

# THEMES ON PUBLIC HEALTH STRUCTURE IN **ARAPAHOE** COUNTY

Preliminary Data  
as of 9/6/21



# Things to know about this information

- This is information from interviews with some community leaders
- This is only one piece, of the many, that will be provided in this work
- On its own, this information is not enough to make a decision about public health services in Arapahoe county
- Not all information collected is being presented in this preliminary presentation, but it will be included in the final report
- This presentation uses the following acronyms
  - *TCHD = Tri-County Health Department*
  - *PH = public health*
  - *HIPAA = Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act*
  - *EHR = Electronic Health Record*

# Project Background

Since 1966, the Tri-County Health Department (TCHD) has provided public health services for Adams, Arapahoe and Douglas counties.

In 2020, Douglas County announced its intent to explore options of creating its own health department. In anticipation of this departure, Adams County, Arapahoe County and TCHD leaders must make decisions on how to proceed with providing public health services in their counties.

These decisions will impact the structure of TCHD and the public health (PH) activities and services available to residents, workers and visitors.

# Project Approach

The effort will be implemented in two phases:

- Phase I: Collect and compile data to inform TCHD and Adams and Arapahoe Counties in deciding under what structure(s) public health services will be provided in 2023 and beyond.
- Phase II: Transition plan developed for implementation in 2022.

The work will begin with a series of focus groups, key informant interviews and partner surveys. The team will compile organizational and financial data and information, and will create some scenarios for decision-makers to consider. By October 2021, the Adams and Arapahoe County Commissioners will be provided the findings to inform a decision on the structure and governance by which to provide public health services. After that organizational structure decision is made, a transition plan will be created.

# Objective and Scope of Work

## Objective

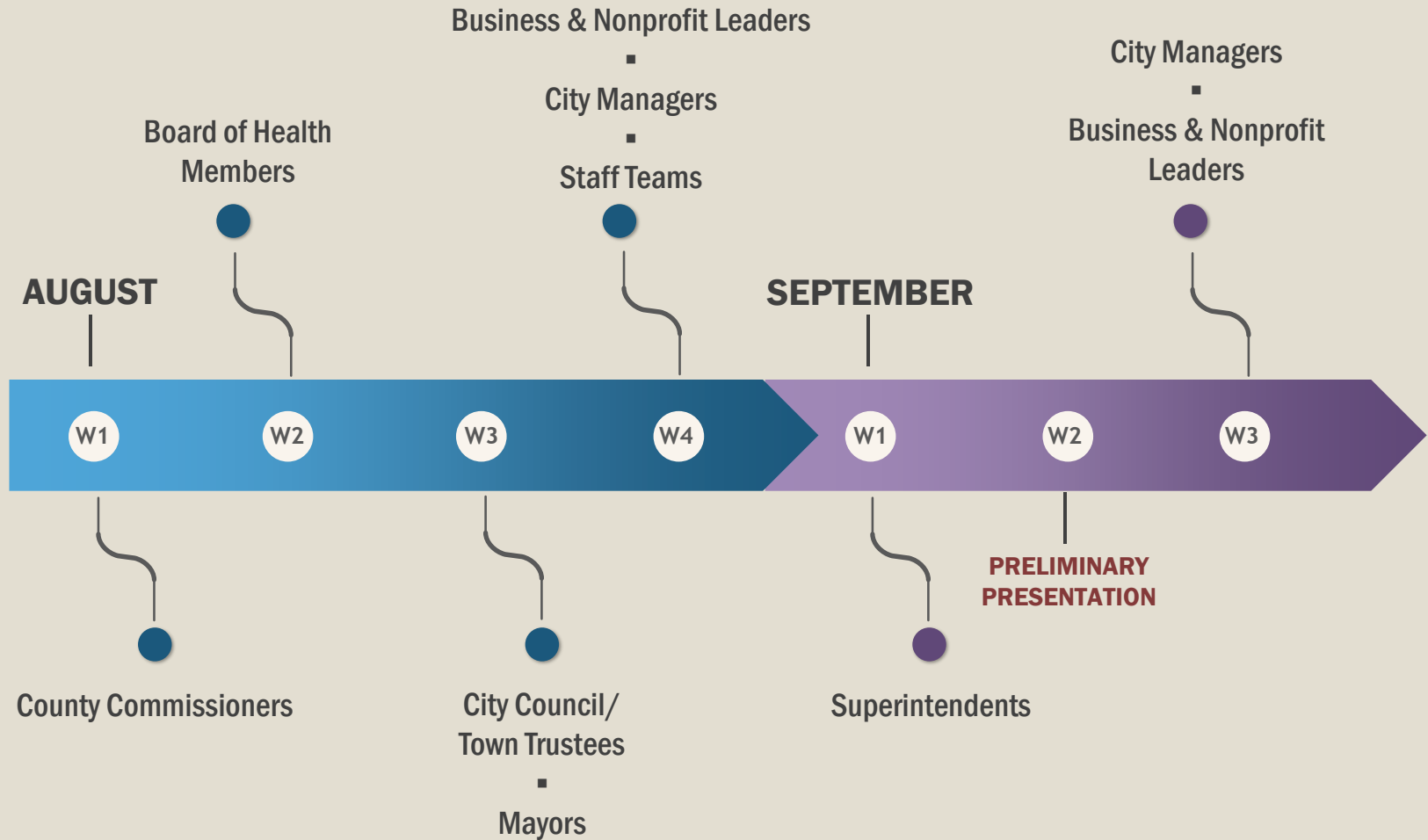
- Provide information to support Tri County Health Department (TCHD), Adams and Arapahoe Counties in deciding under what structure(s) they will proceed with public health services with the likely withdrawal of Douglas County.

## Scope of Work

- Conduct individual interviews and small group discussions with elected officials (county and municipal), partner agencies, funders, and agency leaders

## Participant Selection

- Identified by Adams, Arapahoe and TCHD



# People who talked to us (as of 9/6/21)

## ARAPAHOE COUNTY

5 County Commissioners

3 Board of Health members

12 Department Directors

9 city councilors and town trustees from 5 cities and towns

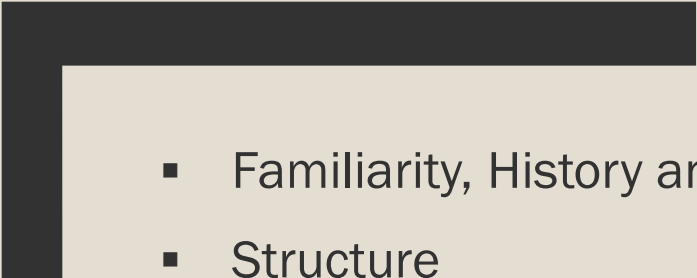

4 Mayors

4 City managers

12 Business community partners

2 Superintendent representatives from 2 school districts

**TOTAL = 51 people**

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- Familiarity, History and Knowledge of TCHD and PH services
  - Structure
  - Service Delivery
  - Expectations for PH services
  - Concerns
  - Opportunities
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# Core areas of exploration





# City, Town and School District Leaders



City Councils, Town  
Boards and Mayors



City Managers and  
Town Administrators



School District  
Superintendents

# Familiarity, History and Knowledge

## Local elected officials

Most did not know of TCHD or PH services before COVID

- Knowledge usually related to one program or service
- Personal experience increased knowledge

## City managers & Town administrators

More familiar with specific programs and services currently provided by TCHD

## Superintendents

- Familiar with specific programs and services such as immunizations, environmental health services and communicable disease investigation
- Did not spend a lot of time thinking about public health, unless there was an issue

Many participants described TCHD staff as smart, highly qualified, responsive and helpful.

# Structure

## Local elected officials

- Wide range of thoughts on structure of public health services, with a more of an interest in Adams and Arapahoe staying together
- Many people can see multiple sides of the issue
- Some acknowledged that a separate health department would mean more expense, they mentioned wanting to ensure programs are relevant and connected to community need

## City managers & Town administrators

More likely to bring up the management challenges and to mention economies of scale, human resources impacts, organizational infrastructure, ensuring staff expertise, etc.

## Superintendents

Strongly recommended staying together and making improvements to TCHD, including adequate funding

Majority in favor of staying together and making improvements through TCHD

# Service Delivery

## Local elected officials

- More information and more direct connections on other topics and services
- Ensure there is no unnecessary duplication with what the city/town is providing
- More communication, more community engagement, and more local partnerships with public health
- More localized data and services
- Current level of services or better - No reduction

## City managers & Town administrators

More communication and more proactive outreach is desired from TCHD

## Superintendents

- More funding to increase staffing to increase response times and capabilities for core services
- It is helpful to have an independent health authority providing recommendations

Many appreciate TCHD providing useful data and reports, and participation and representation on committees and task forces

# EXPECTATIONS

among  
city, town  
and  
school district  
leaders

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Same services expected - or better

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Ability to target and customize services

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Costs that mean the services are a good value

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Localized data

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Deep expertise

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Economies of scale

# Opinions on Keeping District Structure

## Opportunities

- Maintaining staff expertise
- Potential to increase proactive partnership and communication
- Build on COVID-created relationships
- Increase funding, communication, partnership with school districts and cities/towns
- Focus on using what has been learned through COVID to make improvements
- Increase awareness of each other's work and do more planning and prevention together

## Concerns

- Adequately funding TCHD
- Rebuilding reputation of public health as science-based
- Governance structures
- Jurisdiction size and complexity

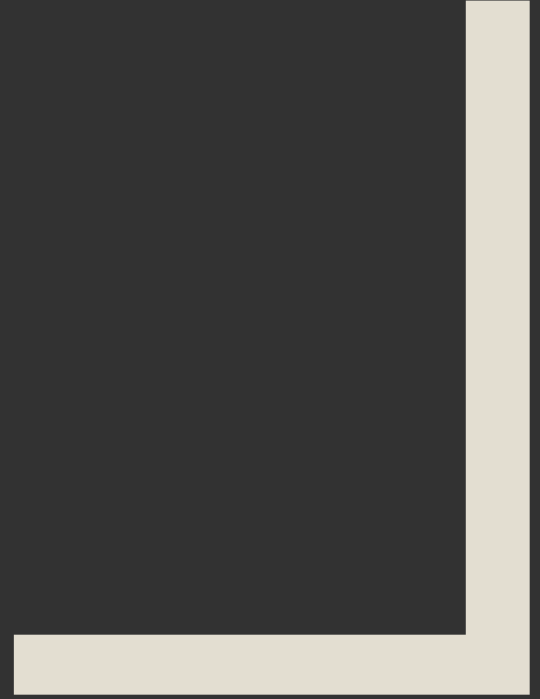
# Opinions on Creating Single County Departments

## Opportunities

- Potential for more localized service
- Potential for faster service
- Potential for integration into other county structures
- County-level strategy alignment

## Concerns

- Message to residents about politicization of public health, trust and responsibility
- Creation of more bureaucracy by having 2 duplicative departments
- Time and resources spent to build a new department in the middle of a pandemic
- Impact on existing staff at TCHD
- Loss of staff expertise
- Loss of economies of scale





# Reflections from TCHD Department Directors

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Willingness and interest in evolving structures, services, staffing to better meet needs of the counties

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Strong sense of pride in the expertise and team culture

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Detailed staffing economies of scale examples (nursing and WIC)

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Deep concern for the clients they serve and negative impacts on quality, access and relationships

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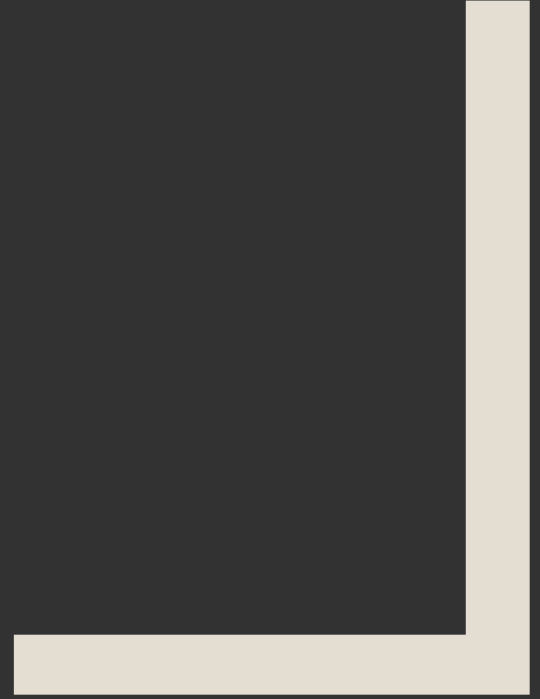
Strong epidemiology, data and health IT infrastructure (HIPPA and EHR)

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More competitive for Federal and philanthropic funds together

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# County Specific Leaders



Community  
Organization Leaders



County Department  
Leaders



Board of Health  
Members

# Arapahoe Business organization leaders

## Familiarity, History and Knowledge

- Generally pleased with their work with TCHD
- Some describe high quality, “excellent” services and connections

## Expectations/Accountability

- Issues such as coordination among MORE public health agencies across the metro area were discussed, including food safety inspections of food trucks
- Want more coordination, more proactive approaches and more local engagement, especially if separate county departments

## Structure

- Support staying together within TCHD

# Arapahoe Business organization leaders

## Service Delivery

- Retain the language access and cultural competence needed to work with restaurants and other small businesses

## Concerns

- TCHD has a good reputation, good will in the community and institutional knowledge - we would lose that with separate departments
- Supportive of LESS government meaning TCHD is an efficient and effective approach

# Arapahoe County Department Leaders

## Familiarity, History and Knowledge

- High level of familiarity from Human Services, Environmental Health, General Operations
- Generally feeling isolated from daily work of TCHD

## Potential Impact of Decision

- General sense of “we should do this” and “we can do this”
- Concerns about costs and losing current services

## Structure

### Single County Health Department

#### *Opportunities*

- Reduction of duplication in operations
- Better strategic alignment
- Focus on Arapahoe
- Increase of knowledge and communication about PH services
- Potential cost savings in HR and operations

#### *Concerns*

- Loss of funding
- Changing relationships with cities
- Continuity of data

### District Health Department

#### *Opportunities*

- Articulation of clear governance
- Co-location of services

#### *Concerns*

- Existing silos

# Arapahoe Board of Health Members

## Services

- TCHD is an award-winning Public Health Department, both nationally and locally
- The capacity and knowledge of the TCHD staff is something our county can't lose

## Structure

- Separation will lose robust infrastructure such as epidemiology
- A larger health department gives us ability to deliver more services and employ highly specialized staff
- Items to be addressed: Governance structure

## Governance

- Current structure is not working
- Consider advisory board(s)
- Need more diversity on board

## Concerns

- Funding a county health department with same services
- Counties sometimes have different needs and health concerns
- Need more engagement with our commissioners
- Politics is getting in the way of good public health

