screening clinics.

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**New medical director joins Health District**

Dr. Paul Mayer has joined the Health District as its new medical director. He provides oversight and direction for Health District programs and services.

In addition to his role at the Health District, Mayer will continue to serve as medical director for Larimer County Department of Health and Environment, a position he has held since 2021. He’s also been co-medical director of El Paso County Public Health since August 2022.

Mayer has more than 25 years of experience as a family physician, including general family medicine, obstetrics, and HIV care. He also previously served as medical director of urgent care for UCHealth’s Family Medicine Center.

“We are so fortunate to have Dr. Mayer join us as our medical director,” says Lee Thielen, interim executive director. “He has broad and pertinent experience that is invaluable to our programs and is a great addition to our team.”

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**Winter Bike to Work Day**

In early February, the Health District partnered with Homeward Alliance to provide a warming station, hot coffee, and breakfast snacks for cyclists at a stop on Conifer Street for Winter Bike to Work (or Wherever) Day. Several hardy employees also braved the chilly temperatures and rode their bicycles or took the bus to work that day.
cholesterol tests

Find out your total cholesterol, HDL, LDL, triglycerides, glucose, and blood pressure results; learn what they mean and what to do about them. Health District residents receive their test for free. Cost for all others is $15. The Health District boundaries include Fort Collins, Laporte, Wellington, Red Feather Lakes, Livermore, Bellvue, and Timnath.

Cholesterol tests are 20 minutes and are available 8:30–10:30 a.m. 
Appointments required: call 970-224-5209. Currently, masks are optional.

The following are dates for community cholesterol and blood pressure screenings*:

**April**
- Tues., April 11 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Thurs., April 13 – Spirit of Joy Church, 4501 S. Lemay
- Wed., April 19 – Health District, 120 Bristlecone
- Thurs., April 27 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree

**May**
- Tues., May 9 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Thurs., May 11 – Spirit of Joy Church, 4501 S. Lemay
- Thurs., May 25 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree

**June**
- Thurs., June 8 – Spirit of Joy Church, 4501 S. Lemay
- Tues., June 13 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree
- Wed., June 21 – Health District, 120 Bristlecone
- Thurs., June 29 – Senior Center, 1200 Raintree

An 8-hour fast is recommended for best results; medications and water are permitted. Visit healthdistrict.org for more information.

*See page 7 for more about the future of this program.

Medicaid Renewal? We’ve Got You Covered!

We are here to answer your questions about youth behavioral health, find local options that meet your unique needs, and provide brief services to bridge gaps in care.

Behavioral health services include:

- Brief Therapy
- Care Coordination
- Psychological Assessment & Testing
- Brief Psychiatry
- Referrals

Some services are offered at no cost and others are offered on a sliding fee scale.

Call us today! 970-221-3308

Can’t afford dental care? Call us!

Fees based on ability to pay • Medicaid • CHP+

Health District FAMILY DENTAL CLINIC

Call us for an appointment, 7:30 a.m.–6 p.m., M–F
970-416-5331

healthdistrict.org

Patients must live in the Health District, have no private dental insurance, and meet income guidelines.

Larimer Health Connect can help with your renewal for Health First Colorado (Colorado’s Medicaid program)

We can also help you:
- Find out if you are eligible for financial assistance
- Choose and enroll in a private Connect for Health Colorado plan if you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period
- Understand health insurance, including your new coverage

See page 3 of this newsletter for more information on Medicaid renewals after the end of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency.

In-person, Zoom, and phone appointments available. No cost for services. Se habla español.

Larimer Health Connect 970-472-0444
larimerhealthconnect.org

larimerhealthconnect.org

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