As everyone hunkered down throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, many routines went by the wayside. That included canceling annual physicals, elective procedures, and even important health screenings and treatment, all to avoid potentially catching the virus. Now that a growing portion of Colorado’s population is vaccinated and strict infection protocols are in place, it’s time to schedule those appointments if you haven’t already, say local health-care providers.

In a recent survey by The Harris Poll, 52 percent of Americans said they delayed or canceled health-care services since the pandemic started. Locally, many doctor’s offices and non-emergency medical facilities needed to restrict in-person care for a time, with patients communicating with providers by video or over the phone for routine visits or to determine if in-person treatment was needed. At times it was a difficult way to provide comprehensive care, says Dr. Mark Simmons, internal medicine and pediatric care physician for UCHealth Northern Colorado.

“With telehealth visits we couldn’t do the usual care like take the patient’s blood pressure, or listen to their heart and lungs, so we couldn’t pick up heart murmurs,” Simmons says. The yearly check-up for school-aged kids is when a doctor picks up on any growth problems and can discuss mental health issues, a growing concern for all ages during the stress of the pandemic. Simmons said he preferred not to do physicals over video for fear of missing problems.

Now that restrictions have lifted and more people are vaccinated, he advises families not to wait any longer to see their care team. The risks of delaying care for known issues like hypertension or diabetes—or problems that have yet to be caught on a Pap test or mammogram—are a big concern. Even routine blood draws can tell a lot about what is going on in the body without a patient experiencing symptoms. “With regular screening we can pick up problems earlier when they are easier to treat, and there are fewer chances of complications. For instance, a whole host of serious medical issues can occur for those with untreated diabetes and high blood pressure,” he explains.
Healthier twist on the

Tasty Freeze

Smoothie bowls are cool, colorful, and quick

by betsy lynch

Want to satisfy your family’s summertime cravings for something cool and creamy while sneaking in healthy ingredients? The way to do it is with a smoothie bowl. All you need is a good blender, a bit of imagination, and 10 minutes to artfully decorate your creation.

Whether for breakfast, dessert, or a midday snack, these smoothies are meant to be eaten with a spoon, not sipped through a straw. The secret is to blend the base just enough so the mixture is thick and frosty—more soft-serve parfait than milkshake. When transferred to a bowl, the surface becomes a colorful palette for arranging fresh berries, banana slices, seeds, nuts, granola, coconut shreds, fruit zest, chocolate shavings...you name it! If your kids enjoy cookie decorating, why not give them a chance to express their creativity with their own bowls?

Dairy or plant-based milks and yogurts (almond, cashew, soy, oat, coconut, hemp) combine well with a variety of frozen fruits and veggies. Acai berries, bananas, mangoes, kale, cauliflower, Swiss chard, and spinach are great for texture and flavor. Fruit provides natural sweetness, while additions such as peanut butter, avocado, silken tofu, and grains contribute to nutritional balance. They also make smoothies taste rich and satisfying.

Smoothie bowls with destination themes and exotic ingredients might be just the culinary vacation you need this summer!

Here are more tips:

- Beware of excess sugars; skip sweetened juice concentrates and yogurts, and use high-calorie toppings like granola, honey, and dried fruit sparingly.
- Limit saturated fats such as coconut oil or dairy cream, especially if you have heart disease.
- Use complementary spices and extracts, such as vanilla, to enhance flavors.
- Customize to be gluten-free, vegan, low carb, low fat, high fiber, or sugar-free as desired.
It’s a well-known fact that impaired driving and distracted driving can have deadly consequences.

Staying sober and focused when you are behind the wheel is the best way to ensure the safety of everyone on our streets, says Fort Collins Police Chief Jeff Swoboda. “Crashes due to distracted driving can cause serious injury and death, and it happens very quickly. And any form of impairment, whether due to alcohol consumption or drug use, can reduce someone’s ability to safely navigate roadways and unexpected situations.”

For more than two decades, the Health District has used its triennial Community Health Survey to ask adults in Larimer County about their health-related behaviors. That includes questions about drinking and driving and people’s use of technology while driving.

Some responses from the 2019 Community Health Survey are contained in a new Driving Habits fact sheet available for download at healthdistrict.org/sites/default/files/driving-habits-fact-sheet-2019chs.pdf.

A concerning practice that has led to tragic accidents on our roadways is distracted driving, which is any activity that takes the driver’s attention away from the road, including eating, drinking, using a cell phone, or even adjusting the sound or navigation system.

The 2019 Community Health Survey asked about technology use and driving. Talking on the phone was by far the most common activity. Nearly half of respondents said that they “always or almost always” (13 percent) or “sometimes” (33 percent) made or received phone calls while driving. (While not part of the survey, drivers under 18 years old are prohibited from using a phone.) Adult drivers also reported engaging in illegal and dangerous activities involving technology as noted in the chart below.

When driving, how often do you:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Usually or Always</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read/send texts</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read/send emails or update social media</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you see dangerous or concerning driving, pull over and call 911 or text *277 to report it to law enforcement, or have a passenger do it for you.

Drink driving deaths in Colorado involved alcohol, compared to the national average of 28 percent, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Locally, Larimer County had the second highest number of people in the state killed in alcohol-related crashes, with 119 deaths in 101 fatal accidents (ranked 8th for rate of deaths compared to other Colorado counties).

After a steady 15-year decline, the percentage of Larimer County residents who reported driving after having two or more drinks one or more times in the preceding month also more than doubled from 2016 to 2019.

93% of Larimer County adults always wear a safety belt while riding in or driving a car, up from 89% in 2016. The national rate was 91% in 2019 (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration).

24% of current marijuana users reported driving a car within 2-3 hours of using marijuana in the past month.

In 2019, 27 percent of driving deaths in Colorado involved alcohol, compared to the national average of 28 percent, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Locally, Larimer County had the second highest number of people in the state killed in alcohol-related crashes, with 119 deaths in 101 fatal accidents (ranked 8th for rate of deaths compared to other Colorado counties).

After a steady 15-year decline, the percentage of Larimer County residents who reported driving after having two or more drinks one or more times in the preceding month also more than doubled from 2016 to 2019.

8% 7% 6% 6% 4% 9%


Need a ride?

There are many transportation alternatives available in our community. The No DUI Larimer County coalition’s campaign, “Make the Call” for a sober lift home, offers $10 off a zipride ride every month to anyone who texts #NoDUI to 970-224-2222. Find out more at nodullarimer.org and on social media @nodullarimer.

More health data available

Interested in learning about other local health topics? Fact sheets from the 2019 Community Health Survey are also available for mental health, oral health, tobacco, and marijuana. Visit healthdistrict.org/2019-community-health-assessment.
Empowering clients to escape homelessness

by kate braniff

As summer envelops northern Colorado and many COVID-19 restrictions are lifting, residents crave a semblance of normalcy.

For Fort Collins-based Homeward Alliance, a non-profit dedicated to ending homelessness, normalcy means overcoming the unique health challenges brought on by COVID-19.

“The COVID-19 pandemic exposed our health-care system’s inequities,” says David Rout, executive director of Homeward Alliance. “Our challenge, and other agencies’ challenge, was keeping people safe and healthy while empowering people to escape homelessness and move forward with their lives.”

Homeward Alliance, originally Homeless Gear, began as a volunteer-run organization created by retired Fort Collins resident and avid outdoorsman Ken John, who collected donated outdoor gear for residents living on the streets.

The organization grew, adding outreach, distribution programs, and assuming operations of the Murphy Center for Hope, a day center housing over 20 agencies that assist people struggling with homelessness.

Presently serving about 5,000 clients annually, Homeward Alliance collaborates with other agencies to provide basic needs, case management, housing placement, employment services, and connections to health services.

Responding to COVID-19

During COVID-19, the organization helped oversee a regional response to the virus, deploying relief funding to new programs that helped keep people safe and alive.

First, they reconfigured the Murphy Center to meet COVID-19 health protocols. When cold weather hit, they set up outdoor tents, heaters, and hand-washing stations, accommodating nearly 45,000 check-ins throughout 2020.

Next, Homeward Alliance teamed up with the Health District to create COVID-19 Isolation/Recovery and Quarantine sites in Fort Collins and Loveland. The sites provided safe, comfortable, socially distanced indoor shelter for unhoused Larimer County residents to recover from COVID-19 and quarantine if they were exposed or had symptoms.

Homeward Alliance prioritized COVID-19 vaccinations as soon as they became available, educating clients about their importance, and providing easy opportunities to get vaccinated.

Ultimately, over 300 individuals and families secured housing in 2020 through Homeward Alliance—a new record.

“For many of our clients, it’s a lack of affordable housing combined with low wages,” says Pam Brewer, development director for Homeward Alliance. “If you have other barriers, like divorce, domestic violence, or job loss, housing stability is almost impossible.”

Add to that a lack of family or community support, and it’s easy to see how many fall victim to homelessness.

Brewer explains that some of their clients escape homelessness fairly quickly, with light touch services like rental assistance or finding a second job.

But for those with more substantial barriers, like senior citizens, or people with mental health or substance use disorders, it’s not so simple.

“People who are homeless suffer from chronic health conditions, mental health issues, and substance use disorders at rates beyond the population at large,” says Rout. “What’s more, there are limited health resources for people who are homeless, and countless barriers preventing regular access.”

So, while life moves forward for northern Coloradans, Homeward Alliance resumes its work providing access to services and interventions that empower thousands of people to survive, move forward, and thrive.
No other word describes the Health District’s experience in 2020 quite as well as whirlwind. From the moment COVID-19 was first discovered in Colorado on March 5, like so many other organizations, our staff sprang into action to create new ways to help protect our community’s health.

We have assisted in many disasters before, but never had any of us experienced a threat so serious—one that could, if immediate action wasn’t taken, spread major illness and death like the wildfires we also experienced last year—and one that impacted the entire community, and lasted so long.

As the reality set in that in order to save lives, people would have to distance from one another, that individual’s incomes would be impacted, that this was no time for people to be without health insurance, and that anxiety would grow, we recognized that our services would be critical. Yet we would have to provide them in entirely new ways. And we soon learned that things would change constantly—requiring constant flexibility.

Almost immediately it became apparent that COVID was even more of a risk to some—calling for us to help develop new services. It is impossible to ‘shelter at home’ if you have no home. While consulting with the amazing organizations moving at lightning speed to set up a temporary, safer shelter for people experiencing homelessness—helping to create health and hygiene practices—we suddenly discovered a critically important gap.

There was no place for those who were unhoused and experiencing COVID-like symptoms to isolate (or to quarantine due to exposure). It was not safe or humane for the individual, nor was it safe for the community. By mid-March, our employees were pouring themselves into creating and staffing safe locations for Isolation/Recovery and Quarantine for those experiencing homelessness—helping to create health and hygiene practices—we suddenly discovered a critically important gap.

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ome Health District staff began 2020 doing the jobs they were trained for only to end up serving the community in ways they never could have imagined as they helped respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among those were staff from several different programs who helped make sure that one of the community’s most vulnerable populations was not forgotten in the midst of the pandemic.

The Health District team joined partners from Homeward Alliance and other community groups in the day-to-day operation of a temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness that was established at Northside Aztlan Community Center. They oversaw separate areas where visitors could isolate, recover, or quarantine (IRQ), depending on their COVID-19 status. Plans and tasks changed frequently as needs evolved, covering everything from screening for symptoms to organizing hand-washing stations.

“There were no manuals for this. There was no chapter in a textbook that any of us got during our education that told us how to do what we were doing,” says Health District Medical Director James Stewart, who, along with Community Impact Team Director Brian Ferrans, oversaw medical operations at the shelter and subsequent IRQ locations.

Isolation, recovery, and quarantine care later moved to a residential facility where up to 25 people could be accommodated at one time. As COVID cases surged in December, efforts shifted yet again, this time to a Loveland hotel that provided greater capacity. Each change in venue brought new challenges, but staff never lost sight of how important their work was for the people in their care.

“The alternative was that they could be sick with COVID out on the street,” Ferrans says.

Another group of Health District staff redeployed to help the community in different ways after the pandemic put a sudden halt to their in-person services. Nurses from Heart Health Promotion joined with staff from Research and Evaluation to assist the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment with COVID-19 contact tracing.

Finally, the Research and Evaluation team seized an opportunity to help the community better understand local impacts of the pandemic. Staff contacted respondents from its recently completed Community Health Survey and asked how COVID-19 had affected them. More than 1,500 county residents responded, offering insights into how the pandemic was affecting their work, income, emotional health, substance use, and other factors. (See results at healthdistrict.org/2020-covid-19-supplemental-survey.)

Connections offers answers, options, and support to help individuals take the next step—the right step—toward mental health and freedom from substance misuse. Connections includes a team called Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) that works specifically with ages 0-24 and their families. Connections served over 4,500 individuals in 2020, many with more severe symptoms than seen in previous years—and staff reported an increase in whole families needing support.

Shifting to telehealth and working remotely meant a new process for delivering therapy and other services that was secure, HIPAA-compliant, and confidential. The last piece was probably the toughest since two-thirds of the team are parents with kids doing remote schooling, so finding a quiet spot with no disruptions wasn’t always easy, says Michelle Clark, Connections clinical supervisor and a mom.

Connections also expanded its hours from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays to 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., 7 days a week, with callers connected to SummitStone Health Partners’ crisis line at night.

As the pandemic dragged on, immediate emotional support was seen as critical to those struggling with fears of getting sick, social isolation, loss of employment, juggling online schooling, concerns about increased substance use, and more. So Connections worked with local partners to create, market, and fund a “warm line” available 24/7 for callers throughout Larimer County who needed someone to listen and offer emotional support.

“The team rallied and did whatever was required at any given time to meet the community’s needs,” Clark says.
Dental professionals know to expect the unexpected, but the global pandemic brought constantly changing regulations and safety protocols that pushed the Family Dental Clinic staff to make almost daily adjustments. Committed to ensuring the community had access to dental care and advice, the clinic first shifted to emergent care while also giving patients the option to talk to dentists over the phone for guidance and avoid an unnecessary trip.

The clinic provides quality free and low-cost dental care to people in northern Larimer County who do not have dental insurance, and accepts Health First Colorado (Medicaid) and CHP+. Sliding fees are also available to those who qualify. In 2020, over 1,900 individuals visited the clinic for in-person care.

“We had patients that were very grateful that we offered them the chance to speak directly to a dentist, to ease their concerns without having to risk their health if the issue didn’t require immediate care,” says Dana Turner, dental services director for the Family Dental Clinic. The phone guidance also helped some people to stabilize their situation and manage without going to the ER when COVID-19 community spread was high.

A new filtration system was installed in the clinic and staff quickly adapted to the extra cleaning and disinfecting, screening, PPE, and physical distancing required to help keep patients and staff safe. Additionally, employee shifts were scheduled to allow for back-up staffing in case someone couldn’t come to work, which required flexibility from everyone. Strict precautions continued as the clinic opened up to serve more people, Turner says.

Once the clinic re-opened for comprehensive care, many patients told the dental team that they were happy to finally get their overdue dental work done. That’s a good thing because the condition of teeth or oral issues can change dramatically in a year or more, and small problems can become big ones. The Family Dental Clinic’s Dr. Rob Garland says, “Cavities don’t go away on their own. Gingivitis doesn’t magically disappear. One of the biggest risks with untreated dental disease is infections that can cause pain, yes, but if it progresses far enough can enter your bloodstream and affect your overall health.”

People who have put off dental care should feel confident to return and not wait any longer, concludes Dr. Justyna Aspiazu of the Family Dental Clinic. “Sometimes we can’t help missing an appointment, especially with the pandemic, but with updated infection control and vaccines it’s important to resume these exams and cleanings because they exist to keep patients healthy and happy.”

Adding to the crisis for some was the inability to pay for their prescriptions. Prescription Assistance is an arm of Larimer Health Connect that helps those with limited incomes fill their prescriptions through vouchers, manufacturer assistance programs, and navigating lower-cost sources. More people reached out with immediate needs compared to past years, and many of them were between coverage plans and experiencing homelessness, says Ann Martin, program lead for Prescription Assistance.

In a year filled with layoffs and fears about the spread of COVID, having health insurance coverage became an urgent need for many people in Larimer County. The Larimer Health Connect team rose to the challenge, using virtual appointments to help hundreds of people enroll in an affordable plan and ease their minds.

Larimer Health Connect is a free service that helps people find the best options for health insurance to meet their family’s needs and budget. Trained staff provide impartial assistance with new, free, and lower-cost health insurance plans—including plans from the Connect for Health Marketplace, Health First Colorado (Medicaid), and CHP+.

While staff met remotely with most customers over video, individuals without a computer or internet access were offered in-person appointments, following proper protocols to ensure safety.

The team saw a big increase in people who had experienced a job loss or loss of income due to shut downs and were looking for budget-friendly insurance plans that would still provide the healthcare coverage they needed during uncertain times. The program served 1,937 households in 4,556 encounters in 2020, including many repeat customers during Open Enrollment.

The rapid spread of the virus also led some who were without insurance to seek assistance. “We had several calls from people who said their motivation to apply for health insurance was the potential need for COVID-19 testing and treatment and that close friends or family had tested positive,” says Rosie Duran, Larimer Health Connect program coordinator.

Let us help you get covered!
Throughout 2020, improving the health of our community required fortitude and perseverance, as well as strengthened existing and new partnerships centered on a commitment to helping others. It’s with profound gratitude that we recognize our donors and partners who advanced our mission and those that supported services to address increased and unforeseen community health needs due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Together, we touched the lives of over 10,337 individuals by:

- Helping people to quit tobacco and control their blood pressure, both risk factors for severe COVID complications
- Ensuring that those experiencing homelessness in our community had a safe place to isolate, quarantine, and recover from COVID-19
- Providing children, adolescents, families, and adults with emotional support when they needed it most, helping them to find answers, options, and resources for mental health and substance use challenges
- Supporting individuals and families to enroll in health insurance programs at a time when so many people in our community faced employment challenges
- Ensuring safe access to dental care services for individuals living on low incomes and/or living with disabilities
- Helping individuals to understand, complete, and share their advance care directives, specifying medical treatment and health-care decision-makers if they were to become seriously ill or injured
- Helping people to quit tobacco and control their blood pressure, both risk factors for severe COVID complications

### Programs

#### Connections

**Answers, options, and support for adult mental health and substance use.**

425 W. Mulberry, #101 • 970-221-5551

**Child, Adolescent, and Young Adult Connections (CAYAC) Team**

A service of the Connections program that focuses on answers, options, and support for youth and families. Early identification of areas of concern, assessment, and guidance for counseling, or other treatment of mental health and substance use for youth and families.

425 W. Mulberry, #112 • 970-221-3308

#### Community Impact Team

Organizes community efforts to make long-term, systemic changes that will significantly improve the health of the community, with a focus on mental health.

970-224-5209

#### Family Dental Clinic

Dental services for adults and children.

202 Bristlecone • 970-416-5331

#### HealthInfoSource

Your source for mental health and substance use resources and information in Larimer County.

144 N. Mason, Unit 7 • 970-472-0444

#### Heart Health Promotion

Nurse screening and consultation for cholesterol, blood pressure, and glucose. The Improving Blood Pressure Program offers sessions with an RN to learn self-monitoring techniques and how to discuss results with a medical provider.

970-224-5209

#### Integrated Primary Care/Mental Health Program

Providing behavioral health care in safety net clinics.

970-224-5209

#### Larimer Advance Care Planning Team

Free assistance and support to help people complete and share their advance care directives.

120 Bristlecone • 970-482-1909

#### Larimer Health Connect

Helping people find the best options for health insurance to meet their family’s health needs and budget; prescription assistance.

144 N. Mason, Unit 7 • 970-472-0444

#### Quit Tobacco Program

Support and resources to quit smoking, vaping, and/or chewing with the help of certified Tobacco Treatment Specialists.

120 Bristlecone • 970-224-5209

### 2020 Revenues, Total

- **$11,872,642**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program/Service</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lease Revenue</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Revenue</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Property &amp; Specific Ownership Taxes</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grants &amp; Partnerships</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
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<td>Other Revenue</td>
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### 2020 Expenditures, Total

- **$14,401,882**

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<td>Resource Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment, Research, &amp; Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Connections/CAYAC</td>
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### 2020 Expenditures, by Program

- **$10,454,694**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health Access (Larimer Health Connect) Prescription Assistance &amp; Policy</td>
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<td>Integrated Mental Health, Substance Use, &amp; Primary Care Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heart Health Promotion &amp; Quit Tobacco Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated Mental Health, Substance Use, &amp; Primary Care Services</td>
<td>30.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental Services</td>
<td>30.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HealthInfoSource</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Health District 2020 Annual Report

O ur services are open to those who live within the Health District, including Fort Collins, Laporte, Wellington, Livermore, Red Feather Lakes, and Timnath. The Health District serves residents of ALL INCOMES, though some services are specifically for families who have low incomes and no health insurance. Most services have a fee, but sliding fees are available to make good health affordable for all.
Struggling to recover from COVID chaos?

Financial relief is here

You or a friend or loved one may be eligible for economic assistance due to COVID-19 losses that you weren’t aware existed. Several new federal and state programs are available to help individuals with rent and health insurance coverage and to aid small businesses in getting back on their feet. Check out the options below and how to access them.

Housing security

Families and individuals in Larimer County with a household income below 80 percent of area median income who were impacted by the pandemic may be eligible for funds to pay back rent, as well as the current month’s rent, two future months’ rent, and utility assistance, according to Kelly Evans, executive director of Neighbor to Neighbor. Households with undocumented individuals also qualify, she adds.

Neighbor to Neighbor (N2N) provides stable housing and helps people in northern Colorado stay in their homes through rent and mortgage assistance. Between April 2020 and April 2021, N2N distributed nearly $7.5 million in emergency rental assistance through local grants; city, county, state, and federal funding; and individual and corporate donations for households in Larimer and Weld counties.

Please note that no COVID-related mortgage assistance is available through N2N.

Steps to take now:

Landlords and individuals can apply for rent or utility help through Neighbor to Neighbor at n2n.org/rent-assistance or call 970-829-0296 to reach a client assistance coordinator.

Mortgage assistance may be available by calling Colorado Housing Connects at 1-844-926-6632 or go to coloradohousingconnects.org.

Health insurance

The federal American Rescue Plan expands financial help for health insurance, making health coverage offered through Connect for Health Colorado (the state health insurance marketplace) more affordable. Premium discounts and coverage is now available to state residents of all income ranges, uninsured people, those who lost coverage during the pandemic, and those currently enrolled in other individual insurance plans.

The American Rescue Plan eliminates the threshold for household income eligibility for subsidies and caps the amount of income you have to pay for premiums at 8.5 percent of household income. In addition, anyone who has received at least one week of unemployment benefits beginning in 2021 may qualify for $0 or low-cost premium options for the remainder of the year.

“When the American Rescue Plan, we’re able to provide relief to many more families who are figuring out their health insurance options at a time when the need for coverage has never been greater,” says Kevin Patterson, CEO of Connect for Health Colorado.

Enrollment is open until at least Sunday, August 15. Coverage for all plans begins the first day of the month following plan selection.

Note:

Colorado is NOT auto-adjusting the accounts of those who currently purchase their insurance through Connect for Health Colorado. Customers must log in to their accounts to confirm or update their information in order to receive any premium reductions they may be due; otherwise, any savings would come to them in lump sum payments when filing their 2021 taxes.

Steps to take now:

Go to Connect for Health Colorado—connectforhealthco.com—to learn more and to update your account.

Need help?

Call Larimer Health Connect at 970-472-0444 to schedule a free appointment with a health coverage guide to get your questions answered and review all of your options.

Small business help

Larimer County small businesses still have several options for getting financial assistance to weather the long-term effects of the pandemic.

Colorado Loans to Increase Mainstreet Business Economic Recovery (CLIMBER) is a new statewide loan fund that will provide up to $250 million in working capital to small businesses through 2023. It is a public-private partnership with banks and other funders across the state.

Loans of up to $500,000 will be available with below-market interest rates to businesses with 5 to 99 employees that were negatively impacted by COVID-19.

An excellent local resource for small businesses is nocorecovers.com. It is the one-stop shop for the latest information on all the potential COVID-19 funding sources available.

Steps to take now:

Small businesses can find a participating CLIMBER lender at climber-colorado.com.
New screening guidelines

One recommended test that some of us put off is a colonoscopy. Colorectal cancer is one of the most common cancers in both men and women, but the colonoscopy exam is the one test we have that can actually stop cancer, Simmons points out. That’s because the doctor can remove any polyps found during the procedure to prevent colorectal cancer from developing.

New guidelines mean more people will be asked to schedule their first colonoscopy before their 50th birthday. The American Cancer Society recently updated the colorectal cancer screening recommendation to age 45. In the past, 45 was the age recommended for Blacks because of their higher risk as a group, and before age 50 for those with a family history of colon cancer. An initial colonoscopy was advised for everyone else at age 50.

“There are 18,000 colon cancers diagnosed each year for men and women under the age of 50 in the U.S., so I was happy to see the new guidelines,” Simmons says. “I tell people they just have to get through the prep, then it’s a nice nap because you’re asleep during the colonoscopy itself. It’s absolutely worth it.”

Catch up on immunizations

Since the COVID-19 pandemic dragged on for over a year, many people have fallen behind on their shot schedule. Infants and children need their immunizations to keep them safe from diseases like measles, whooping cough, and polio. If you have young children 5 and under, it’s especially important to follow the timeline for their primary series of vaccines, Simmons stresses. Most childcare providers require kids to be vaccinated before enrollment, as well as schools (with some exceptions allowed).

For adults who put off other vaccines when they were getting their COVID-19 shots, the latest recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is that you don’t have to wait. Some people delayed their first shingles vaccine or waited longer than the recommended 2 to 6 months between their first and second dose during the pandemic, for instance. If you’ve waited, it is recommended that the second dose of Shingrix, the shingles vaccine, be done as close to 6 months after the first one as possible. You are still protected, according to the CDC, so go ahead and schedule it no matter where you are in your COVID-19 vaccination plan.

Also, mammograms can still be done even if your lymph nodes may be enlarged after a COVID-19 shot. Just tell the technician doing the mammogram that you’ve recently received a COVID-19 vaccine and they will take that into consideration.

Pay attention to your teeth

Trips to the dentist were also often put on hold over the last year. A dental cleaning, though, is about more than shining up your pearly whites—the condition of your teeth and oral issues are examined and can change dramatically in a year, says Dr. Justyna Aspiazu of the Health District of Northern Larimer County’s Family Dental Clinic.

“Cavities can become bigger and lead to a root canal or an extraction. A small lesion on the tongue, which could have been removed, may become malignant, grow, and spread cancer to other parts of the body,” Aspiazu warns.

And according to an American Dental Association survey, dentists around the country reported a greater than 60 percent increase in stress-related conditions in the teeth such as clenching and grinding which leads to headaches, muscle fatigue, and fractured teeth.

For all of these reasons, now is a good time to visit your dentist and get a current picture of your dental health, Aspiazu says. The Family Dental Clinic is seeing patients for routine care as well as emergencies with strict cleaning protocols in place. Call 970-416-5331 to see if you are eligible for services.

As we return to more normal daily lives, it pays to make time for our health. Writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir said it best: “Don’t gamble on the future, act now, without delay.”

Schedule affordable health care*

UCHealth Family Medicine Center – Fort Collins  
970-495-8800, uchealth.org

Salud Family Health Center – Blue Spruce  
970-484-0999, saludclinic.org (Additional locations in Fort Collins and northern Colorado)

Poudre School District Health and Wellness Center  
(open by appointment during the summer) - Enroll at 970-488-4950 or hwcenter.org

Health District’s Heart Health Promotion Program  
Registered nurses provide free cholesterol and blood pressure screenings and education for Health District residents – For appointments and upcoming clinic dates/locations call 970-224-5209 or go to healthdistrict.org/heart for more information

Health District’s Family Dental Clinic  
Call to see if you qualify at 970-416-5331 or go to healthdistrict.org/services/family-dental-clinic for more information

*Always check on COVID-19 safety requirements before your appointment
Free community cholesterol testing resumes

After a more than one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health District’s cholesterol testing service is back in business and coming to a convenient community location near you.

The service, part of the Health District of Northern Larimer County’s Heart Health Promotion Program, restarted in July and will ramp up the number of clinics it offers in September for National Cholesterol Education Month.

For more than 20 years, the tests have helped thousands of northern Colorado residents uncover hidden heart disease risks or monitor known risk factors as people work to manage those in conjunction with their health-care provider.

The testing clinics, offered regularly at a variety of community and worksite locations by registered nurses Cheri Nichols and Julie Abramoff, measure total cholesterol, LDL, HDL, triglycerides, blood pressure, and blood glucose levels and include a personalized consultation. The one-on-one appointments provide an opportunity for people to ask questions, and participants come away with a better understanding of their test results, as well as information and resources to take the next steps toward improving heart health.

“Screenings are so important because they help us find people who are at risk and encourage next steps, including treatment discussions with providers and a healthy lifestyle, to avoid complications that can occur when serious progressive illnesses like diabetes and hypertension go untreated,” Cheri Nichols says. “It’s really why the Health District offers cholesterol testing and blood pressure screening as part of our Heart Health Promotion Program.”

In addition to the community cholesterol tests, the Heart Health Promotion Program also has the Improving Blood Pressure Program, a one-on-one consultation service to help people understand, monitor, and manage their blood pressure.

Both programs are free for Health District residents. For a list of upcoming cholesterol clinic dates and locations, see page 8.

Caring for Colorado grant supports vaccine equity

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, people experiencing homelessness have faced a unique set of challenges in protecting themselves, as they are often at a higher risk for getting severe illness due to underlying health risks. They also face barriers to meeting social distancing guidelines within shelter settings, as well as challenges to accessing testing and medical treatment when needed.

In partnership with Homeward Alliance, the Health District received $19,850 from the Caring for Colorado Foundation to promote COVID-19 vaccine equity in our community.

As a state designated COVID-19 vaccination provider, the Health District staff partnered with Homeward Alliance to enhance vaccine access for the unhoused and people experiencing low incomes and at risk for housing instability.

Funding will support outreach and education on COVID-19 vaccinations to reduce vaccine hesitancy and will increase vaccine access by addressing the barriers individuals face in receiving their vaccinations.
Cholesterol tests are back!

After a pandemic hiatus, cholesterol tests are back this summer with safety precautions in place. 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 25 minutes and are available 8-10:30 a.m. Appointments required; call 970-224-5209. Please remember to wear a mask.

Free, 5-10 minute walk-in blood pressure reading and consultation with a registered nurse. Checks are the second Monday of each month, 10 a.m.-12 p.m. at the Fort Collins Senior Center, 1200 Raintree. No appointment necessary. Please remember to wear a mask.

Cholesterol testing FREE for all Health District residents!

**COVID-19 Vaccination**

Every Wednesday, 2-6 p.m., through August*

- Moderna. 1st or 2nd dose.
- Ages 18+ • Free • No ID required
- Health District offices, 120 Bristlecone Dr., Fort Collins
- Help with free transportation if needed.
- We’re sorry, but we cannot vaccinate anyone who has previously had a severe allergic reaction (food, drugs, or vaccine).

Schedule online at healthdistrict.org/vaccine or by calling 970-221-7144.

Questions about the COVID-19 vaccine?

We have answers! Come to one of our Wednesday vaccination clinics and chat one-on-one with a nurse or physician, or call us with your questions at 970-221-7144, Mondays, 9 a.m.-noon or Wednesdays, 1-6 p.m. Leave a message at other times and we’ll call you back.

*Subject to availability. Please confirm by checking healthdistrict.org/vaccine or calling 970-221-7144.

Still uninsured?

You have until August 15 to enroll in a 2021 health plan
- We’ll help you find a plan that meets your needs and budget.
- No deadline to enroll in Health First Colorado (Medicaid) or CHP+

Free, local help

970-472-0444
larimerhealthconnect.org

Death Happens:

**What to know and expect to have a kind and compassionate experience**

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