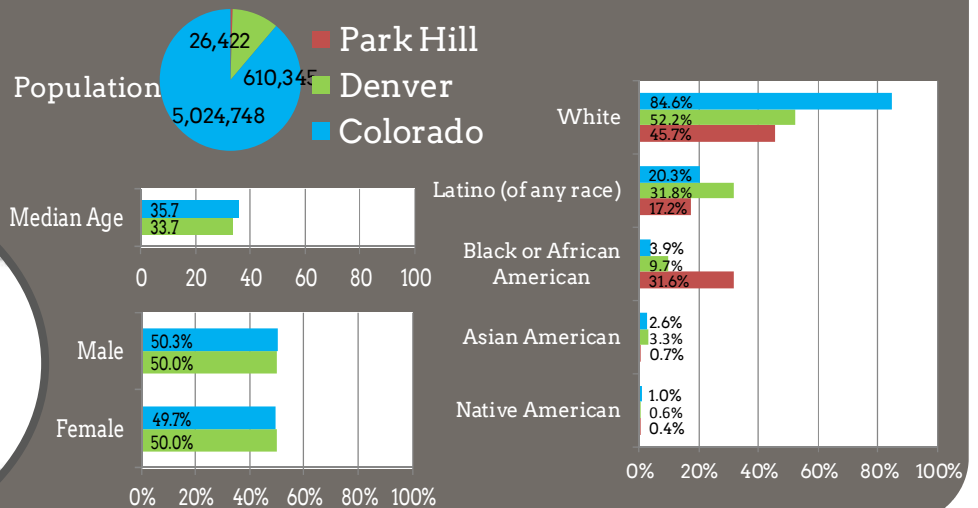


Community Profile: Park Hill

Denver’s South Park Hill, North Park Hill, and Northeast Park Hill (collectively referred to as “Park Hill”) are three of the city’s 77 defined neighborhoods. Park Hill is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in the city with its population being nearly one-third African American and nearly one-fifth Latino.¹



Figure 1.
Demographics of Park Hill, Denver, Colorado, 2009¹



Colorado HealthStory began collecting stories in Park Hill last year about residents’ experiences with health. From these stories an important narrative unfolded. Members of the Park Hill community have a strong culture of health and wellness and take health care matters into their own hands. Despite this personal accountability, there are high instances of chronic disease such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. In managing these chronic conditions, many Park Hill residents have formed strong relationships with their medical provider(s). These storytellers are not alone. Data shows that many neighborhood residents share common health experiences.

Manley



"Ten years ago, I weighed 50 pounds more, and I wasn't leading the greatest of lifestyles. My doctor told me that I better clean up my act. So I quit drinking, and then I picked up the physical exercise. I was teaching at the time and started riding my bike to work. I've lost 50lbs and I'm completely off the medication I used to take for 8 years for high blood pressure and high cholesterol.

I used to be a teacher and I saw the need with my students. Many of them were becoming obese; many of them were failing to take care of themselves. They just needed exercise, things to do, and they are cutting physical education in the schools so the need is even greater."

Health & Wellness

The Park Hill neighborhood is unique in its strong investment in health and wellness among its residents of all ages. Park Hill is home to the Bike Depot (which hosts the family bike ride), two recreation centers, and youth sports organizations like Denver City Lax.

Organizations like 2040 Partners for Health and the *be well* health and wellness initiative are working in Park Hill connecting neighbors and promoting healthy living. Additionally, the 9Health Fair hosted at the Montview Presbyterian Church, and the annual health summit put on by the Center for African American Health, enable residents to receive free and reduced cost preventive screenings.

Chronic Disease: Cardiovascular

Despite Park Hill's culture of health and wellness, many residents struggle with chronic diseases. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in Denver and Park Hill has one of the highest rates of cardiovascular disease deaths in the city.² The disease also disproportionately affects African Americans in Denver.² Unlike many chronic diseases, cardiovascular disease is largely preventable. Common risk factors for cardiovascular disease include tobacco use or exposure to secondhand smoke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and diabetes.

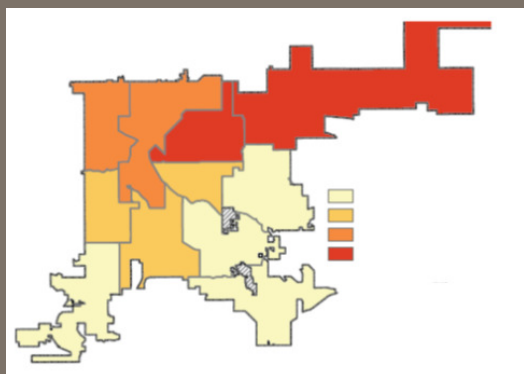


Figure 2.
Cardiovascular Disease Deaths, Denver 2010²
*Age-adjusted rate per 100,000



Chronic Disease: Diabetes and Cancer

Park Hill residents also struggle with diabetes and cancer. More than 23,000 Denver residents are living with diagnosed diabetes, with the highest rates in the western and northern parts of the city.² In Denver, African Americans and Hispanics are at a higher risk for diabetes-related deaths.²

Cancer is the second most common cause of death in Denver.² Other than skin cancer, the most common forms of cancer in Denver involve the prostate, breasts, lungs, and colon. Some of these most common types of cancer are preventable. Exposure to tobacco smoke is by far the leading cause of lung, throat, esophageal, and bladder cancers. Some cancers, like certain types of liver and cervical, can be prevented by vaccines. Lack of access to health care is associated with diagnosis of cancer at more advanced and less treatable stages.²

Positive Relationship with Health Care Providers

Many Park Hill residents expressed how a personal relationship with their provider was important to receiving quality care. This sort of relationship is often called a “health care home.” The staff at a health care home knows and understands each patient’s specific health needs over time. Although 24% of Northeast Park Hill residents and 10% of Park Hill residents were uninsured in 2008, many reported having a health care home.³ Patients with a sustained health care home have better satisfaction with their care, take advantage of more preventive care measures, and utilize the emergency department less frequently.⁴ Eighty-five percent of NE Park Hill, and 84% of Park Hill residents, said they had a particular doctor’s office, clinic, health center, or other place they frequented for care or advice.³

Mary



“When I first saw my gynecologist I had no clue that it was ovarian cancer, I just knew something weird was going on in my abdomen to make it balloon up. I went through chemotherapy over the summer.

I really felt cared about. Which was really a wonderful thing, and I had never gone through anything quite like that before. I think it would have been a lot harder to go through that, especially that initial month, without friends or people who cared.

Today I’m fine, I feel great.”

Michele



“I had been experiencing severe back pain and didn’t know why, so finally I went to see a chiropractor. He said, “Okay you have a herniated disk, and in addition to that, let’s get you healthier.” He went one step beyond by telling me to have blood work done and also telling me, nutritionally, I needed to eat better and do all of these other things.

They seemed to care more about my well-being, that I wasn’t just another cookie-cutter kind of patient coming in with the same old complaint they probably hear day in and day out. And after a while I didn’t have any pain at all. I’m pain free. I’m cured.”

Karen



"I'm a clinical psychologist and I think it's really important that people be able to find a provider, whether it's for mental health or physical health, that they feel they can actually talk to and have a long-term relationship with.

The best thing they can do, if they find themselves assigned to somebody they don't feel comfortable with, is to be upfront about it. First, confront the provider, because sometimes the provider may just be busy, may not be aware of the impact of their behavior. You can say, 'I don't think you're hearing me and it's really important that I feel you're listening and hearing the whole story... and not just making a quick diagnosis and running out the door to the next patient.'"

In Park Hill it was common to hear accounts of patients advocating for their own needs, knowing their own bodies and not accepting that something couldn't be done to improve their health.

Providers in the Park Hill community also shared stories about the importance of engaged patients and self-advocacy within the health care system. Everyone has an important role to play in their own care, and patients need to continue being proactive in order to

¹ American Community Survey, 2009. US Census Bureau.

² Denver Public Health. "Health of Denver, 2011: A report on the health status of the residents of Denver, Colorado." February 2011.

³ Taking Neighborhood Health to Heart. Household survey results on health care access and health status neighborhood briefs: NE Park Hill and Park Hill. 2008.

⁴ Gill JM, Fagan HB, Townsend B, and Mainous AG 3rd. Impact of providing a medical home to the uninsured: evaluation of a statewide program. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*. 2005;

Getting everyday Coloradans involved in the conversation about health 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 be a part of improving health in 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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