TRI-COUNTY HEALTH NETWORK

In 2014, The Colorado Trust launched the **Health Equity Advocacy (HEA) Strategy**, a multi-phased investment in building a strong and diverse field of health equity advocates to ensure equitable health outcomes for Colorado's most vulnerable. A centerpiece of the second phase of this strategy (2015-2016) included providing financial and capacity-building support to a cohort of direct service, community organizing, and policy advocacy organizations across the state. This support was designed to strengthen individual and collective capacity to "seed" an emerging health equity advocacy field in Colorado.

The following is part of a **"Seeds of the Field"** series of profiles of each of the 17 cohort members funded in the second phase of the HEA Strategy.

Seeding a Health Equity Advocacy Field: The Story of Tri-County Health Network

[Tri-County Health Network](#) (TCHNetwork) is a vertical network of healthcare providers committed to improving the cost, quality, and coordination of care in the rural counties of San Miguel, Ouray, and Montrose in southwest Colorado. TCHNetwork increases the capacity of clinics and organizations within its network by promoting innovative healthcare programming, improving reporting and data analysis, and supporting the implementation of best practices. Nearly 50% of those who live in TCHNetwork's coverage area reside in geographically isolated areas that lack access to public transportation or reliable phone and internet service. Many patients routinely travel more than an hour and a half to receive care. Resort economies in towns like Telluride

create health disparities between the wealthy and a service-industry workforce that includes a sizable immigrant population. During the Phase 1 planning process, TCHNetwork identified six core goals it planned to address to create a foundation for building a health equity advocacy field: 1) raising public awareness of health inequities and health disparities; 2) thinking regionally, in contrast to focusing on a single county or town; 3) assigning equal value to the needs of its smaller "periphery towns" and those of the larger economic centers; 4) designing population-based interventions guided by reliable data and incorporating input from citizens; 5) engaging in participatory, broad-scale, and long-term strategies; and 6) building both political and public will to address health inequities and local disparities.

TCHNetwork's Phase 2 Work

TCHNetwork leverages rural community voices and experiences to affect policy change in the health equity advocacy field. Early on in Phase 2, it received HEA technical assistance funds to organize a Digital Storytelling workshop for the HEA cohort. Digital Storytelling is a methodology used to elicit personal narratives on video that can then be shared broadly to promote social change. Through this training, the HEA cohort learned how to script, shoot, edit, and present their stories to various audiences. TCHNetwork also became a trained facilitator of Digital Storytelling so that they could instruct other service providers who engage in health equity advocacy work. Digital Storytelling helps organizations reinforce an emerging narrative – health inequities affect the day-to-day lives of Coloradans.

TCHNetwork has been finding ways to break down silos within and across health systems, work across disciplines, and improve health equity. TCHNetwork formed a Behavioral Health Advisory Committee with representatives from the school board, area non-profits, local clinics, and mental health professionals. The committee has begun to work collaboratively and across systems to identify common health equity goals within the field of behavioral health. TCHNetwork's Executive Director Lynn Borup elaborates,

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– Lynn Borup, Executive Director

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To overcome health inequities for the region's growing Latinx population, TCHNetwork spearheaded the creation of a Latino Advocacy Committee. Composed of Latinx professionals, this group fights to remove barriers that prevent immigrants and their children from accessing the services they need. The committee has also been able to advocate at the local level for increased resources to combat health problems that disproportionately impact the Latinx community.

Laying the Groundwork for an Emerging Field

TCHNetwork continues to seek new opportunities to incorporate health equity advocacy into their core programming. TCHNetwork is currently developing a comprehensive needs assessment focused on the social determinants of health of the region's largely Latinx immigrant community. TCHNetwork also plans to provide technical assistance to its nine network members to update their organizations' mission and vision to better reflect their commitment to health equity.

TCHNetwork Staff

TCHNetwork recently added a Regional Health Coordinator (RHC) position to expand their advocacy efforts into three new counties: Delta, Hinsdale, and Gunnison. The RHC works with healthcare providers, community-based organizations, patient advocates, and public health agencies to help identify their community's unique public health needs and facilitate local and regional efforts to develop programs that effectively address health inequities. The RHC will work with other coordinators across the state to share best practices and lessons learned as part of building a health equity advocacy field.

In addition to gathering qualitative data through Digital Storytelling and engaging community leaders, TCHNetwork has also dedicated resources to utilize quantitative data by hiring a data analyst to collect and analyze data from their network members and healthcare systems. Once gathered and analyzed, TCHNetwork reviews data reports with

network members to identify trends and improve patient care. These reports arm network members with the ability to recognize health inequities. TCHNetwork, guided by reliable data on community-specific patterns and incorporating input from citizens, has Been building their internal capacity to be a stronger network and regional anchor in building a health advocacy field in Colorado.

Looking Forward

Beginning in 2017, the 17 HEA cohort members, including TCHNetwork, are launching a new phase of work focused on further cultivating the seeds collectively planted across the state in Phase 2. Ultimately, guided by common values and empowered communities, cohort members will be aligning their change efforts to dismantle structural and racial inequities and build equitable health systems so that all Coloradans can thrive. TCHNetwork is poised to serve as a leader in this collective endeavor.

Highlights: Tri-County Health Network's Seeds of the Field

– Leadership of local efforts to create a new narrative of health equity advocacy

– More collaboration across system network partners and reduction of silos

– Greater advocacy and equity capacity of TCHNetwork as an anchor organization in San Miguel and Ouray Counties, and the West End of Montrose County