

## Douglas County examining the future of public health services delivery effective 2023

*Fiscal analysis and services review underway to assess costs, governance and services delivery structure.*

As the year begins, just weeks after the swearing-in of two Commissioners, the Board of County Commissioners is expected to give additional direction to staff to take up discussion on one of the most important issues this County will face in the coming years -- pursuit of a new approach to delivering public health services to this front range county of approximately 370,000 residents.

Currently and through Dec. 31, 2022 – per an agreement with Tri-County Health – Douglas County is receiving public health services from Tri-County Health Department, a \$55 million agency serving more than 1.5 million people in Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas Counties, today the largest local public health agency in Colorado. This collaboration began 55 years ago when Douglas County had a population of approximately 5,000.

Today Tri-County offers more than 60 programs and services ranging from birth and death certificates, immunizations and health care referrals to restaurant inspections and infectious disease investigations. The agency has 11 offices in a 3,000 square mile area and a jurisdiction that includes 26 municipalities within three counties; 15 school districts with more than 360 public schools; 12 acute care hospitals, and three community mental health service providers.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed to the Board of Douglas County Commissioners that the time to evaluate and seek a different solution to public health services delivery of a County this size had come..... focused specifically on the public health needs of the Douglas County population and business community. The Commissioners are quick to note -- that what the service delivery model will look like and cost is in the beginning phase of being discovered.

“Having been named the healthiest County in Colorado for the past four consecutive years, the healthiest County in the U.S. in 2019 and second healthiest in 2020, data demonstrates that Douglas County’s public health needs are very different from the other two Counties served by the Tri-County Health Department,” said Douglas County Commissioner and Board Chair, Lora Thomas.

“Is it possible that by 2023 the delivery of public health services in Douglas County will look different, absolutely yes. And we are working closely with Tri-County Health in the process of determining the best approach to determining that outcome,” Thomas said.

“When the Board of Douglas County Commissioners rescinded their letter to withdraw from TCHD and indicated a new two -year timeframe, we knew exploration of the current structure and three-county relationship would need to occur in 2021,” said Jennifer Ludwig, Deputy Director of Tri-County Health Department. “We have a good working relationship with Douglas County and feel communication has been open and constructive. We’ve known all along that it was likely that Douglas County would pursue an assessment to evaluate what will best serve the public health needs of the County and we will remain in active dialogue with them and our other counties as that assessment evolves.”

Will the process include a thorough understanding of the present and future public health needs of Douglas County and the most cost-effective means to deliver those services?

“That’s what the fiscal analysis and services review is all about,” said Abe Laydon, Board Vice Chair. “We continue to work with Tri-County Health and other public health officials on solutions that will be consistent with the quality services Douglas County residents and our business community expect from Douglas County Government,” he said.

“It is our responsibility to protect the health, safety and welfare of those we serve, and public health services are among the most important we ensure,” said George Teal. “And will we proceed with exploring our options for public health services delivery working with our municipalities and other community leadership, absolutely yes,” said Teal.

“Without question, collaboration is one of the hallmarks of our success in Douglas County. Working together as a community, sharing resources, and combining talents will enhance the opportunities and likelihood for achieving success. I am convinced that working together with a common end goal in mind, we will succeed,” he said.

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