

Community Profile: **OTERO COUNTY**

Rocky Ford, located in the Arkansas Valley in Southeastern Colorado, is well known for its agriculture, particularly its famed melons and sugar beet production.¹ Rocky Ford is in Otero County, home to 18,333 residents.²

Educational services, health care and social assistance are the three largest industries in Otero County. The median household income is \$32,149, compared to the state's \$55,222.²

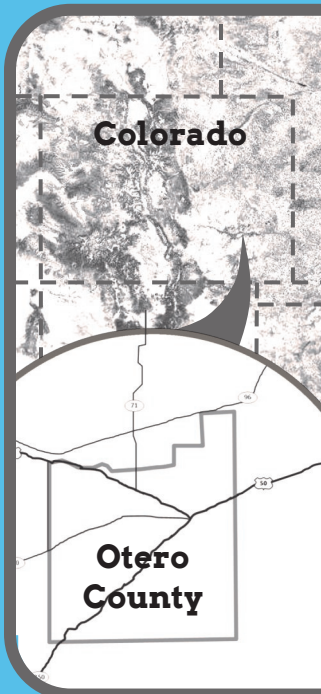
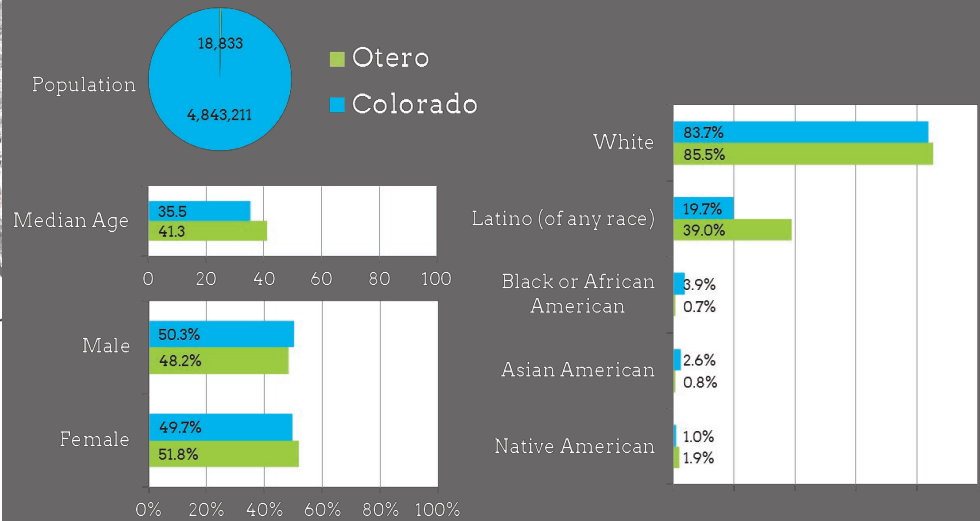


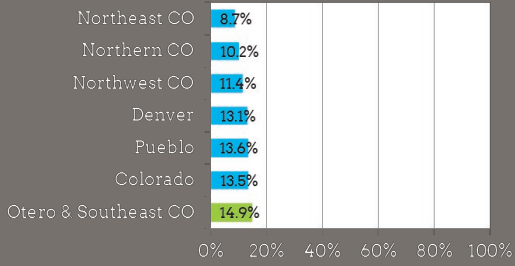
Figure 1.
Demographic statistics, Otero County, CO, 2005 - 2009²



Colorado HealthStory launched in 2011 collecting stories from residents about their experiences with health in Rocky Ford, as well as throughout Otero County. From these stories, several common health experiences became apparent, including access to care and system navigation challenges, mental health and illness, healthy living, challenges from a depressed economy and cultural orientations to health. Data shows that many Otero County residents share these common health experiences.

Access to care & system navigation

Figure 2. Uninsurance Rates by Region, 2008-2009



Ken & Charlette



"We had to find another insurance company, and then I couldn't find anybody that would take me because I had a preexisting condition. Finally we found one HMO that would accept me. There are a lot of things that you could get on Medicare that I can't get because I'm in an HMO. Somebody that's on Medicare, I understand anyway could get oxygen and the Medicare would pay for the oxygen. Well, the HMO will pay for it, but I have a co-payment."

Jerry & John



Jerry: *"I deal with depression, because I take care of everybody; I take care of him; I've always had to take care of everybody."*

John: *"It's hard to see him off of his meds. I want to help him so bad, but I can't."*

Many Coloradans struggle to successfully navigate our complex health care system, bouncing from system to system depending on how, where and from whom they are receiving care. Navigating the various systems, programs, plans, and providers is difficult and can create barriers to care.

In 2008-2009, nearly 14.9 percent of Otero County residents, or approximately 2,732 individuals, did not have health insurance. The rate of uninsured in Otero County is higher than the overall rate of uninsured in Colorado (See Figure 2)³. Additionally an estimated 12.7 percent of Otero County residents are underinsured, which means they have insurance but often have trouble affording their out-of-pocket health care expenses.⁴

Coloradans living in rural areas are more likely to be underinsured and uninsured due to the high number of self-employed farmers, ranchers and small business owners, as well as those working in low-wage positions in the service industry. Those employees that are offered insurance typically have limited options for carriers and face high premiums.⁴

Mental health & illness

Like many parts of Colorado, and across the country, mental health is a concern in Otero County. According to national measurements, annually about 1 in 5 people experience a mental health issue; therefore over 3,667 residents in Otero County are likely affected by a mental health issue within any given year. Taken as a whole, mental illness costs the United States over \$300 billion annually in disability benefits, health care expenditures, and loss of wages.⁵

Healthy living

Overweight and obese children suffer from higher rates of depression, have greater difficulty with their relationships with peers, dissatisfaction with their bodies, eating disorders and experience a poorer quality of life than their normal weight counterparts. According to the Colorado Children's Campaign, children in Otero County are at a moderate to high risk for obesity. Overweight and obese adolescents are much more likely to be obese as adults, and the estimated health care costs for obese adults are 36 percent higher than for the non-obese.⁶

Challenges from a depressed economy

Otero County's population has decreased over the last ten years, while Colorado's population has increased by 18%.⁷ Due to a declining employment base and low wage paying jobs, Otero County has a higher rate of people living below the federal poverty level. As compared to the 12 percent rate across Colorado, 22 percent of people in Otero County were in poverty between 2005 and 2009.²

However, the graduation rate in Otero County is 80 percent, which is higher than the state's average of 77 percent.⁸ Rural areas in Colorado tend to have higher graduation rates than their urban and suburban counterparts due to the larger quantity of extra-curricular activities and extended learning activities.

Lisa



"Before we moved to La Junta, my daughter was missing a lot of school, she was really overweight. She was failing; she was getting D's, F's, she wasn't going to school. We came to our current provider, and he put her on a plan. She lost weight, she was eating better – we were having healthy meals. Now she is down to a healthy weight. She feels really good about herself, her grades are all A's and B's. She has blossomed into a really great kid."

Kandi



There is a tremendous rate in the valley of alcoholism, drug abuse, and it's a problem throughout the valley. I think every other issue we face is directly related to them. I'm sure that in talking to providers they're going to say they ended up having to provide care for more, and more, and more, and more with issues. And the really difficult ones, it is hard to get what's needed. Sometimes you forget, somebody doesn't have that two dollar co-pay if you have no money and no job. You might as well be asking for two thousand. Crowley ranks right up there in the state for the lowest income. It gets by. With all of these cuts, what's already a difficult situation is going to become more difficult in the area. Because the people who are going to be impacted the most are the people who have the highest needs.

Nancy



"At the hospital, they don't always have interpreters to interpret to say what they need or why they're going or what's wrong with them. Sometimes the family is there not knowing what to do, because there is no translator. They call me to ask me to call the doctor, because they don't understand."

Cultural orientations to health

Among people at least five years old living in Otero County in 2005-2009, 20 percent spoke a language other than English at home. Of those, 94 percent spoke Spanish and 6 percent spoke some other language. Another 22 percent reported that they did not speak English "very well."² Failure to understand and manage social and cultural differences can result in negative health consequences.⁹

¹ Foster, Dick, Sowing the Seeds of Success, Colorado Millennium 2000, Denver Rocky Mountain News (Accessed Aug. 17, 2011).

² US Census Bureau, American FactFinder, 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Otero County, Colorado. **Estimates represent the average characteristics of population and housing between January 2005 and December 2009 and DO NOT represent a single point in time. The ACS is able to include estimates for smaller geographic areas with populations less than 20,000 by collecting data over five years.

³ Data Profile for Health Statistics Region (HSR) 6, Colorado Health Institute (March 2011).

⁴ The Magnitude of Underinsurance in Colorado Issue Brief, The Colorado Trust (2010).

⁵ US Department of Health and Human Services. Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General. National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health (1999).

⁶ Childhood Obesity in Colorado: A Growing Problem, Colorado Children's Campaign (2007).

⁷ Colorado Department of Local Affairs, State Demography Office (2009).

⁸ School Dropouts in Rural Colorado School Districts, Colorado Children's Campaign (2009).

⁹ Cultural Competence in Health Care: Emerging Frameworks and Practical Approaches, The Commonwealth Fund (2002).

Getting everyday Coloradans involved in the conversation about health in their community is critical, because those decisions are too important and too personal to be made only by someone else. Colorado HealthStory invites you to *Join The Conversation* and get involved in the health of your community.

Join the Conversation

Colorado HealthStory is working to create an appreciation of our shared experiences of health, one conversation at a time. It is a project of the Colorado Rural Health Center, the Colorado Coalition for the Medically Underserved and ClinicNET, and is funded by The Colorado Trust and the Colorado Health Foundation.



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