

Interrelated challenges facing Colorado's SNAP recipients:

Findings from the Colorado Disproportionate Impact Indicator

March 2026



**Colorado Disproportionately
Impacted Community Indicator**

Executive Summary

The late 2025 federal government shutdown and the follow-on impacts from the 2025 federal budget bill HR1 cast a spotlight on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program and the impacts to SNAP affected Colorado households. But food insecurity is not an isolated challenge for Colorado households. Many of the state's households most reliant on SNAP face interrelated challenges, often overlooked by single focus news coverage and public policies.

In late 2025, the Colorado Futures Center launched an updated version of the Colorado Disproportionate Impact (CODI) indicator, its online application to assess socioeconomic challenges across Colorado. CODI was designed, with input from the service provider community, to present community challenges in multi-dimensional complexity. This report, directly drawn from data available in CODI, highlights the multiple interrelated challenges facing the most food insecure in Colorado.

In particular:

Food related. The majority of SNAP reliant tracts face higher food prices and lower access to healthy food than the state average. The children in those tracts are universally reliant on free and reduced lunch.

Housing related. Housing challenges are largely coincident with food insecurity. The majority of highly SNAP reliant tracts have higher rates of housing cost burden, energy cost burden and doubled up households than the state average.

Health related. Even with health care reform and Medicaid expansion, half the heavily SNAP reliant tracts have adult rates of uninsured higher than the state average. The majority of the tracts have lower access to health facilities.

Economic related. Economic insecurity is at the root of many of the challenges facing SNAP reliant households. The majority of SNAP reliant tracts face unemployment shares higher than the state average and have lower rates of working mothers. However, in a potential bright light for future generations, the majority of tracts outperform the state in youth connectiveness.

Early childhood related. The highly SNAP reliant tracts have higher access to early childhood facilities than the state overall. However, even with more facilities in close proximity sixty percent of the highly reliant SNAP areas have lower access to ECE slots than the state average.

Social related. Highly SNAP reliant tracts have risk factors for social isolation. The majority of highly SNAP reliant tracts have lower rates of voter registration and internet connectivity than the state average.

CODI is available to non-profit and government users at
<https://coloradofuturescsu.org/codi-login-information/>

Introduction

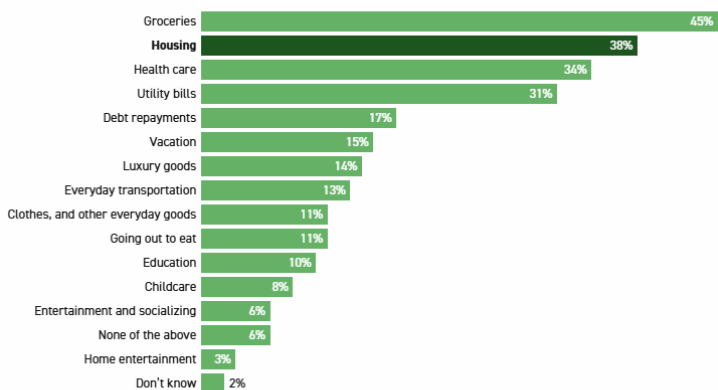
Once again, attention is on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Before November 12, 2025 when the longest shutdown in US history ended, there were almost daily reports of the food security challenges affecting Colorado households eligible for SNAP benefits. Almost at once after the reopening of the federal government, the focus on the vulnerability of SNAP recipients, front and center during the shutdown, disappeared from front pages and news feeds. And now, as the impacts from HR1 begin to affect Colorado, SNAP once again is in the news. In reality, the challenges facing Colorado's SNAP reliant households and the network of agencies providing assistance do not ebb and flow with the news cycle. Instead, the challenges are persistent and interrelated.

While the 2025 shutdown cast the spotlight on the vulnerability and prevalence of households reliant on SNAP, the reopening of the government did not eliminate vulnerability. For the more than 600,000¹ Coloradans who rely on SNAP the resumption of benefits was a relief. However, the food security and other challenges facing SNAP recipients remain and are likely to exacerbate as the impacts from the 2025 federal budget bill HR1 flow through the program.

In a late 2025 Politico poll, housing was the second most cited affordability challenge for US households. The first most cited? Groceries.² And, as this report will show, the majority of the most highly reliant SNAP areas of Colorado also face many of the other challenges identified in the recent Politico polling.

Housing is the second-most common affordability concern among U.S. adults

Which costs of living are "the most challenging" to afford, from The POLITICO Poll



Note: Margin of sampling error is ±2 percentage points.
Source: The POLITICO Poll
Cassandra Dumay/POLITICO

The challenges facing SNAP reliant households are poised to continue mounting. In July 2025 HR1 was enacted into law. Among the many changes enacted in this omnibus legislation are significant changes to SNAP – ones that in addition to transferring additional cost to the state budget will adversely impact access to benefits for certain Coloradans. A recent study from the Urban Institute estimates that up to 298,000 families will lose SNAP benefits in the wake of HR1.³ This will have both economy-wide and household level impacts.

1 This estimate of the number of Coloradans receiving SNAP is from the Colorado Department of Human Services at <https://cdhs.colorado.gov/press-release/state-requests-full-snap-food-assistance-funding-for-november>. Accessed November 25, 2025.

2 <https://www.politico.com/polling> accessed November 25, 2025.

3 <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/How-the-Senate-Budget-Reconciliation-SNAP-Proposals-Will-Affect-Families-in-Every-US-State.pdf>

Introduction

A study from the Regional Economic Development Institute at Colorado State University highlights that the loss of SNAP reverberates through the food economy, reducing overall economic activity by \$1.54 for every \$1.00 reduction in benefit related spending.⁴ And, as many analyses demonstrate, this loss of economic activity is most pronounced in rural areas, threatening the stability of rural grocers and access to healthy food for rural residents.⁵ This has the potential to further exacerbate food affordability for rural Coloradans heavily reliant on SNAP, many of whom already face higher food prices than the state average, and further reverberate through smaller regional economies.

While the greater economic effects affect all Coloradans, this report will show that the most salient impacts are on SNAP reliant households who have intersecting challenges that make them vulnerable to policy changes that extend beyond those directly related to food security. Notably, the next most cited challenge in the Politico poll, health care, also is poised for significant changes as a result of HR1.

A recent analysis from the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) identifies ten distinct Medicaid impacts ranging from coverage and eligibility provisions to changes in funding and cost sharing for Colorado's Medicaid programs. While some of these changes are effective in the current year, significant portions are scheduled to be implemented over the next two to three years, with some effective dates scheduled for as late as 2028.⁶ The extension of these changes over the second half of the decade ensures that Medicaid enrollees in Colorado will bear impacts for years to come. An August 2025 Colorado Public Radio reporting on the changes to Medicaid identifies more than 500,000 Coloradans vulnerable to adverse impacts – up to four in 10 of estimated current enrollees.⁷ Many of these 500,000 Coloradans are the same as the almost 300,000 about to experience SNAP impacts.

In 2024 the Colorado Futures Center, together with our advisors representing community service providers, created the Colorado Disproportionate Impact (CODI) indicator. This application, recently updated and released as version 2, was designed to better quantify the multiple and intersecting challenges facing Colorado communities and to provide policymakers, service agencies and funders with a resource to better inform policy, service provision and funding decisions. As the following findings – all derived from data available in CODI – indicate, Colorado's households in the most highly reliant SNAP regions face interrelated challenges with housing, health care, economic security and social cohesiveness. This analysis, along with others facilitated by CODI, can serve to better address policy toward those households.

4 https://csuredi.org/redi_reports/food-assistance-and-resilience-in-colorado-the-changing-role-of-snap/ accessed December 1, 2025.

5 See for example <https://frac.org/blog/snaps-critical-role-in-rural-communities-and-the-consequences-of-cuts#:~:text=This%20is%20particularly%20true%20for,markets%20are%20at%20heightened%20risk> accessed December 1, 2025.

6 <https://hcpf.colorado.gov/impact>. Accessed December 1, 2025

7 CFC analysis of the Colorado Public Radio reporting in <https://www.cpr.org/2025/08/13/colorado-health-care-medicaid-coverage-plans-amid-federal-cuts/> accessed December 1, 2025. In September 2025 HCPF reports that approximately 1.235 million Coloradans are enrolled in Health First Colorado – Colorado's Medicaid program.

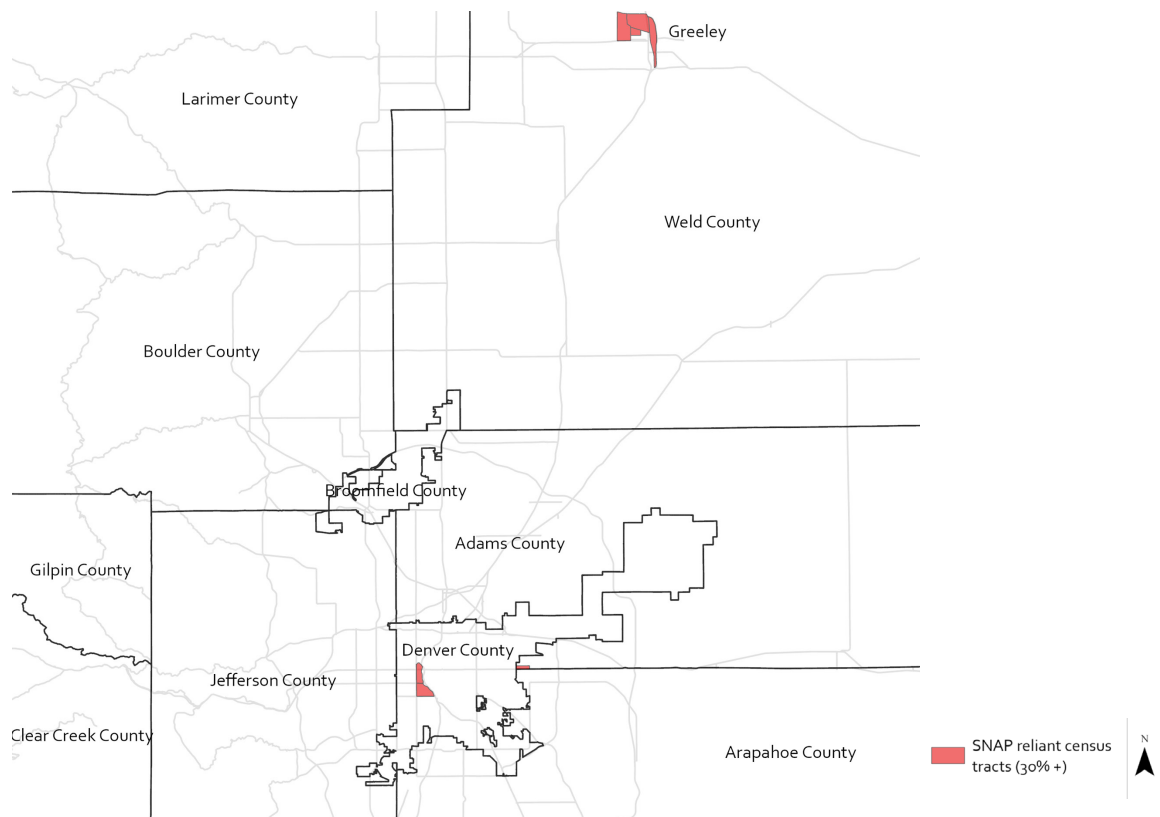
Colorado's most food insecure

There are 28 census tracts in Colorado in which at least 30 percent of the households report receiving SNAP. The 28 tracts are geographically distributed throughout regions of the state with the majority in urban areas.

The table and maps that follow identify the 28 tracts and the naming convention used throughout the report. Note that, due to geographic size, not all SNAP reliant urban tracts are visible at the state level. A bit unconventionally we present the regional inset maps first to highlight each of the 28 tracts and then follow with the statewide view.

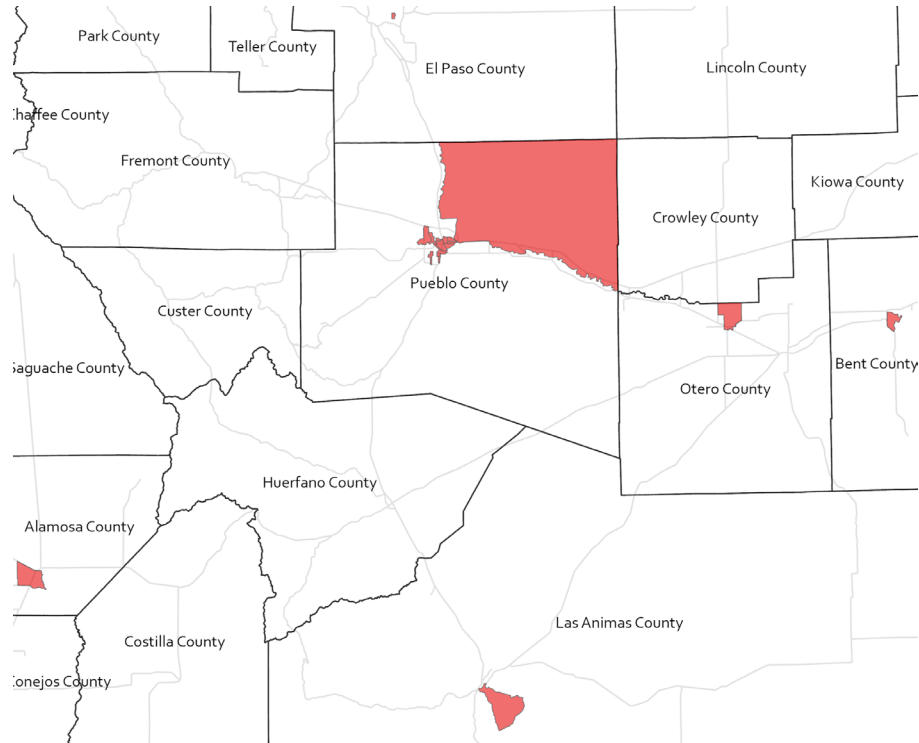
Naming convention	Census tract	County	Area	Naming convention	Census tract	County	Area
Denver_800	08031000800	Denver	Urban	Pueblo_2100	08101002100	Pueblo	Urban
Pueblo_1100	08101001100	Pueblo	Urban	Pueblo_2200	08101002200	Pueblo	Urban
Pueblo_1200	08101001200	Pueblo	Urban	Alamosa_960300	08003960300	Alamosa	Urban
Otero_968100	08089968100	Otero	Urban	Montezuma_941100	08083941100	Montezuma	Rural
Pueblo_3500	08101003500	Pueblo	Urban	Pueblo_2901	08101002901	Pueblo	Urban
Bent_966701	08011966701	Bent	Rural	Pueblo_1000	08101001000	Pueblo	Urban
Weid_600	08123000600	Weid	Urban	Denver_1000	08031001000	Denver	Urban
Pueblo_1400	08101001400	Pueblo	Urban	Mesa_1705	08077001705	Mesa	Urban
Adams_7801	08001007801	Adams	Urban	El Paso_6100	08041006100	El Paso	Urban
Pueblo_2600	08101002600	Pueblo	Urban	Pueblo_200	08101000200	Pueblo	Urban
Pueblo_600	08101000600	Pueblo	Urban	Las Animas_500	08071000500	Las Animas	Urban
Weid_501	08123000501	Weid	Urban	Pueblo_3600	08101003600	Pueblo	Rural
Pueblo_800	08101000800	Pueblo	Urban	Weid_1300	08123001300	Weid	Urban
Pueblo_2000	08101002000	Pueblo	Urban	Weid_701	08123000701	Weid	Urban

Weld County and metro Denver census tracts

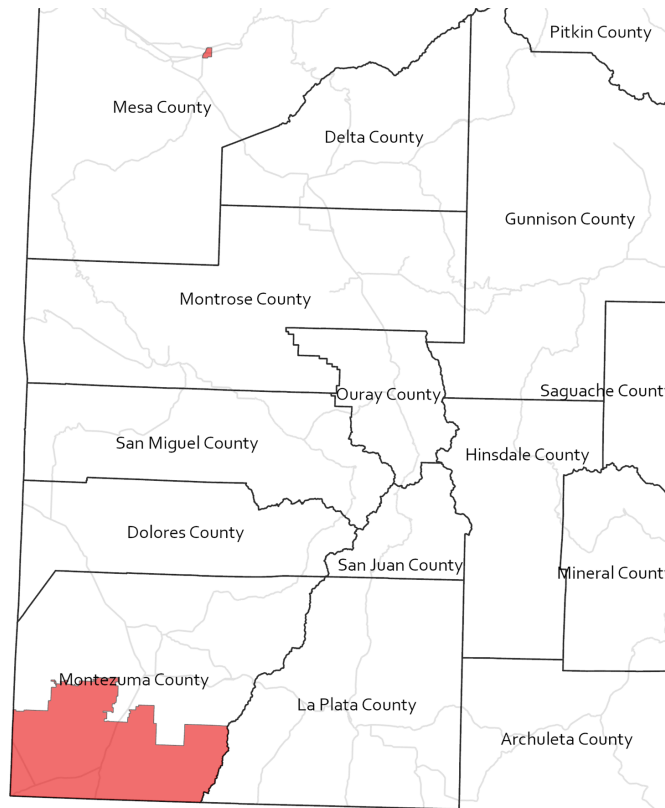


Colorado's most food insecure

Pueblo and surrounding area census tracts



Western slope census tracts

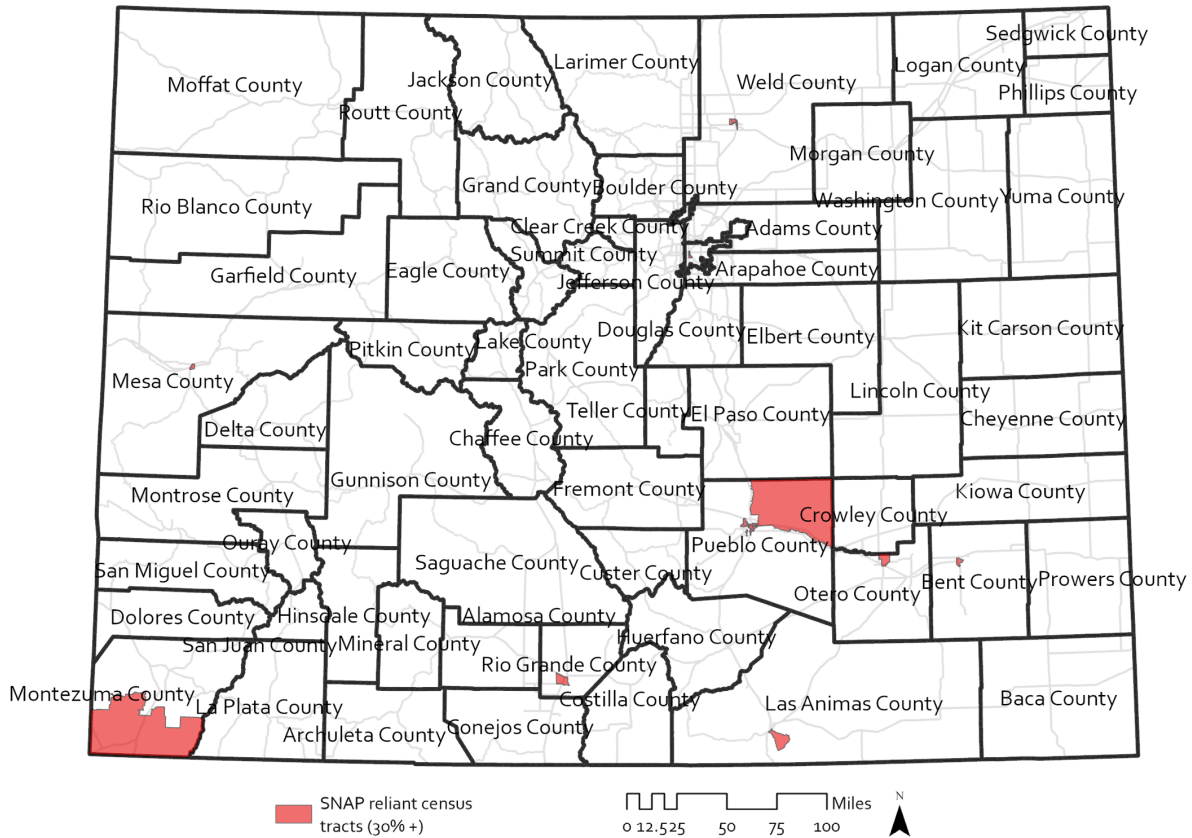


SNAP reliant census tracts (30%+)

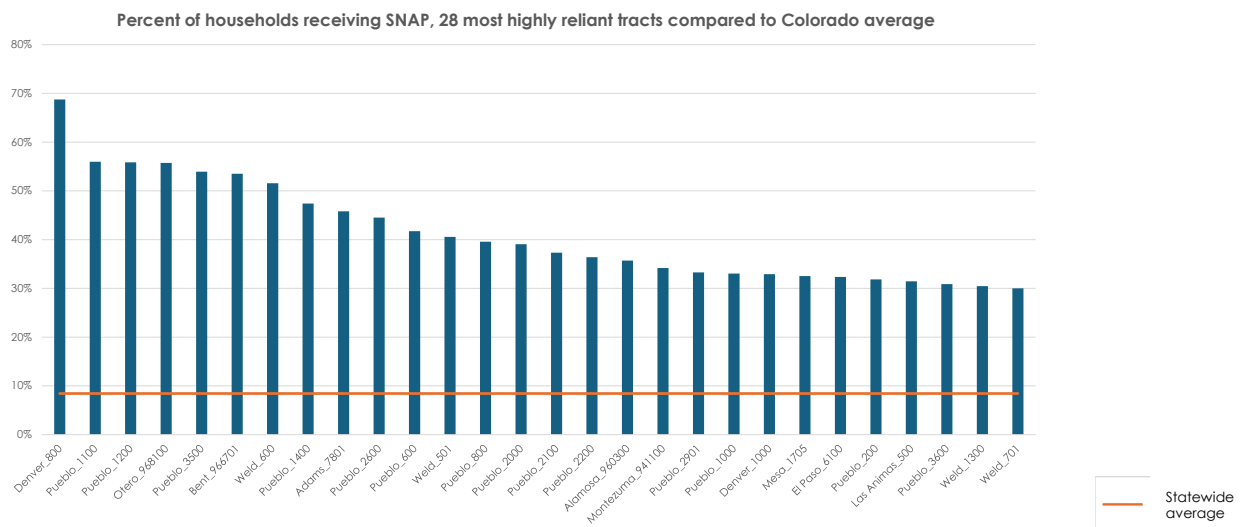


Colorado's most food insecure

Statewide view census tracts



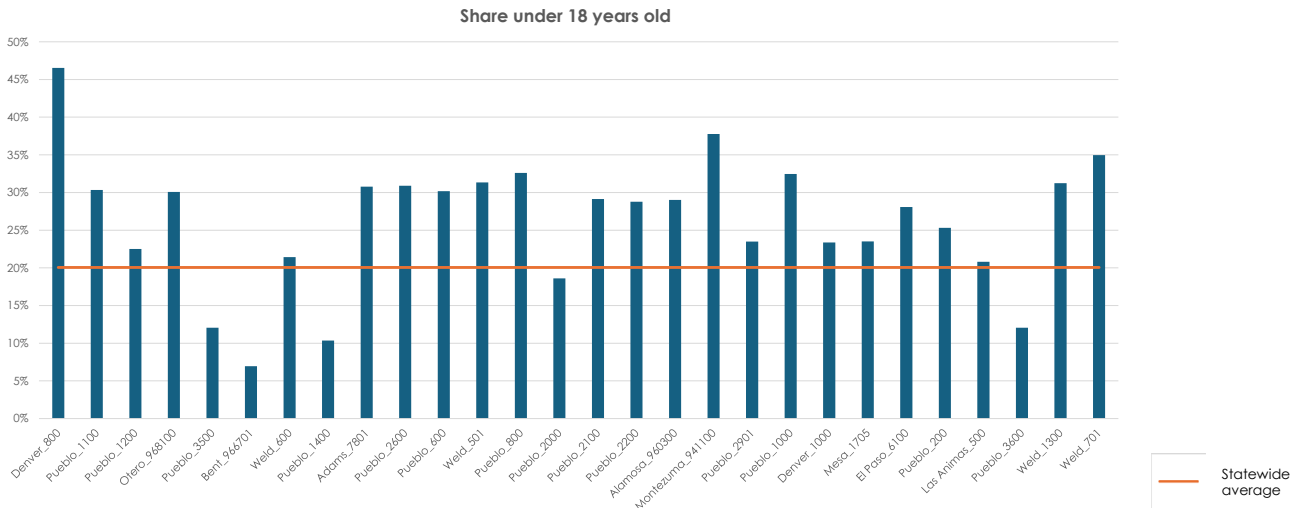
These tracts vary from a high of just under 69 percent of the households receiving SNAP down to a tract with 30 percent reliance. This is in comparison to the state average of 8.4 percent.



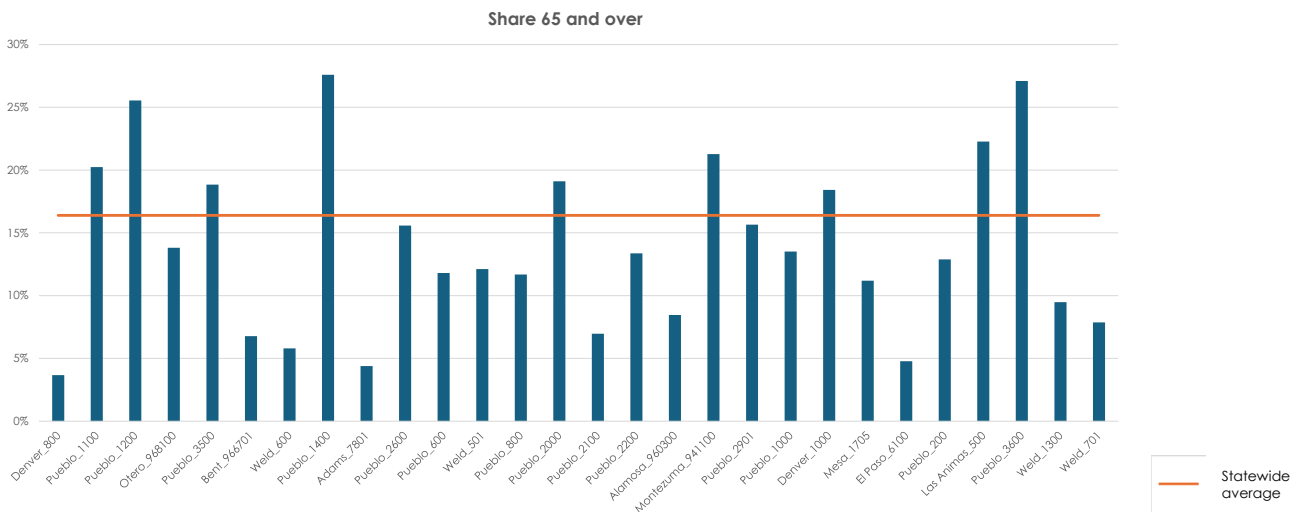
Note: Census tracts included here and throughout the report are the 28 most SNAP reliant in the 2023 vintage data. The tracts are ordered in the graphics high to low for SNAP reliance.

Colorado's most food insecure

Demographically, the most highly SNAP reliant areas of Colorado house larger shares of Colorado's youth. All but five of the 28 census tracts have a higher share of under 18 year-olds than the state average.



At the other end of the age continuum, only nine of the 28 tracts (just under one in three) have a higher share of Coloradans over the age of 65 than the state average. Food insecurity is disproportionately affecting Colorado's youth.



Interrelated challenges

Food insecurity is not an isolated challenge for Colorado households. As the following analysis of data contained in CODI demonstrates, SNAP reliant households in Colorado face interrelated economic, housing, health care, social and educational challenges. In particular:

Food related. The majority of SNAP reliant tracts face higher food prices and lower access to healthy food than the state average. The children in those tracts are universally reliant on free and reduced lunch.

Housing related. Housing challenges are largely coincident with food insecurity. The majority of highly SNAP reliant tracts have higher rates of housing cost burden, energy cost burden and doubled up households than the state average.

Health related. Even with health care reform and Medicaid expansion, half of the heavily SNAP reliant tracts have adult rates of uninsured higher than the state average. The majority of the tracts have lower access to health facilities.

Economic related. Economic insecurity is at the root of many of the challenges facing SNAP reliant households. The majority of SNAP reliant tracts face unemployment shares higher than the state average and have lower rates of working mothers. However, in a potential bright light for future generations, the majority of tracts outperform the state in youth connectiveness.

Early childhood related. The highly SNAP reliant tracts have higher access to early childhood facilities than the state overall. However, even with more facilities in close proximity, sixty percent of the highly reliant SNAP areas have lower access to ECE slots than the state average.

Social related. Highly SNAP reliant tracts have risk factors for social isolation. The majority of highly SNAP reliant tracts have lower rates of voter registration and internet connectivity than the state average.

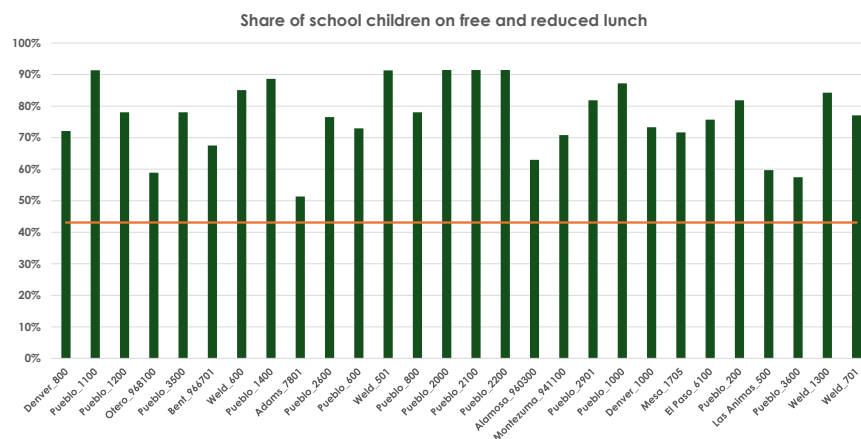
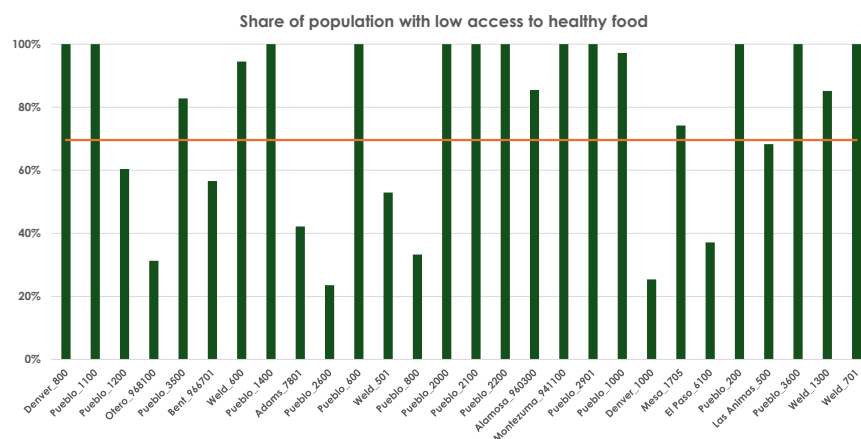
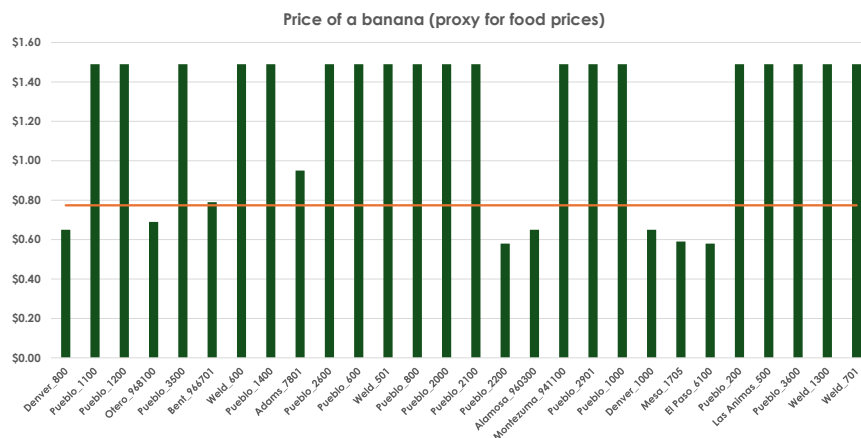


Interrelated challenges: food



Higher food prices and lower access to healthy food than the state average

Children are universally reliant on free and reduced lunch

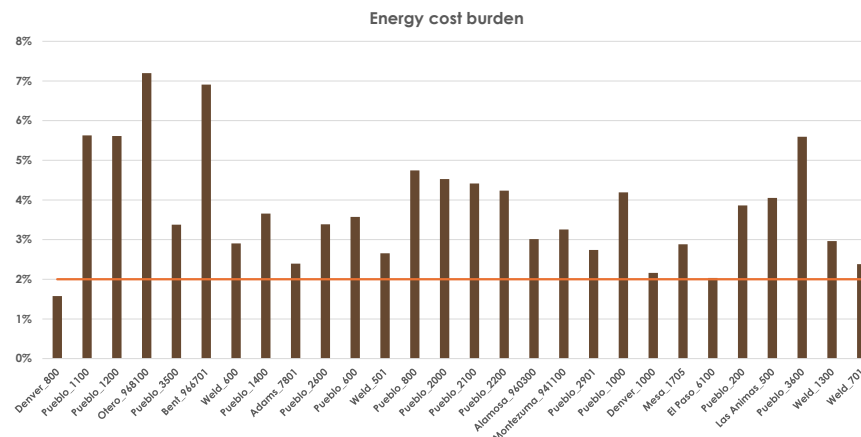
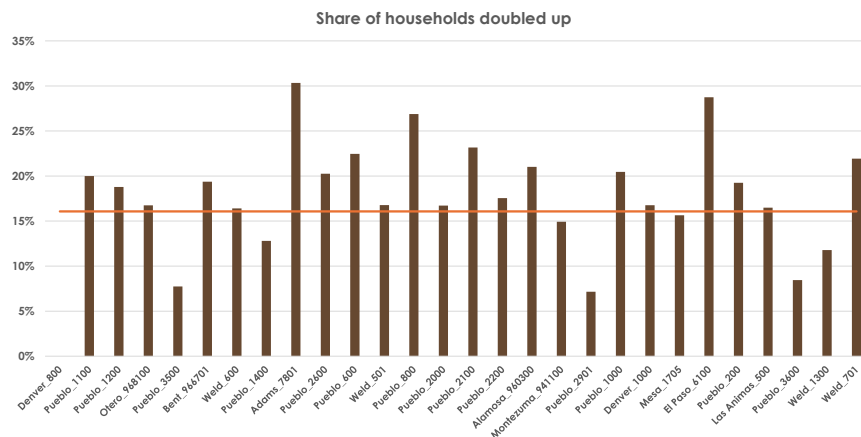
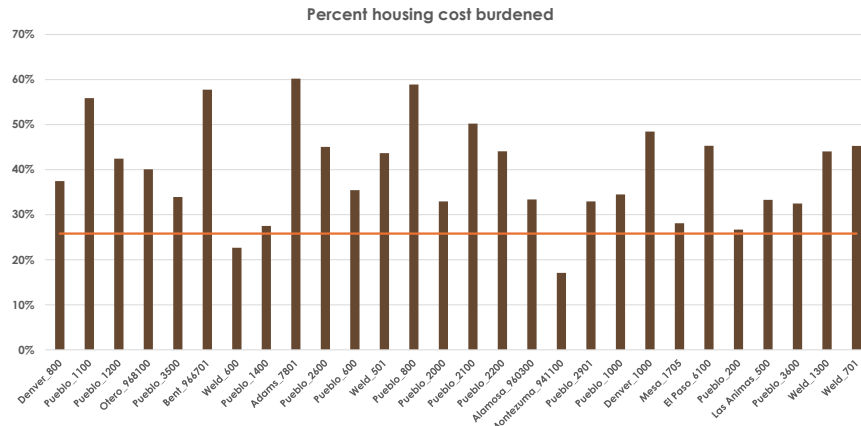


Statewide average

Interrelated challenges: housing



Higher rates of housing cost burden, energy cost burden and doubling up than the state average

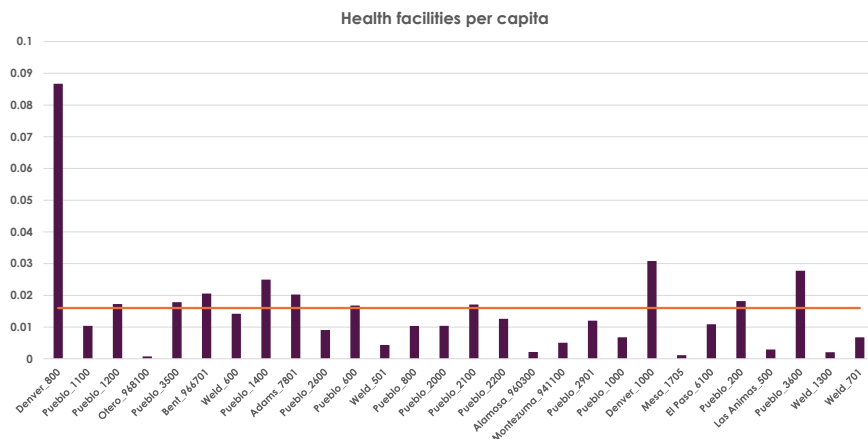
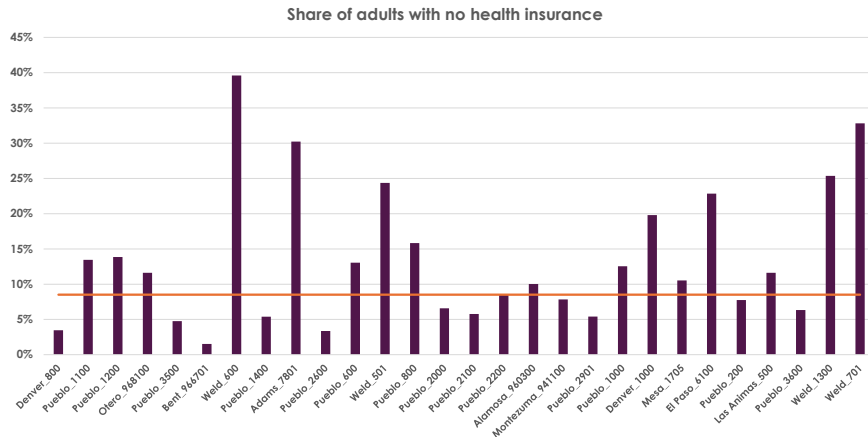


Statewide average

Interrelated challenges: health



Adult uninsurance rates higher and lower access to health facilities than the state average



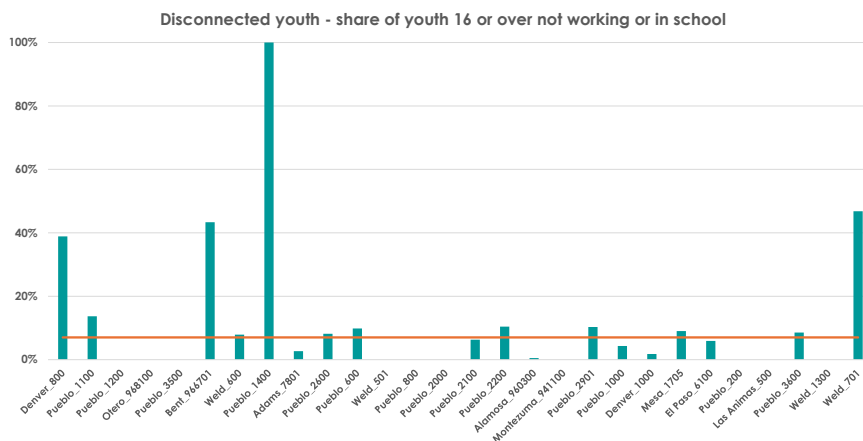
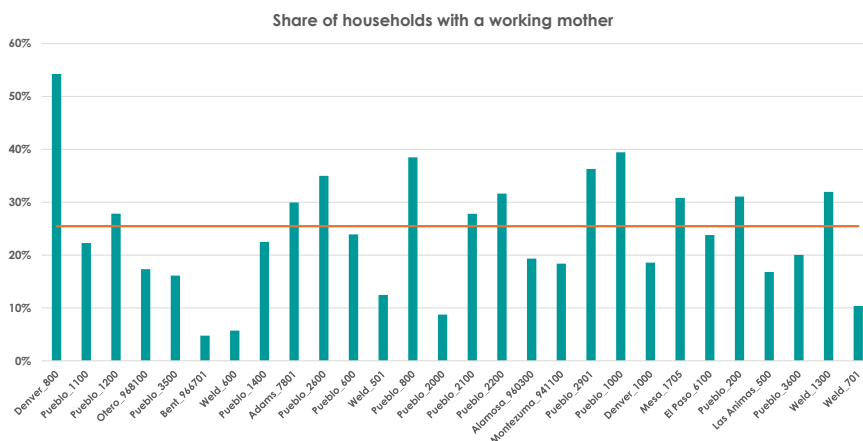
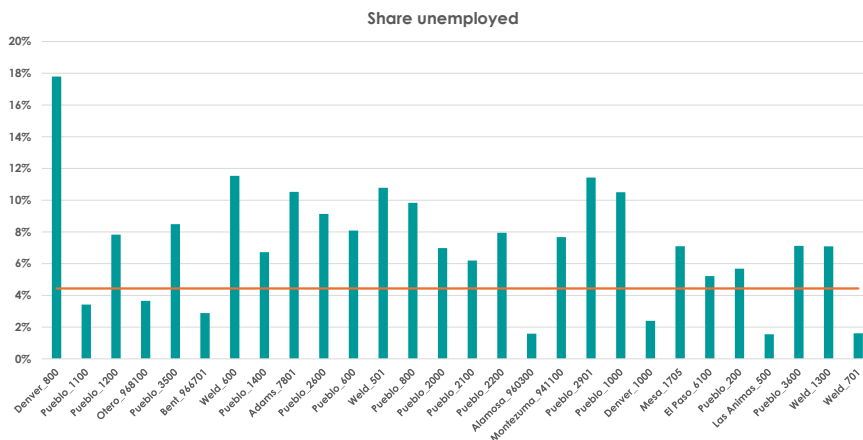
Statewide average

Interrelated challenges: economic



Unemployment shares higher than the state average and lower rates of working mothers

Outperform the state in youth connectiveness

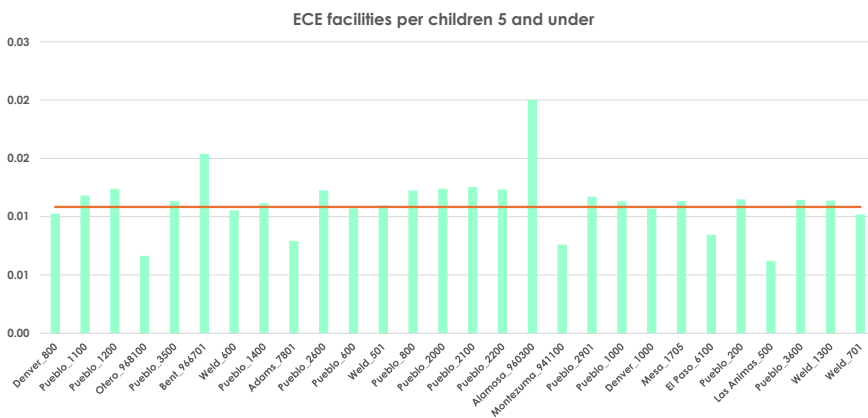
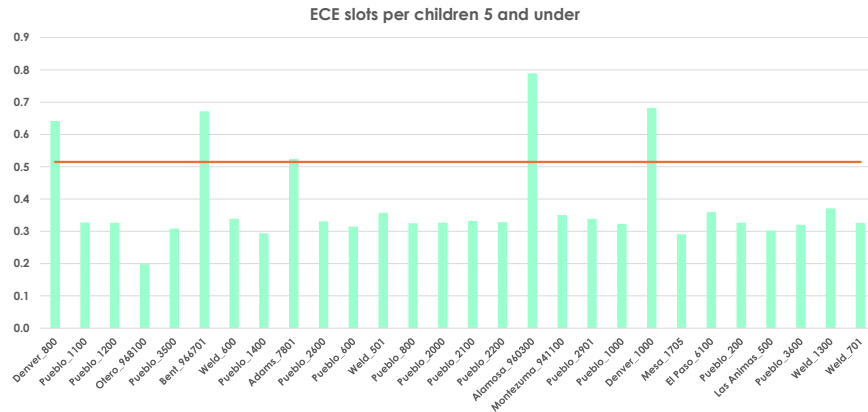


Statewide average

Interrelated challenges: early childhood



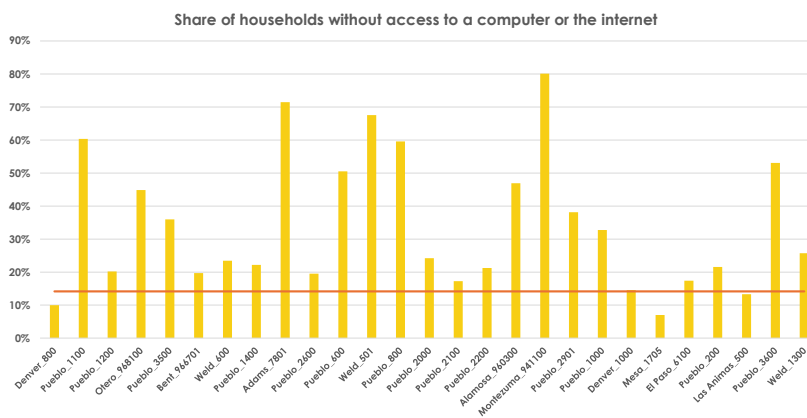
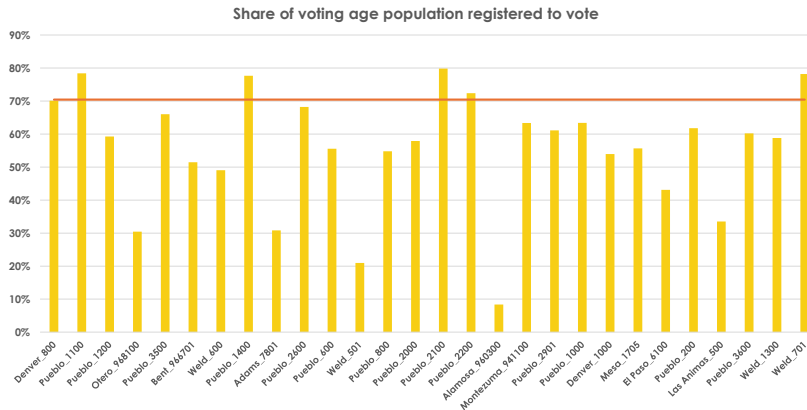
Higher rates of access to ECE facilities but lower access to total ECE slots



Interrelated challenges: social



Lower rates of voter registration and internet connectivity than the state average



Statewide average

Conclusion

Community challenges rarely occur in isolation. Instead, as this research demonstrates, communities often face multiple and concurrently occurring challenges. In 2023 we created and then in 2025 we updated CODI to better define disproportional impact to communities along many dimensions and draw attention to the multiple ways in which Colorado communities are facing challenges. Increasingly, CODI is highlighting the intersecting and interrelated community challenges.

Unsurprisingly, at the same time communities are facing multiple interrelated challenges, policymakers, service providers and funders are as well. Currently, lawmakers are facing significant budget stress from reduced federal funding for programs such as SNAP and Medicaid, increased spending pressures particularly in Medicaid, and limited revenues to support programs locally. This budget stress creates downstream impacts on service providers who are facing increased demand and funders who are asked to support more need than the funding available. A deeper understanding of the profile of community challenges is the first step toward more effective policy, service provision and funding allocations.

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About the Colorado Futures Center. The Colorado Futures Center is an independent, nonpartisan and academically grounded 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to informing about economic, fiscal and public policy issues impacting community economic health and quality of life in Colorado and beyond.



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About CODI. The Colorado Disproportionate Impact Indicator is a resource developed by the Colorado Futures Center at CSU and community partners. The purpose of the CODI Indicator is to provide users with a multi-variate analysis of key stressors at the census tract level throughout the state of Colorado. This tool is intended for use in understanding community needs and providing an informed response by entities seeking to address and invest in solutions that will improve social, economic and environmental conditions in the community.



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