

Kaiser Permanente awards \$750,000 grant to Weld

Weld County officials are taking on the challenge of a health care crisis with the help of a \$750,000 grant. Kaiser Permanente on Thursday announced the grant to the North Colorado Health Alliance to help kick off a health campaign for the next three years. It will launch in June with ambitious goals of reaching throughout the county to get people off the couch, eating more fruits and veggies, de-stressing and just moving. They plan to do it through community outreach from recurring messages on the television or radio, or billboards, or working in tandem with existing school programs, all with quarterly updates on the community's progress. "We want to make it very simple," said Mark Wallace, founder and CEO of the NCHA, who also heads up the Weld County Department of Public Health and Environment. "We're not going to try to convince someone to commit to a 10k in three months; then we'd all be depressed," Wallace said. "We're breaking it down to easy things. Like, we'd like everyone to eat an orange today. One orange today and you build on the power of these easily attainable things. Let's not talk about losing 30 pounds. Let's get the first steps."

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— Mark Wallace, founder and CEO of the North Colorado Health Alliance

The campaign will promote healthy eating, active living and emotional and social well-being through existing health care organizations, local governments, non-governmental organizations, charitable foundations and organizations such as Greeley-Evans School District 6, Aims Community College and the University of Northern Colorado, according to a news release.

In all, 50 organizations — including many large and small businesses in the area — are now involved, and the list is growing, Wallace said.

Together, they can all reinforce the healthy living messages, such as synchronizing what kids are hearing at school with what parents are hearing at work. They also will build a large community calendar with all types of activities that will be going on throughout the grant's life.

Though Colorado is seen as the healthiest state in the nation, Wallace said it would be nice if Weld could lead the state. The first step to any long-term health, however, is community awareness, which this campaign will foster.

"Through our partnership with Kaiser Permanente and other agencies, the Weld County Community Health Campaign intends to revolutionize the way individuals, organizations, businesses and governmental entities collaboratively engage to promote the whole health of our communities," said Vincent Atchity, COO of the Alliance, in a news release.

Having a healthier public — whose health care concerns primarily arise out of lifestyle choices — will eventually bring costs down, said Jandel Allen-Davis, vice president of government and external relations for Kaiser Permanente Colorado, which is a nonprofit organization dedicated to affordable health care. Kaiser announced last year it was coming into the Greeley market in 2014 after partnering with Banner Health.

“As we think about being a new health plan coming into the market ... being at the table to help improve the health of community has long-term benefits, including bringing down the cost of care,” Allen-Davis said. “It’s an amazing win-win, not just for what the Alliance is doing in the community, but also as a health plan coming in there, it will help address the affordability issues.”

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