Behavioral Health Planner: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Health Disparities grant funds a behavioral health planner to assess and address mental health and substance use issues in our community. This position is currently working on a public health assessment and action plan, with a focus on the area of opioid use.

Care Coordination: The CDC Health Disparities grant funds three care coordinators who identify barriers to care and help individuals and families navigate social service and health care systems. The care coordinators support residents in gaining access to vital supports, services, and resources, including those related to mental and behavioral health. Resource navigation is an evidence-based strategy with significant impact as it relates to improving health outcomes for high-need populations. The care coordinators have received 27 mental and behavioral health referrals since the program launched in February 2022, successfully connecting clients to behavioral health resources for counseling and substance use treatment. Examples of these referrals include:

- A single mother who worked multiple jobs, and care coordinators assisted her in obtaining therapy for her two young children.
- A family struggling with addiction was connected to a team of behavioral health providers.

Through funding from this grant, EPCPH’s care coordination program has expanded to include community partner organizations employing health navigators to provide significant mental and behavioral health support to the community: Between Jan. 1 – June 30, 2023, a total of 336 clients have been actively engaged by navigators with Colorado Springs Fire Department Community Assistance, Referral & Education Services (CARES) program, and there have been 142 referrals to behavioral health and substance abuse treatment providers. These clients include high utilizers of 9-1-1 and emergency departments, individuals experiencing homelessness, the elderly and others with behavioral health needs.

Maternal Child Health (MCH): The MCH program provides trauma-responsive training to school staff to help them identify and address disruptive student behavior stemming from the impacts of trauma using an evidence-based training model developed by a world-renowned psychiatrist.
El Paso County Public Health
Efforts to Address Mental Health

Emergency Support Function - 8a: Emergency Support Function-8a (ESF #8a) provides crisis-counseling services to individuals and groups impacted by a disaster situation. Mental health professionals may be mobilized to offer home and community-based services. Under ESF-8a, EPCPH coordinates with the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), Diversus Health, the South-Central Healthcare Coalition (SCHCC), and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) for behavioral health support. EPCPH works with these partners to assure a coordinated approach for addressing short-term and long-term mental/behavioral health needs of the community. EPCPH also provides up-to-date resources and tools on the public-facing website and conducts public outreach to make sure the community is aware of available resources.

ESF-8a's role is to support and assist in the coordination of disaster behavioral health response to groups impacted by natural and human-caused disasters in the following ways:

- Provide program assistance and expertise as appropriate and in coordination with other departments and agencies.
- Provide public health employees and volunteers with training opportunities which enhance their skills and awareness of current methods of dealing with community disasters and emergencies. As an example, every EPCPH employee is required to take Mental Health First Aid training every three years.
- A full-scale public health response to disasters must address both the physical and mental health needs of affected groups. It is common for people to show signs of stress after a disaster, making it important to monitor both physical and emotional health. Although everyone reacts differently to disasters, some of those affected may suffer from serious mental or emotional distress. These individuals may develop or experience exacerbation of existing mental health or substance use problems. Providing a connection to resources or treatment in a timely manner can help reduce these negative outcomes. Because a large-scale emergency will overwhelm existing mental health response resources, psychological first aid—the provision of basic psychological care in the short-term aftermath of a traumatic event—is an important skill set that all public health workers should possess. The goal of psychological first aid is to address immediate post-disaster mental/behavioral health needs and promote safety, stabilize survivors of disasters and connect individuals to help and resources. Members of the EPCPH’s Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) team are trained in psychological first aid and work closely with behavioral health partners in the community to support behavioral health response efforts in a disaster.
- Equip employees with sufficient information on personal preparedness at home to reduce employee stress during a response.
- Provide just-in-time training as necessary for a particular disaster to increase confidence and decrease stress during their response.
Emergency Support Function - 8a (continued):

A recent example of EPCPH conducting ESF-8a activities includes the Club Q active shooter event in November 2022. The EPCPH Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) team was activated by the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management on Sunday, Nov. 20 to serve as the ESF-8 lead to the Club Q mass shooting event. Under this activation, EPR coordinated with behavioral health partners at the state and local level to provide support for community members impacted by the event. The Colorado Springs Police Department (CSPD) Victims Advocacy unit and FBI stood up a community expo following the tragic event and ESF-8 partners provided support through services and resources as needed/requested. Additionally, EPR worked with EPCPH leadership to provide internal staff with access to resources for support, as many team members worked closely with Club Q through their daily work. Additionally, EPR team members attended weekly meetings to discuss long-term support through the implementation of an intermediate and long-term resiliency center. An EPCPH EPR team member was also invited to attend a roundtable with community partners and the Assistant Secretary for Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to discuss current and future response efforts and community needs relating to the Club Q active shooter event.

Healthy Community Collaborative: The Healthy Community Collaborative (HCC) is a stakeholder group of community partners who have been working together since 2011 to implement strategies identified in the El Paso County Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). The HCC consists of over 60 representatives from schools, hospitals and health systems, non-profit organizations, city and county government agencies, public health, medical providers, and interested citizens.

The vision of the HCC is to increase life expectancy for all in El Paso County by removing barriers that prevent people from achieving optimal health. The HCC will achieve this vision by building an integrated system of community partnerships that puts practices into place that provide people the opportunity to have better health outcomes. The HCC has set two key goals for 2018-2022:

- **Goal 1**: To reverse the upward trend of obesity across the lifespan by addressing its root causes.
- **Goal 2**: To decrease the incidence of poor mental health and substance use and misuse.

Nurse Family Partnership (NFP): NFP is an evidence-based home visiting program for low-income, first-time parents from pregnancy through their child’s second birthday. Nationally, nearly half of all NFP clients report significant levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety. Because of this, NFP nurses receive in-depth training on the assessment of depression and anxiety. Parents enrolled in NFP are assessed for mental health challenges through the use of the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-9, Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)-7, and the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale. All EPCPH NFP clients are screened using one or more of these tools at program intake, at 36 weeks of pregnancy, and during infancy at three different points in time: 1-8 weeks, 4-6 months, and 12 months. Based on the results of these screenings and nursing assessments, the NFP nurse develops a plan of care which includes appropriate community referrals, continued monitoring, and activation of specific mental health interventions as indicated.
**Communities That Care (CTC):** CTC, an initiative of EPCPH, is a community-led coalition working to prevent youth substance use in the Fountain Valley by providing resources, education and opportunities for engagement. CTC aims to support a safe, inclusive and connected community for youth and families in the Fountain valley, providing education on why connectedness is imperative to youth mental health and wellness. CTC also created the Connect Me 2 FV program to increase opportunities, resources and programs for youth.

The FV-CTC coalition has had numerous accomplishments to date, including efforts to build community capacity, strengthen community collaboration, increase youth engagement and empowerment, and prevent substance use. In its first year of Drug-Free Communities (DFC) funding, FV-CTC collected over 440 pounds of unused or expired medications through participation in Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) Drug Take Back Days in an effort to safely dispose of prescription medications. CTC also distributed 400 prescription medication lockboxes to families in the Fountain Valley to encourage safe storage of medications. Both initiatives were part of targeted efforts to prevent opioid addiction from ever beginning in the home and to prevent unintentional poisonings.

**Women, Infants and Children (WIC):** In addition to providing nutrition and food assistance to pregnant and postpartum clients, WIC is also in a unique position to serve as a trusted component of their care team. Using the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) research shows about one in eight women who recently gave birth experience symptoms of postpartum depression. Recognizing that perinatal depression is a preventable cause of maternal morbidity and mortality, EPCPH’s WIC program regularly performs Public Health Questionnaire (PHQ)-2 depression screenings on clients during nutritional counseling appointments. In 2022, WIC staff performed 4,288 PHQ-2 screenings, resulting in 199 referrals to behavioral health resources. In addition, approximately 325 WIC clients had nutrition counseling appointments with WIC registered dietitians to address nutrition concerns that can be associated with a depression diagnosis. So far in 2023, WIC staff performed 2,456 PHQ-2 screenings, resulting in 121 referrals to behavioral health resources. In addition, over 350 WIC clients have nutrition counseling appointments with WIC registered dietitians to address nutrition concerns that can be associated with a depression diagnosis.

**Workforce training:** EPCPH equips its staff with tools to support the mental health of clients, colleagues and individuals in their personal lives through Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training. MHFA teaches individuals how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorders. The training gives individuals the skills they need to provide initial support to someone who may be developing a mental health or substance use problem and help connect them to the appropriate care. EPCPH requires all staff to become certified in MHFA within 90 days of hire.
**Tobacco Education and Prevention Partnership (TEPP):** In collaboration with Crossroads Turning Point Inc., TEPP has helped residents and patients quit tobacco by providing training and information regarding available cessation resources. Crossroads Turning Point Inc. is an agency that treats and supports individuals suffering from substance use and mental health disorders. While the Colorado QuitLine is a great free tobacco cessation resource, it can take up to two weeks before receiving nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). TEPP connected Crossroads Turning Point Inc. with the Behavioral Health and Wellness program at the University of Colorado - Anschutz to provide staff training and close the gap between the time when a patient wants to quit to when they can receive NRT. The goal of Crossroads Turning Point Inc. is to be able to provide NRT to their patients in the interim while they wait on services from the Colorado QuitLine.

In 2022, a trusted adult training was given to Academy District 20 by TEPP. The trusted adult training gives adults the tools to build strong connections with young people. Every young person should be able to have one trusted adult at home or at school. Trust is a valuable aspect to understanding, setting, and respecting boundaries with young people. Young people that can name a trusted adult inside their home, as well as outside their home, are less likely to bully or be bullied, suffer from depression, abuse substances, and are more likely to be able to turn toxic stress into tolerable stress.

**Partner Engagement Grant:** EPCPH values and supports the important work many entities in our community do for the health of our county. Recently, EPCPH received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for Strengthening U.S. Public Health Infrastructure, Workforce, and Data Systems. This funding is intended to help meet critical infrastructure and workforce needs and make strategic investments that will have lasting effects on the agency and community. The funding strategically strengthens the capacity and systems related to the workforce and public health foundational capabilities in the El Paso County community.

In March of this year, EPCPH provided grants for community work focused on overarching strategies complementing and reinforcing the overall community health system. Ten organizations received up to $36,000 to fund projects targeting access to care, food insecurity, behavioral health, suicide prevention, community education, and resource navigation.

The following are grant recipients:

1. Status Code 4, Inc. (SC4i)  
   Behavioral health support for first responders  
   $30,594
2. New Directions Agape Services  
   Food insecurity in Southeast Colorado Springs  
   $36,000
3. Hope Mountain Behavioral Health  
   Resource navigation targeting behavioral health  
   $36,000
4. Mindfulness and Positivity Project  
   Teacher training/resilience  
   $36,000
5. Trails and Open Space Coalition  
   Exercise awareness/access partner with Peak Vista and RISE  
   $9,853
6. Centro de la Familia  
   Behavioral health support/bilingual  
   $36,000
7. Project Angel Heart  
   Food insecurity  
   $36,000
8. Family Promise of COS (Interfaith Hospitality Network)  
   Homeless prevention services, partners with Hope Mountain BH  
   $36,000
9. Home Front Military Network  
   Resource navigation program for veterans  
   $31,553
10. Pikes Peak United Way  
    Resource navigation/life coach funded position  
    $36,000

**Total Award:** $324,000
Youth Suicide Prevention: Suicide prevention research shows that building relationships with others and feeling well-connected to the community increases a sense of belonging, enhances emotional well-being, and lowers levels of social isolation or loneliness. Since its inception in 2015, the Youth Suicide Prevention (YSP) Workgroup—spearheaded and convened by EPCPH—has had more than 80 community partners and residents come together to take collective action in support of youth mental health, well-being and suicide prevention. The YSP works with numerous multi-disciplinary partners, including school districts, parents, behavioral health providers, faith community leaders, hospitals, law enforcement, the El Paso County Coroner’s Office, El Paso County agencies, the Child Fatality Review Team co-led by EPCPH, and other organizations that work closely with youth. This year, the YSP Workgroup is championing the suicide prevention strategy of connection and promoting ways to connect youth to their communities and trusted adults. A trusted adult could be a parent, older sibling, relative, employer, teacher, coach, faith leader, or community member—anyone that a young person can reach out to for support. Being connected to a trusted adult is a proven strategy to foster positive growth, greater engagement in school and community activities, better overall health, and prevention of risky and threatening behaviors. This past year for Mental Health Awareness Month—recognized each year in May—EPCPH encouraged community members to explore ways to increase connections. Tangible tips and resources can be found here.

Additional Resources

- Call 1-844-493-TALK (8255) or text "TALK" to 38255
- Find Behavioral health administrator (BH) licensed providers in your area: www.ownpath.co
- Get connected to treatment:
  - If you or someone close to you needs help for substance use disorder, talk to your doctor or call the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) national help line at 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or go to SAMHSA’s behavioral health treatment services locater at FindTreatment.gov
- Safely dispose of unused or expired prescription medications
  - The Colorado Consortium for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention offers resources and locations for safe disposal of unused and expired medications at www.takemedsseriously.org/safe-disposal
  - The Drug Enforcement Agency’s (DEA) Diversion Control Administration offers a way to dispose of medications near your zip code or city.
- Educate yourself and your loved ones on the dangers of opioids, such as fentanyl. You can learn more about the signs of an overdose and what to do if you think someone is overdosing at www.cdc.gov/stopoverdose/fentanyl