It takes a community to care for our communities. At no time in El Paso County history has this been more vividly evident than over the past two years as our vast community quickly coalesced to respond to significant health crises, recover, and be ready for what might come next. In these pages, we highlight the incredible teamwork, ingenuity, and persistence demonstrated by our public health team and corps of community partners to address formidable challenges during 2019-2020.

Concurrent to ongoing response efforts beginning in fall 2018 to fight an outbreak of hepatitis A in El Paso County (which officially ended in April 2020), we learned about our first confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 6, 2020, and experienced our first death Friday, March 13. This marked the first death in both El Paso County and the state of Colorado. Many of us remember March 13 as one of the most concerning and roughest days, with the starting point of acceleration of the transmission of COVID-19 in our county. This is when many of us started to drink from a fire hose of issues daily, seven days a week from the time we woke up until the time we went to bed, with very few breaks. We kicked into a higher crisis response mode with continuously trying to increase communication and coordination and trying to find our battle rhythm. It has been an intense year, with us facing enormous stressors with much exhaustion. Yet, as physically and emotionally difficult as the year was, our community continued to rise to the challenge to help battle a public health crisis unlike anything we had seen before. I continue to be impressed with our local public health team.

Working together we are fulfilling our statutory obligation of leading the county’s pandemic, emergency/ crisis response. Many of us throughout the years have completed training in the National Incident Management System, facilitated by our Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response, and some of our new employees have gained the experience with on-the-job training. Prior to 2020, we had 158 full-time equivalents, and with the help of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding, we ramped up to 184 full-time equivalents, approximately 30 contracted staff and seven part-time staff supporting COVID-19 response to increase our bandwidth.

With our multiple partners across the county and the state, we were able to rapidly establish four large-scale community COVID-19 testing sites which completed over 100,000 tests at the end of 2020. We worked to combat food insecurity, language barriers and other challenges in accessing critical needs during the crisis for the most vulnerable among our fellow residents through the Protect our Neighbors grant and other targeted initiatives. We conducted thousands of disease investigation and contact tracing activities to slow the spread of COVID-19 in El Paso County. We offered technical expertise and resources to numerous sectors including schools and businesses (including our 2,733 retail food establishments), nursing homes, and other organizations across the county to help them interpret and navigate health and safety guidance and
obtain public health order variances, among them allowances to enable school graduations. We enhanced transparency through the launch of the county’s COVID-19 data dashboard— unlike any other in the entire state — on which various entities and key leaders have relied to make data-informed decisions to assure hospital capacity and help mitigate disease spread. In just a matter of months, we gained support from the Board of Health to purchase a new building and opened our new site in southern El Paso County, further expanding access to services for our residents. And as we approached recovery phase of the pandemic with the advent of the COVID-19 vaccine in the final weeks of 2020, we established a robust Vaccine Consortium. In the brief two-week period between the first shipment of vaccine on Dec. 14 through the end of 2020, partners across the Vaccine Consortium administered approximately 10,986 doses of the vaccine through multiple vaccine points of dispensing (PODs). These efforts included hugely successful vaccine events at our new site, accomplished through call centers, collaboration with the media, community partners, municipalities, county, and business leadership, and local and state elected officials to provide information and connect people to vaccine providers and other resources. All of this while continuing to offer our critical services in our Laboratory, Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems program, Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program, Vital Records, Reproductive Health and Preventive Screenings, and Nurse-Family Partnership through our Continuity of Operations (COOP) plan. In addition, we were able to achieve agency reaccreditation from the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB), multiple local, statewide and national recognitions of members of our public health team, and we earned two prestigious awards from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) recognizing our agency’s commitment to accountability and excellence in financial reporting. These are tremendous accomplishments in the midst of a very difficult period in our agency’s history.

This pandemic has and continues to test us in ways we could not have imagined. It has tested our capacity to grieve as we mourn the loss of 608 souls in this county to the virus over the past year. But it has also tested our fortitude, creativity and ingenuity in how we’ve responded to the crisis to help keep the 731,640 residents of this county safe — thousands of whom have recovered from the virus as of the end of 2020 — and countless others who were protected from it due in large part to the dedicated efforts of our public health team in collaboration with our health care partners, Board of Health, and county, municipal, community and business leadership.

While this report archives a somber period in the history of El Paso County and Public Health, I take pride in, and celebrate, the way our team and the community have stepped up during this unprecedented time. I hope you will take a moment to peruse this special 2019-2020 edition of the Annual Report capturing the outstanding work over the past two years.

Thank you for being an integral part of our community.

Susan Wheeler
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter From the Director .............................................. 2-3

Table of contents ...................................................... 4

Agency Profile .............................................................. 5-12
  Mission, Vision and Values ........................................... 6
  Department Structure .................................................... 7
  Awards and Honors ...................................................... 8-9
  2019 and 2020 By the Numbers .................................... 10-11
  Board of Health ............................................................. 12

Response Activities ..................................................... 13-32
  Emergency Preparedness and Response ....................... 14
  Hepatitis A Outbreak ...................................................... 15-16
  COVID-19 Pandemic ..................................................... 17-32
    Continuity of Operations .......................................... 17
    Staff Expansion ......................................................... 17-18
    Infrastructure and Critical Needs ............................... 18

Data and Analytics ..................................................... 19-20
Case Investigations and Contact Tracing ....................... 20
Policy Group ................................................................. 21
Testing and Clinical Operations .................................... 21
Regional Recovery Council ............................................ 22
The El Paso County Method - GRIT .................................. 23-24
Community Partnerships and Volunteers ........................ 25
Equity Efforts ................................................................. 25-26
Public Information ......................................................... 27
El Paso County Public Health South ............................... 27
COVID-19 Vaccines ....................................................... 28
COVID-19 Timeline ....................................................... 29-31
By the Numbers ............................................................. 32

Public Health Financials ................................................. 33-35
  2019 Original Adopted Budget .................................... 34
  2020 Original Adopted Budget .................................... 35

El Paso County Public Health scientist at a COVID-19 testing site at the Southeast Armed Services YMCA.
EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

AGENCY PROFILE

BOARD OF HEALTH

SERVICES

AWARDS & RECOGNITION
El Paso County Public Health was established in 1872 as a city health department, and then became an organized county health department in 1939. Public Health provides a broad spectrum of services to address ongoing and critical public health and safety issues for the estimated 731,640 residents of El Paso County (per 2020 estimates from the Department of Local Affairs).

Our charge has and continues to be twofold – actively address the urgent and emerging needs of El Paso County during a time marked by significant challenges, while looking ahead at long-term needs to continue to support the health and well-being of our community. As the COVID-19 crisis continues to unfold, we are keeping our strategy concentrated on our central mission to promote and protect public health and environmental quality across El Paso County through people, prevention and partnerships while developing longer-term solutions that will help us recover, rebuild and reimagine the future of our county.

**Mission**
Our mission is to promote and protect public health and environmental quality across El Paso County through people, prevention and partnerships.

**Vision**
Our vision is for all El Paso County residents to live in thriving communities where every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health.

**Values**
- Integrity
- Service Excellence
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Data-Driven
- Respect

El Paso County Public Health Deputy Director speaks at a March 6, 2020 press conference announcing the first COVID-19 case in El Paso County.
Our agency divisions, programs and services are aligned with Colorado's seven core public health services in order to assure high-quality public health services to all El Paso County residents and fulfill our agency’s mission and vision.

**Administration and Governance:** Establish and maintain programs, personnel and operations; implement public health laws, policies and procedures; secure and manage financial resources.

**Assessment, Planning and Communication:** Analyze local, regional and state data sources; create Community Health Assessments and Public Health Improvement Plans; develop public health messaging and communications.

**Communicable Disease Prevention, Investigation and Control:** Monitor, detect and report disease; investigate and control diseases and outbreaks; assure immunizations using established standards.

**Emergency Preparedness and Response:** Promote preparedness by participating in all-hazards planning and training; prepare for and respond to emergencies; implement an emergency communication strategy; coordinate with other responders.

**Environmental Health:** Ensure food safety; protect and improve air, land and water quality; assist with regulatory compliance; mitigate effects of environmental hazards.

**Prevention and Population Health Promotion:** Promote healthy living through policies and programs; promote physical and behavioral health with an emphasis on health equity; develop community-specific solutions to address prevention priorities.

**Vital Records and Statistics:** Record and report vital events (births and deaths); issue birth certificates and death certificates.
In late 2020, our agency became the first local public health agency in Colorado to achieve national reaccreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board. This designation extends our agency’s accreditation status for another five years. Of the nation’s 3,000 health departments, only a fraction have successfully completed the rigorous process. Our agency is one of only 32 health departments nationwide (as of November 2020) that has been awarded reaccreditation.

During the reaccreditation process, our agency received high marks in several different areas, including recognition as a leader with a robust local community presence. Public Health Accreditation Board officials also noted the demonstration of strong multi-sector collaborations and partnerships, in addition to the innovative use of data and metrics through the Thriving Colorado Dashboard. Our agency was recognized for an excellent culture of quality improvement.

The Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) presented our agency with an award for the 2020 Distinguished Budget Presentation. GFOA notes that this award is a testament to local government’s commitment to preparing a high-quality budget which reflects GFOA’s best practices and guidelines established by the National Advisory Council and State and Local Budgeting. Receiving this award signifies that our agency has met GFOA’s criteria for transparent, effective financial statements. It is a rigorous process, and these awards demonstrate our agency’s commitment to accountability and excellence in financial reporting.

In 2020, GFOA also presented our agency with the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting for the fiscal year 2019. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in the area of governmental accounting and financial reporting, and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management.

Director Wheelan was named one of the Colorado Springs Business Journal’s 2020 Women of Influence. Among the attributes noted in the recognition were Director Wheelan’s skill in bringing together diverse partners to create a broader community impact through collaboration.
Spirit of the Springs
In September 2020, Colorado Springs Mayor John Suthers recognized leaders from our agency with a Spirit of the Springs Celebration Award for their work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayor Suthers presented awards to Public Health Director Susan Wheelan, Public Health Medical Director Dr. Robin Johnson and El Paso County Coroner Dr. Leon Kelly, who served as deputy medical director during much of the pandemic response, for their collective effort to protect, inform and educate the community.

Pikes Peak United Way’s Most Valuable Player Award
In July 2020, Pikes Peak United Way presented their Most Valuable Player Award to Director Wheelan, noting how she led masterfully through the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to her work on teen suicide prevention and youth substance abuse prevention in El Paso County.

2019 County Innovation Award
In 2020, our agency’s communicable disease program received El Paso County’s 2019 Innovation Award for their efforts on the hepatitis A outbreak. In their forward-thinking and cross-sector approach, the team partnered with homeless respite care to lower readmission rates and reduce transmission of hepatitis A during a person-to-person outbreak associated with homelessness and substance use. These innovative and multi-sector partnerships laid a strong foundation to build upon for the later response to COVID-19.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) – Advocate of the Year Award
NAMI Colorado Springs recognized Fadi Youkhana, epidemiologist for our agency, with the Advocate of the Year award. Amid the public health demands created by COVID-19, he set aside time to partner with NAMI on in-depth research about co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders in the local community. He and the public health team worked with NAMI to conduct 30 interviews and more than 50 surveys, results from which will help us better understand and support many of those who are served by NAMI. Amid the pandemic, Youkhana was still able to champion the core public health work in mental health and substance use, which is one of the top priorities in our agency’s 2018-2022 Community Health Improvement Plan.

Pikes Peak Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America – Peak PRo Excellence in PR Award
The Pikes Peak Chapter of PRSA recognized Michelle Hewitt, public health information officer for our agency, with the Peak PRo Excellence in PR Award. Michelle was recognized for her leadership and excellence in communications during the COVID-19 crisis. Her colleagues and peers noted her calm, decisive and forward-thinking approach in leading the regional Joint Information Center and providing the community and media with timely, credible and accurate information.
PUBLIC HEALTH
2019 BY THE NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive Health Visits</td>
<td>2,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infectious Disease Cases Reported</td>
<td>2,714</td>
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<tr>
<td>STD Tests Performed</td>
<td>5,098</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immunizations Provided</td>
<td>12,115</td>
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<tr>
<td>Birth Certificates Issued</td>
<td>21,592</td>
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<tr>
<td>Death Certificates Issued</td>
<td>36,664</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retail Food Establishment Inspections</td>
<td>4,309</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retail Food Establishment Plan Reviews</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Workers Provided</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Safety Education Classes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Well Water Tests</td>
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<td>On-Site Wastewater Permits Issued</td>
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<td>Public Water Systems Tests</td>
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<td>Child Care Center Inspections</td>
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<td>School Safety Inspections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coordination Care for Children with Special Needs</td>
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<td>Nurse-Family Partnership Home Visits</td>
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<td>Air Quality Permits Issued</td>
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<td>Body Art Establishment Inspections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public Pool Inspections</td>
<td>400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land Use Reviews</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
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</table>

REPORTED INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS: 65
PEOPLE IMPACTED BY INFECTIOUS DISEASE OUTBREAKS: 3,052

El Paso County Public Health
## Public Health 2020 by the Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Statistics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reproductive Health Visits</td>
<td>802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infectious Disease Cases Reported</td>
<td>1,314*</td>
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<tr>
<td>STD Tests Performed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immunizations Provided</td>
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<td>Birth Certificates Issued</td>
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<td>Death Certificates Issued</td>
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<td>Retail Food Establishment Inspections</td>
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<td>Retail Food Establishment Plan Reviews</td>
<td>142</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Workers Provided</td>
<td>989</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Safety Education Classes</td>
<td>1,346</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private Well Water Tests</td>
<td>2,824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-Site Wastewater Permits Issued</td>
<td>616</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Water Systems Tests</td>
<td>4,309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Care Center Inspections</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Safety Inspections</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>WIC Average Monthly Case Load</td>
<td>12,733</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurse-Family Partnership Home Visits</td>
<td>3,332</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air Quality Permits Issued</td>
<td>119</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body Art Establishment Inspections</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Pool Inspections</td>
<td>235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Use Reviews</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Non-COVID related
El Paso County Public Health is governed by a nine-member Board of Health, which establishes policy, approves the budget and appoints the Public Health Director. Each member serves in a voluntary capacity for a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms upon appointment by the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners. The Board is made up of two current county commissioners, one Colorado Springs city councilor, one elected official from another municipality from El Paso County, an active or retired physician, an active or retired medical professional, a business or financial professional, an educational professional and an at-large member.

The Board meets regularly once each month, and additionally as needed. For the first time in 2020, Board meetings were made available by live stream.
HEPATITIS A (2018-2020)

COVID-19 (2019-PRESENT)

EL PASO COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE EFFORTS
Our agency is committed to preparing and planning for a variety of all-hazards emergency responses to include natural and manmade disasters, in conjunction with the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management, county and municipal leadership, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Our agency’s Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response provides fact-based education and resources for public health threats and crises and guides the community through response and recovery phases.

When there is not a current emergency, the office trains with first responder agencies and other partners, including engaging in full-scale exercises, to test preparedness planning and fine-tune procedures. Our agency also provides training, exercises, and epidemiology support to a five-county region in Colorado.

In August 2019, public health staff and external community entities participated in a functional exercise designed by our agency’s Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response to test and evaluate capabilities of managing a measles response in El Paso County. The intent of this exercise was to provide key leaders and partners the opportunity to discuss critical and actionable decision points in recommending and implementing non-pharmaceutical interventions in response to a confirmed measles case within El Paso County.
HEPATITIS A

Our agency implemented a heightened response, along with the support of El Paso County community partners and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, to respond to an outbreak of hepatitis A. The outbreak began in October 2018 and ended in early 2020, shortly following the start of our agency’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hepatitis A is a serious, highly contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A is spread by eating contaminated food or beverages, or through close contact.

Our agency quickly identifies and responds to outbreaks. The communicable disease team identified 132 cases of hepatitis A in El Paso County; typically, in the absence of an outbreak, the county identifies less than seven cases per year. El Paso County was the first county in Colorado to identify an outbreak that eventually impacted more than 25 counties in Colorado. The majority of the cases had several risk factors for hepatitis A in common, including homelessness and the use of street drugs. The response to this outbreak included active surveillance to quickly identify and respond to cases, hepatitis A vaccination efforts to prevent further spread of disease, and providing health education and sanitation guidance to facilities, congregate settings and partners. Collaboration and community partnerships were foundational to the success of hepatitis A response efforts. This included building and expanding traditional and non-traditional partnerships with clinical and nursing partners, law enforcement, respite care and others. These expanded efforts included:

- **Expanding nursing capacity:** A response of this magnitude and duration put strain on our agency’s staffing—in particular, nursing capacity. With only four clinical nurses dedicated to immunizations at that time, our agency had to train and call upon other grant-funded non-clinical nurses to support these efforts. This was not a sustainable solution. To address this challenge, our agency forged a strong relationship with the University of Colorado Colorado Springs Helen and Arthur E. Johnson Beth-El College of Nursing and Health Sciences, which allows nursing faculty to bring student nurses into the field to support immunization efforts.

- **Collaboration with the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office:** The Sheriff’s Office was a critical partner in the success of the vaccination efforts. Congregate settings such as the Criminal Justice Center (CJC) pose a unique risk for the spread of hepatitis A due to the close proximity of inmates, shared facilities, and the frequent cycling of at-risk individuals in and out of the facility. Public health staff spent several days at CJC to assure every inmate had the opportunity to receive vaccine while also providing technical expertise and support to facilitate immunization clinics for the Sheriff’s Office staff. These efforts resulted in approximately 3,900 vaccine doses administered to CJC inmates and Sheriff’s Office staff. Subsequently, our agency worked with the Sheriff’s Office to implement new CJC business practices to include offering hepatitis A immunization at intake and release.

- **Collaboration with the Colorado Springs Police Department’s Homeless Outreach Team (HOT):** CSPD’s HOT team, who have built trusted relationships with individuals experiencing homelessness, were a critical partner in increasing mobile vaccination outreach efforts to meet impacted individuals where they are. The HOT team provided technical guidance and assistance in facilitating the provision of vaccines and pertinent information about hepatitis A among the homeless community.
Similar hepatitis A outbreaks occurred in other locations such as San Diego and Salt Lake City, as well as additional Colorado counties. Counterparts across the nation have complimented El Paso County on the response efforts put in place, especially the close collaborative relationships developed with law enforcement, emergency departments and respite care. In 2020, our agency’s communicable disease program received El Paso County’s 2019 Innovation Award for its efforts on the hepatitis A outbreak. Our agency also received the Shining Star Award at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment’s 2019 Annual Partners Meeting. Our agency is recognized for organizing a robust response that set a strong framework, and are sought out by partners throughout the state and the nation for expertise.
In late December 2019, our agency began monitoring the novel coronavirus that emerged in Wuhan, China. Local public health agencies are statutorily charged with leading their community’s response during a pandemic and by Feb. 14, 2020, our agency activated its Incident Command System and on March 6, 2020, El Paso County saw its first case of COVID-19. On March 14, the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners declared a local state of emergency. Each step of the way, our agency has been proactive, taking swift action to keep the public and partners informed, as well as taking the necessary steps to protect the well-being of the community by balancing health and economic vitality.

Our agency has taken an innovative approach to pandemic response in forming a unified command structure between our agency and the Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management (PPROEM). This unified model is not a typical approach, and it has served El Paso County well in COVID-19 response. Pairing the subject matter expertise and technical knowledge of public health with the tactical and operational emergency management principles of PPROEM has led to increased ability to respond to the evolving needs of the pandemic. The partnership and support from PPROEM was critical in mounting and sustaining a strong local response.

**Continuity of Operations**
As the lead agency in responding to a novel infectious disease, the pandemic required innovative ways to continue providing essential services to the public while keeping staff and community members safe and healthy. On March 17, our agency quickly and effectively implemented new strategies to continue delivery of public health services while maintaining response activities. This allowed for several programs, such as Women, Infants and Children and Nurse-Family Partnership to provide virtual and phone services, while essential functions such as the Public Health Laboratory worked in the office to assure the El Paso County community had safe drinking water.

This shift to virtual operations was successful in large part due to the foresight of Director Wheelan and our agency in creating detailed continuity of operations (COOP) plans ahead of time which our agency was able to quickly enact. Despite the changes to operational structure, our agency has been able to meet the needs of the pandemic and continue to provide the highest level of support and customer service for the community.

**Overseeing Largest Expansion of El Paso County Public Health Staff**
Our agency has been historically understaffed since the recession of 2008, with a steady state of 158 full-time equivalent employees, including the addition of the 10 critical needs positions highlighted in the subsequent public health infrastructure section of this report. According to a 2019 national profile of local
public health departments by the National Association of County & City Health Officials (NACCHO), local health departments serving populations our size (500,000 to 999,999) have on average 269 full-time equivalents. El Paso County is estimated to have 731,640 residents as of 2020 (Colorado Department of Local Affairs), with additional projected increases in the coming years. This puts our agency at a deficit of more than 100 FTEs. With insufficient staffing, when the pandemic hit, our agency was forced to make the difficult decision of scaling back services and reassigning staff in order to prioritize the COVID-19 response. At one point, the majority of public health staff were assigned to a COVID-19 response role in 2020 and many continue to be into 2021.

Our agency received funding in 2020 through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to hire additional staff to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, 26 full-time equivalent and seven part-time staff have been hired in a variety of roles. These positions include environmental health specialists, public health nurses, disease intervention specialists, project management specialists, epidemiologists and a school liaison, all key players in the COVID-19 response. These additional positions brought us from a steady state of 158 FTEs to 184 FTEs at the end of 2020.

In addition to hiring more staff, our agency has partnered with several staffing agencies to procure temporary, contracted staff. Through a partnership with the Pikes Peak Workforce Center and Goodwill Staffing, our agency has worked to add approximately 30 contract staff and seven part-time staff. This additional infrastructure is vital to managing disease spread and providing a targeted and robust response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Public Health Infrastructure and Critical Needs**

To address ongoing and emerging critical needs, in late 2018 the Board of Health and Board of County Commissioners unanimously approved a budget increase for 2019 as part of a proposed five-year phased funding roadmap with additional projected increases. This phased funding roadmap was the first time since 2012 that El Paso County increased its core funding amount to our agency, enhancing, among several objectives, our agency’s ability to address emergent community needs.

The additional budget funded 10 critical needs positions including an emergency preparedness and response coordinator dedicated to El Paso County, environmental health specialists, public health nurse, youth health and wellness staff, youth resilience and suicide prevention support, health equity planner, chief data scientific strategist, and an epidemiologist. The county’s investment in 2019 was instrumental in our agency’s ability to respond swiftly to the COVID-19 pandemic. These were the first employees re-assigned into the COVID-19 response and have provided tremendous support in:

- Assisting long-term care facilities
- Implementing and providing COVID-19 testing
- Developing and launching the COVID-19 data dashboard to inform policy decisions
- Quickly enhancing transparency of information
- Leading the Joint Information Center
- Interpreting and guiding business, industry, and community partners in implementing numerous state public health orders
- Coordinating information and resources to connect people to get their basic needs met
- Ramping up planning efforts for COVID-19 vaccination points of dispensing (PODs)
Building Public Health’s Data and Analytics Infrastructure

At the beginning of 2020, our agency set out to implement our agency’s key priorities for the year driven by goals set forth in the Strategic Plan and Community Health Improvement Plan, and to continue foundational services and activities for the coming year. By February, plans pivoted as our agency assumed its statutory role as lead agency in the COVID-19 response.

At the start of the response effort, our agency grappled with numerous external challenges. In addition to contending with the novel virus, there were a multitude of factors impeding the early phases of the response effort including insufficient public health capacity. Yet, despite these issues, our agency continued to thread the needle successfully due to existing partnerships and infrastructure put in place prior to the pandemic that were made possible by the El Paso County Board of County Commissioners’ and El Paso County Board of Health’s unanimous approval in 2018 of the critical needs funding which started in 2019.

This foresight in budgetary planning placed our agency in a position of strength in the early stages of the COVID-19 response, prior to the provision of Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding. The county’s investment in 2019 was instrumental in the ability to respond swiftly upon the onset of the crisis in early 2020. This was particularly impactful with regard to the establishment of our agency’s data infrastructure to inform critical decision-making across multiple entities in the county involved in the response effort, as well as longstanding partnerships and new collaborations made possible through the strategic allocation of resources to address critical community needs.

Between 2010 and 2019, El Paso County experienced a 15.8 percent population increase. With significant growth expected to continue over the next several years, the need was identified to expand our agency’s capacity to collect, analyze and disseminate data to harness the power of data for informed, proactive community decision-making. With this objective our agency established a new Data and Analytics Office in 2019 designed to lead strategic agency and community efforts that are upstream, using data, evidence-based best practices, and innovative approaches to create efficiencies and further community health improvement measurements.
In 2020, this office was instrumental in launching an innovative COVID-19 data dashboard, a critical component of our agency’s response to the pandemic, which greatly expanded access to data for public and community partners. Data visualizations and information regarding disease incidence and prevalence with interactive features has made it easier for users to visualize and break down complex data to better understand disease spread within the community and inform mitigation efforts.

Amid a constantly shifting landscape, the Public Health Data and Analytics COVID-19 dashboard is a resource for the public as a place to find reliable, trustworthy and immediate information. It has quickly solidified our agency as the leading local data expert with the purpose of establishing a central repository to provide transparent, accurate, and timely information. The information is presented and explained through multiple conduits: public forums, our agency’s website, county commissioner meetings, city council meetings and in the media.

Challenges exist in keeping pace with the demand for information and the incoming stream of data. It is an agency imperative to continue to build out the data infrastructure and acquire tools for data management necessary to sustain a high level of resolution in providing details and the granular level of data necessary to examine the specific impact. This not only applies to COVID-19 but other health conditions that our agency is statutorily obligated to track, the social determinants of health, and public health interventions to address these issues.

Through community-specific data collection, our agency will be able to be increasingly proactive in understanding the challenges facing community partners and El Paso County residents. Using technology and comprehensive data analysis, resources can be prioritized and directed more efficiently to meet those challenges collectively. Data analysis and visualizations assist community members to deepen their understanding of the relationship between health risks and disease outcomes. By sharing results of data analysis with the public and community partners, this information will assist community entities to prioritize their own efforts and enable our agency to work collaboratively and more efficiently through aligning resources to better serve the community.

**Case Investigations and Contact Tracing**

Quickly after the first case was identified in El Paso County, a team of COVID-19 contact tracers and case investigators was mobilized to meet the increased demand of the pandemic. Contact tracing is a foundational component of Public Health, and a critical tool for preventing and mitigating the spread of COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19, the public health communicable disease team consisted of 3.5 full-time equivalent staff. As a result of pandemic response needs, we were able to ramp up in 2020 to an expanded team of more than 70 individuals from across our agency, Medical Reserve Corps, and contracted staff through the Pikes Peak Workforce Center. The new staff and volunteers have provided critical Spanish language capacity.

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*El Paso County Public Health Communicable Disease Epidemiologist in a video educating the public on what contact tracing is and why it's important.*
**Policy Group**
The pandemic posed far-reaching challenges and policy decisions impacting the entire county. To respond to this need, our agency proactively established a COVID-19 policy group with numerous cross-sector partners in order to provide a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach. Sectors represented in this group included countywide and municipal leadership, legal expertise, medical intelligence, data and analytics, law enforcement, fire department, business and economic and countless others. With the collective expertise, this group navigated complex policy decisions, adeptly balancing the needs of both public and economic health.

**Testing and Clinical Operations**
In 2020, increased testing was a state and local priority, as it helps determine the prevalence of the virus and assist El Paso County in moving forward. To expand access to testing, our agency utilized a low-barrier testing strategy to expand additional testing locations throughout the region, with a focus on increasing access in underserved areas and decreasing barriers for El Paso County residents. On Aug. 11, El Paso County launched the first community-based drive-through COVID-19 testing site at the Citadel Mall. The new location added to several existing testing resources that were already available in El Paso County. From August – December 2020 alone, the Citadel site completed more than 83,000 COVID-19 tests. Following the opening of the Citadel site, three additional testing sites were mobilized in October in the municipalities of Fountain and Falcon/Peyton, and in north Colorado Springs. Through the end of 2020, these additional sites completed an additional 19,000 COVID-19 tests.

Our agency also partnered with the Southeast YMCA and Servicios de la Raza to pair services by offering COVID-19 testing at an existing food drive for disparately impacted populations in southeast Colorado Springs. This targeted site, which originally launched on June 26, was open every Monday from June 29 through Aug. 17 and completed more than 100 tests.
Regional Recovery Council

Once the first cases of COVID-19 were detected in March 2020, our agency focused and strengthened cross-sector collaboration to develop and orchestrate an actionable plan designed to meet the health needs of community residents. At this time, it also became apparent to the business sector that a collaborative approach would be critical to response, relief, and recovery.

Launched in April 2020, the COVID-19 Regional Recovery Council was formed as a collaborative effort between our agency and the Colorado Springs Chamber & Economic Development Corporation. The council represents multiple sectors including economic development, municipal government, tourism, marketing, public health, workforce, education, non-profit, philanthropy and community development. This multi-sector effort is an innovative collaboration between public health and commerce, and represents the collective understanding about the co-dependent relationship between public health and economic health. Our agency has continued to be keenly focused on how to balance the needs of public health with what is required to sustain the local economy during this crisis and beyond.

In close collaboration with the local chamber of commerce, economic development, multiple businesses, and county and municipal leadership, our agency has maintained a focus on supporting this collaboration through dedicating the time and staff needed to mitigate COVID-19 disease spread in the community. These efforts include comprehensive risk communication, education, testing and containment measures, technical support, data resources, assistance to businesses and organizations in interpreting swiftly changing public health orders and guidance, and the orchestration of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign for the region. One result of this collaborative effort was the drafting of a multi-pronged variance designed to help businesses across several sectors reopen as safely and quickly as possible in accordance with statewide health orders. Public health leadership equipped businesses with resources empowering them to continue operations while promoting the safety of employees and customers.

Because of these steady efforts, sales tax revenues for both the City of Colorado Springs and El Paso County are beginning to recover sooner than expected. This emphasizes the positive impact attributed to the collaborative work of El Paso County, including all municipalities, with the business and medical communities that ultimately supported the economy in opening faster, while still protecting the health of the community.

To address sustainability, our agency anticipates the group will continue to serve the community post-COVID-19. The focus in the future will remain on ensuring public and economic health through continuing to connect and refine disaster preparedness plans to enhance resiliency and recovery for the next natural or man-made disaster that affects the Pikes Peak community.
The El Paso County Method – Greater Resilience Information Toolkit

Disasters have occurred in almost every community in America at some point, leaving in their wake a need to rebuild, reconnect and, sometimes, restructure. The COVID-19 pandemic is no different, apart from the duration of time it is impacting our lives. With no official pandemic end date, anxiety and fear have an opportunity to take root in our community in a deep and unique way. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our community from a physical, mental, emotional, and economic perspective, affecting all facets of our lives. Our agency recognized early in the local pandemic response the need for access to tools to help the community address concerns and doubts, and to build up our strength and ability to cope in order to create a stronger, more resilient community.

GRIT (Greater Resilience Information Toolkit) was developed at the local onset of COVID-19 by Dr. Charles Benight, Ph.D., Dr. Josef Ruzek, Ph.D., and Nicole Weis of the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs to help community members support each other during these uncertain times. It was designed to train and support volunteers to become coaches who boost resilience and support people through the pandemic.

The El Paso County Method was born when representatives of the National Alliance on Mental Illness and Diversus Health (formerly known as AspenPointe) were brainstorming ways the community could come together to respond to COVID-19 in both the short- and long-term. After hearing from other community leaders about the GRIT program, they connected with the Lyda Hill Institute for Human Resilience to see if GRIT could be part of a community solution. The basic premise of the El Paso County Method is simple: core community agencies support each others’ ongoing work, and build a stronger mental health safety net, by collaborating on efforts to increase the number of GRIT coaches in our community. Then GRIT coaches partner with NAMI volunteers to continue to support community members throughout times of great uncertainty, creating a network of people who are trained and committed to helping each other. Those coaches and volunteers create a pipeline into both no-cost NAMI services and to Diversus for higher levels of care, including care in the FEMA-funded Crisis Counseling Program, while it is in place. Through this system, Diversus can stretch FEMA funds today and create a network of connections and a support framework for the longer term, when NAMI volunteers and GRIT coaches will carry on the education, support, and training that the El Paso County Method collaboration began. The method maximizes the time and funding that FEMA provides to build community partnerships; trains members how to be more resilient by becoming GRIT coaches or NAMI volunteers; utilizes the social networks of both individuals and community agencies; and starts building resilience and support locally.
Behavioral health issues were emerging in crisis levels well before COVID-19 in 2020, and the priorities established in previous years were intended to continue our agency’s efforts to develop a framework for behavioral health system improvement and strengthen the mental health treatment continuum in El Paso County. The El Paso County Method has been a great collaboration which complements and builds on these efforts to more effectively address and create solutions that are sustainable.

The establishment of these and other partnerships demonstrates how quickly the creation of coalitions can provide opportunities in the midst of a crisis. While many sources cite the importance of multi-sector partnerships in attaining the goals of the Public Health 3.0 model, it is clear how this need is heightened during a disaster relief effort. The Public Health 3.0 model emphasizes the imperative for local health departments to actively engage both the public and private sectors in order to support healthy, equitable, and resilient communities.

In 2020, our agency was tested in profoundly remarkable ways. Yet, the energy, commitment, focus and adaptability of the public health team and community partners during the COVID-19 crisis has enabled the county to develop the exemplary and replicable outcomes achieved thus far.

**Long-term resiliency efforts**

Our agency remains committed to building long-term resiliency by addressing root challenges and improving the health of the county’s citizens. Some examples of this transformative work include:

- In 2019, our agency reinforced existing multidisciplinary partnerships while also forging new collaborations. Our agency continued to partner with the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office, UCHealth and the National Alliance on Mental Illness to maintain and expand the Behavioral Health Connect (BHCON) Co-Responder Model, an approach that pairs law enforcement with licensed behavioral health clinicians in response to emergency calls for service determined to have a behavioral health issue. This grant-funded program, initially launched in 2018, has been effective in providing timely connection to mental health care and resources, and created a unique climate of collaboration between diverse community partners.

- Convened by our agency, the Youth Suicide Prevention Workgroup now has more than 90 community partners working together to support youth mental health and suicide prevention. The workgroup focuses on identifying community needs and assets, improving community networking and partnerships, and developing an action plan for comprehensive community-driven strategies to prevent youth suicide.

- Public Health secured $350,000 in funding from the El Pomar Foundation in 2017 to be disbursed over seven years. This funding allows our agency to continue to support community leaders through the Resilient, Inspired, Strong, Engaged (RISE) Coalition. As a result of RISE’s community engagement activities, The Colorado Health Foundation awarded a grant to the Trust for Public Land (TPL) to fund the revitalization of Panorama Park, located in southeast Colorado Springs. This is the largest neighborhood park renovation in City of Colorado Springs history. Funding for the multi-million-dollar project is the product of a collaborative effort between RISE, the City of Colorado Springs Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services Department, and TPL.
Community Partnerships and Volunteers
With the county’s local emergency declaration in March 2020, our agency was able to utilize volunteers from Medical Reserve Corps to strengthen core response efforts. These volunteers have contributed more than 17,000 hours of time, with an estimated cost value of $1,037,212. In addition, local Community Emergency Response Team volunteers have provided well over 348 hours of time in staffing the call center and responding to questions from the community.

Equity Efforts: Protect Our Neighbors Grant
To look at areas and communities hit hardest by the pandemic and identify ways to increase resources and support, our agency connected with local grassroots organizations and nonprofits to learn more. Among those most impacted were senior citizens, families meeting federal poverty levels, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, residents who become unemployed as a result of COVID-19, and monolingual Spanish-speakers.

As part of these efforts, in late September 2020, our agency received two grants as part of the state’s Protect Our Neighbors grant program: one for planning ($50,000) and one for infrastructure strengthening ($300,000).

The $50,000 planning grant was utilized to contract cultural brokers through RISE/Be You and Servicios de la Raza to develop and administer a culturally relevant survey, with the goal of building relationships with the community and learning directly from residents what their needs were. More than 1,500 surveys were collected and analyzed. Some of the findings were encouraging, with more than 89 percent of those surveyed indicating they had access to social support. However, the data also revealed some challenges such as difficulties due to loss of job or wages, difficulties affording basic items such as food, and difficulties paying rent, mortgage or bills. To translate this information into action, the planning grant also provided for the creation and translation of educational and outreach documents into Spanish, and funded the development of a culturally-relevant outreach campaign in Spanish, including paid advertisements in the Southeast Express.
The infrastructure strengthening grant addressed disparities across the county with a strong focus on southeast Colorado Springs. The priority populations identified in the grant included senior citizens age 65 and over, parents with children ages 0-14 who meet the federal poverty guidelines, unemployed residents of the service areas, and anyone residing in our county who is not a native speaker of English. Our agency partnered with local nonprofits to distribute infrastructure strengthening funds. Among the impacts:

- 127 individuals and families received rent/mortgage assistance;
- Over 4,000 meals were provided to senior residents;
- Hotel vouchers were provided to 25 families impacted by COVID-19

A drive-up Thanksgiving food event was also held in November, resulting in 75 flu shots, 170 COVID-19 tests and 300 Thanksgiving meals provided.

While positive COVID-19 cases continued to rise in El Paso County throughout the duration of the grant, as they have in all areas of the state and country, our agency’s work with community and grassroots partners has provided the resources needed to assist many people to stay in their homes, care for their families and put food on their tables until they are able to return to jobs and routines. This collaborative work will also allow our agency to better address the needs of all citizens moving forward.
Keeping the Public Informed Through Credible Information

To support the pandemic response efforts and disseminate accurate, timely and credible information, the Pikes Peak Regional Joint Information Center (PPRJIC) was activated on March 2, 2020. This cross-sector team includes communication professionals from across our agency, municipal and county government, in addition to regularly engaging with communication partners from health care and hospitals, medical, school and higher education, nonprofit and for profit, business community, and many others.

Since activation, the PPRJIC has focused on providing the community with timely and transparent information including website management, media engagement, news releases, social media, campaign development and implementation, fact sheets, guidance documents, and representing the local agencies on the state’s Joint Information Center. The PPRJIC provides timely, coordinated, and routine updates on a daily basis.

Public Health Establishes New Location in Southeastern El Paso County

The opening of a new El Paso County Public Health building in the southeast region of the county — an area hit hard by the pandemic — is a working example of how data analytics fueled a vital public health endeavor. Data related to social determinants of health and health disparities in the area informed a collaborative effort between the City of Fountain, multiple partners, and our agency to develop a proposal to open a new, innovative public health space. The new El Paso County Public Health South opened in December 2020 and is providing multiple services to the community. It is designed as a central location where multiple partnering agencies provide support for food insecurity, access to behavioral health services, a Women, Infants and Children’s program and health services. A COVID-19 testing site was quickly implemented at this new location in November 2020. Plans were also underway in 2020 to quickly gear up to be able to provide large-scale COVID-19 vaccination clinics at the new El Paso County Public Health South location starting in 2021. The site is an integral component of our agency’s goal of continuing to reduce health disparities in our community.
El Paso County Receives COVID-19 Vaccines

Dec. 14, 2020, marked a pivotal turning point in COVID-19 response efforts, with the first COVID-19 vaccines arriving in El Paso County. From March to December 2020, partners from our agency, El Paso County, municipalities, Pikes Peak Regional Office of Emergency Management, and hospitals have responded to COVID-19 without a pharmaceutical intervention. These first vaccines were an encouraging development that marked a critical juncture in response efforts.

Prior to the receipt of vaccines, there were extensive months of planning beginning in August 2020 around strategies for vaccine distribution and administration. This involved coordination between our Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response and Immunization Program and numerous partners, who worked tirelessly to develop comprehensive and detailed plans and work with partners to plan ahead for the receipt of COVID-19 vaccines. When the vaccines arrived in December, supplies were very limited and vaccination efforts were focused on priority groups and phases outlined by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. With such limited supply, this required high levels of communication, coordination, and strategy.

Quickly after the first vaccines arrived, Director Wheelan convened partners to form the Vaccine Consortium to collectively make progress on increasing vaccination rates and have a forum for dialogue among medical and public health and key leaders.
COVID-19 TIMELINE

FEBRUARY 14: El Paso County Public Health activates Incident Command Structure.

MARCH 6: First COVID-19 case in El Paso County.

MARCH 11: Gov. Polis declares a state of emergency.

MARCH 13: President Trump declares a federal state of emergency.

MARCH 14: El Paso County Board of County Commissioners declares a local state of emergency.

MARCH 25: El Paso County Board of Health declares a public health emergency.


MARCH 13: First death from COVID-19 in Colorado occurs in El Paso County.

MARCH 18: Gov. Polis Issues Executive Order D 2020-007 Ordering Suspension of Normal In-Person Instruction at all Public Elementary and Secondary Schools.

MARCH 25: Gov. Polis issues Executive Order D 2020-017 Ordering Coloradans to Stay at Home starting on March 26.


APRIL 26: Gov. Polis issues Executive Order D 2020-044 Safer at Home and Public Health Order 20-28 Safer at Home Order. All public and private gatherings outside of a residence are limited to 10 people outdoors. Indoor events are not permitted.

MAY 14: El Paso County graduation variance approved.

MAY 23: El Paso County restaurant variance approved.
JUNE 1: Gov. Polis issues Executive Order D 2020-091 Safer at Home and in the Vast, Great Outdoors. Public and private gatherings limited to 10 people.

JUNE 24: El Paso County variance for houses of worship and Cheyenne Mountain Zoo approved.

JUNE 26: El Paso County Public Health and the City of Colorado Springs launch #MaskUpCOS campaign.

JUNE 29: State approves El Paso County multi-sector variance. Specified indoor businesses and activities may operate at a capacity up to the lesser of 50 percent occupancy or 175 people per confined indoor space. Specified outdoor businesses and activities may operate at a capacity up to the lesser of 50 percent occupancy or 250 people per designated activity.


JULY 16: Gov. Polis Issues Executive Order D 2020-138 Requiring the Use of Cloth Face Masks in Indoor Public Settings.

AUGUST 11: El Paso County Public Health opens first community-based testing site at the Citadel Mall.
SEPTEMBER 15: Gov. Polis issues Public Health Order 20-35 Safer at Home Dial. El Paso County is in Safer at Home Level 1 – Cautious. Indoor events are limited to 50 percent capacity (up to 175 people) and outdoor events are limited to 50 percent capacity (up to 250 people).

NOVEMBER 4: State moves El Paso County to Safer at Home Level 2: Concern. Indoor events limited to up to 100 people per room. Outdoor events limited to 175 people per designated activity.


NOVEMBER 13: State moves El Paso County to Level Orange: High Risk. Indoor events are limited to 25 percent capacity or up to 50 people. Outdoor events are limited to 25 percent capacity or up to 75 people.

NOVEMBER 27: State moves El Paso County to Level Red: Severe Risk. Indoor events are closed, outdoor events are limited to 25 percent capacity, up to 75 people.

DECEMBER 14: State receives first shipment of vaccine, implements phased distribution plan beginning with Phase 1A. The first El Paso County resident to receive the vaccine, a UCHealth nurse, was vaccinated on Dec. 14.

DECEMBER 31: El Paso County surpasses 10,000 people vaccinated.
### COVID-19 By the Numbers: 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19 Cases</td>
<td>42,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths (by date)</td>
<td>608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital Admissions</td>
<td>2,138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Outbreaks</td>
<td>245*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-Term Care Facility Outbreaks</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/Child Care Outbreaks</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals/Families in Isolation/Quarantine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residents Served at the Homeless Isolation Shelter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meals Delivered to Seniors</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPANISH-SPEAKING INDIVIDUALS SURVEYED TO ASSESS BARRIERS AND NEEDS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individuals/Families Provided with Rent/Utilities Assistance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Restaurant Applications Reviewed for Expanded Outdoor Seating</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiries About COVID-19 Responded To</td>
<td>11,593</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Includes outbreaks that are resolved and were declared on or before 12/31/20.
2019 ORIGINAL ADOPTED BUDGET

$16,959,289

- El Paso County $3,749,698
- Miscellaneous (.15%) $24,650
- Licenses, Fees and Contracts $3,736,252
- State Per Capita $948,225
- Interest Income (.15%) $25,000
- Other Intergovernmental Revenue (0.22%) $37,600
- Program-Specific Grants $8,437,863

49.75% of total budget
5.59% of total budget
22.11% of total budget
22.03% of total budget

$17,562,383

- Program-Specific Grants: $8,604,518 (44.99%)
- El Paso County: $3,992,775 (22.73%)
- Licenses, Fees and Contracts: $3,712,148 (21.14%)
- Miscellaneous: $21,600 (1.2%)
- Interest Income: $50,000 (0.28%)
- Other Intergovernmental Revenue: $25,000 (0.28%)
**Mission**
Our mission is to promote and protect public health and environmental quality across El Paso County through people, prevention and partnerships.

**Vision**
Our vision is for all El Paso County residents to live in thriving communities where every person has the opportunity to achieve optimal health.

**Values**
- Integrity
- Service Excellence
- Collaboration
- Innovation
- Data-Driven
- Respect

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