

2026 Colorado County

Community Health Needs Assessment



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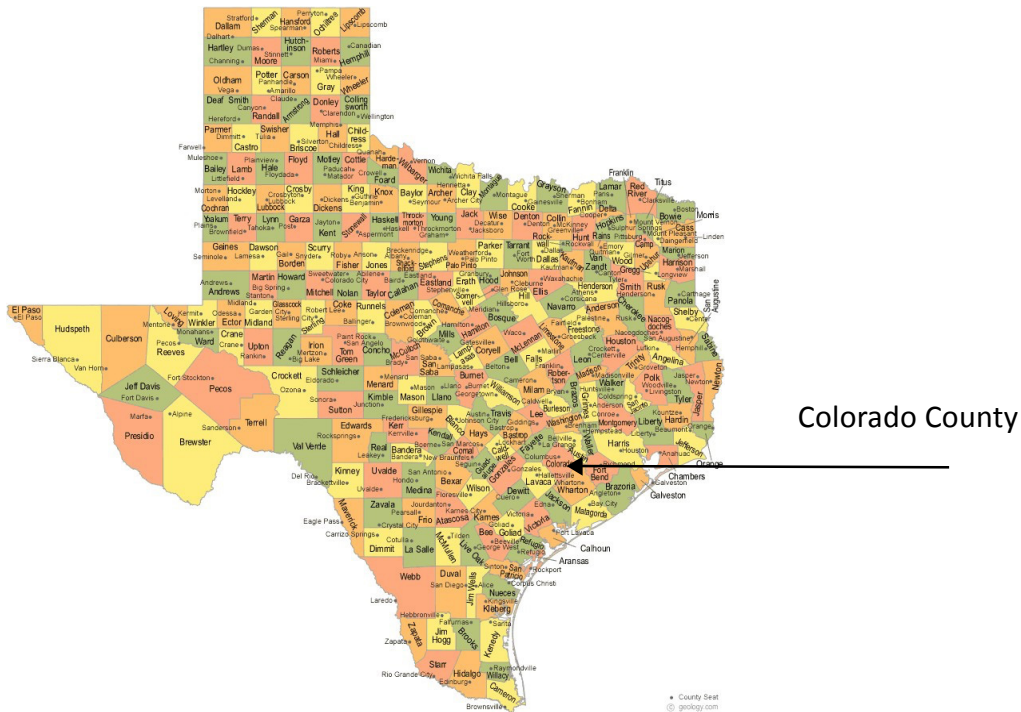
Colorado County Community Health Needs Assessment

Presented to:
Mr. James Vanek, CEO
and
Columbus Community Hospital Board
of Directors

April 2026

History and Location

Colorado County is located in the southeast quadrant of Texas, halfway between Houston and San Antonio, and is approximately 60 miles from the Gulf of Mexico (figure 1).



The county contains three incorporated towns, and 45% to 46% of the county's population resides in Columbus, Eagle Lake, and Weimar (figure 2). The remaining population resides in nine other communities, with populations ranging between 100 and 741 people, or in rural areas. Despite its rural nature, the location of Colorado County is important because it has a major thoroughfare (Interstate 10) that connects the East Coast and West Coast, a well-connected state highway system, and railroads. This infrastructure is valuable for transporting products of the county's agribusinesses, gravel mining, and oil/gas services (Texas Almanac, 2021).



Figure 2.

Historically, Colorado County is important. Many of Stephen F. Austin's "Old Three Hundred" colonists settled in Colorado County in 1821, along the banks of the Colorado River. Although it was a site for the headquarters of the Austin Colony, it later was abandoned due partially to Indian raids. Later, the area played an important role during the fight for Texas Independence; after the Battle of the Alamo, General Sam Houston camped on the east bank of the Colorado River and General Santa Anna camped about two miles to the west of the river.

When the Republic of Texas was recognized, Colorado County became one of the original counties, being settled mainly by German immigrants. This German influence has continued today, and approximately 30% of the community is of German ancestry. Because of good soil, the mild climate, and a long growing season, the county was an important agricultural area. At first, cotton and corn, the main cash crops, were exported via the Colorado River. However, after the Civil War, water transportation was replaced by railroad. Although cotton remained a viable product, more people turned to ranching for their livelihoods, and the impact of railroads certainly contributed to the emphasis on livestock.

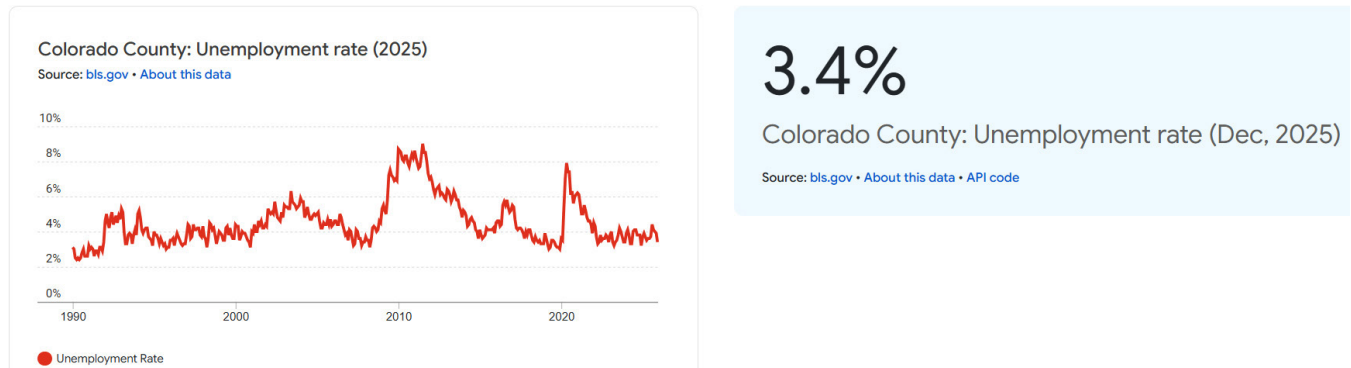
In the early 1900s, rice was introduced into the county and became an important cash crop due to large-scale irrigation processes; today, Colorado County is the third greatest producer of rice in Texas. In addition to farming, oil and gravel industries were initiated in the early 1900s. Colorado County has remained one of the leading producers of gravel since the 1930s. Although both farming/ranching and oil/gravel industries have waxed and waned over the centuries, they remain paramount in the county's economy.

The county's racial/ethnic makeup is approximately 57.2% White alone (not Hispanic or Latino), 29.1% Hispanic or Latino, and 10.8% Black or African American (US Census Quick Facts, July 2021). The county has an unemployment rate of approximately 4.4% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), with the unemployment rate in Colorado County steadily decreasing over the past four years (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Unemployment rate, Colorado County, Texas

Colorado County: Unemployment rate

[Explore other facets \(3\)](#)



Because of common culture, socioeconomics, and businesses, the communities within the county work together for common interests of the county. The county is bordered by Austin, Lavaca, Fayette, and Wharton counties. Three of these counties (Lavaca, Fayette, Wharton) are similar in size and demographics as Colorado County, while Austin County, also bordering Houston, tends to have a larger population (people/square mile) although a smaller land mass (US Census Bureau, 2024).

The overall appearance of the county is that of a content and proud area, with neighbors willing to help each other. There is a pride in all of the communities, and homes and businesses seem well-kept. Large shade trees cover the community, and there are parks and recreation areas that support outdoor activities. The Colorado river is a source of recreation, drawing people from outside the county as well as residents of the county. In addition, the communities seem to have drawn on their historical emphasis to attract tourists with home tours being highlighted in the springtime. Because of the tourists and the proximity to Interstate 10, the communities, especially Columbus, have a plethora of fast-food restaurants.

Government

Although the towns that make up Colorado County have their own city governments, when considering the health of the entire county, it is important to appreciate the county government as well as state legislative officials. Colorado County has four men serving as County Commissioners – Shannon Owers, Ryan Brandt, Keith Neuendorff, and Darrell Gartson. The County Judge, Ty Prause, has served in this position for 15 years. Although fiscally conservative and having a limited tax base, the Commissioners adopted a tax rate of 0.46% for the 2025 fiscal year. The county has an emergency management department and an emergency medical services department. It currently has no public health department, but is included in Region 6-5 South of the Texas Department of State Health Services.

Colorado County is represented in the Texas Senate by Joan Huffmann who switched districts in 2021. She was first elected Senator in 2008 and has been re-elected 5 times. She currently serves as Chair of the Senate Committee on Finance, and as a senior member of the Senate Committee on Criminal Justice and the Legislative Budget Board. Senator Huffman's pragmatic approach to problem-solving has allowed her to effectively represent her district and Texans. Her leadership has earned recognition from various advocacy and public safety organizations. Recently, she was named the "89th Legislature Senator of the Year" by the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas, and received the "2025 Exemplary Conservative Award" from the Conservative Round-table of Texas and the "2024 Luminary Award" from the Texas Healthcare & Bioscience Institute. She is also the only three-time recipient of the Texas District and County Attorneys Association's "Law and Order Award" for her work to enhance public safety and victims. (<https://senate.texas.gov/member>)

In 2022, Representative Stan Kitzman was elected to District 85. As a 2nd term legislator, Representative Kitzman serves on the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission, the House Appropriations Committee, and the Agriculture and Livestock Committee. He was appointed Chairman of the Appropriations Article III subcommittee, a Texas representative to the Energy Council, and was elected by his peers to chair the bicameral Water Caucus. Kitzman was an advocate for protecting Texas production agriculture, the future of Texas water and energy, Agricultural Extension, and ending trafficking of children through Texas and our rural communities. (<https://house.texas.gov/members>)

Colorado County continues to be represented in the United States House of Representatives by Representative Michael McCaul. Representative McCaul served as a Republican leader on the Foreign Affairs Committee and as Chairman Emeritus on the House Committee on Homeland Security during the 116th Congress. McCaul is also a co-chair on the Congressional High Tech Caucus, Childhood Cancer Caucus, the Congressional Cybersecurity Caucus, and Congressional Caucus on Sudan and South Sudan (<https://www.congress.gov/member/michael-mccaul>).

Workforce/Economy

Continuing its agriculture history, Colorado County remains predominantly agribusiness. Rice is the top crop grown in the county by amount of acreage allocated. Other important agriculture endeavors include cattle, grains, dry beans and dry seeds and oil seeds in terms of sales, with fruits, tree nuts, berries, eggs from poultry and dairy being important as well (2022 Census of Agriculture).

Because of its location and number of irrigated acres of rice, Colorado County is also an important duck and goose hunting area. Besides waterfowl, there are numerous other animals for hunting, including deer, dove and exotic animals. With the vast amount

of wildlife, Colorado County has nearly year-round hunting leases open. This means there is potential for unintentional injuries. Other businesses that impact Colorado County include gas, oil, and gravel mining.

The U.S. Census estimates that in 2024, 10.7% of Colorado County was in poverty, which is down from the 17% of the Colorado County residents living in poverty in 2021. For children under the age of 17, the situation remains dire. In 2024, 20.7% of Colorado County children were at/below poverty compared to 18.5% for Texas as a whole (USDA, 2024). Drops in percentages are very encouraging, but nearly than one in five children are in poverty should be of great concern.

Demographics

Age. The actual number of people residing in a county is determined every 10 years through the national census. According to the estimates of the US Census Bureau in 2024, Colorado County has 21,006 residents, which is up by 449 from the 2020 census (US Census Quick Facts, 2020). The number equally divided between male and females. The population of Colorado County tends to be older with a median age of 43.3 (US Census 2020), which is higher than the Texas' median age of 43.1 (US Census 2020). Thus, the population of Colorado tends to be older with a population of 65 year olds at 24% (US Census 2020).

Although the 2020 census is the most accurate picture of people living in Colorado County, the U.S. Census does project change in population throughout the decade. Although these are extrapolations, it does provide some insight into population change at the county level.

Race and Ethnicity. Figure 4 below gives a comparison of the racial and ethnic profile based on the 2024 US Census estimates. As you can see, Colorado County has a greater percentage of white alone and white (non-Hispanic or Latino) than in Texas, but Colorado County has a lower percentage of white only (not Hispanic or Latino) compared to the US.

Race and Hispanic Origin	
White alone, percent	83.1%
Black alone, percent (a)	12.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone, percent (a)	1.2%
Asian alone, percent (a)	0.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, percent (a)	0.1%
Two or More Races, percent	2.3%
Hispanic or Latino, percent (b)	31.5%
White alone, not Hispanic or Latino, percent	54.8%

Education. Colorado County Texas, is served primarily by three school districts—Columbus ISD, Rice CISD, and Weimar ISD—serving a total of over 3,600 students. These districts offer a mix of rural, small-town education. Columbus ISD is the largest district with 4 campuses and approximately 1,636 student and a B- rating. Rice CISD has 1,315 students 6 campuses and a C rating. Weimar ISD has 722 students, often earning B- to B+ rating (Niche 2025).

Social and Behavioral Factors. Social and behavior factors include numerous underlying determinants that contribute to people developing disease. These factors include, but are not limited to personal behaviors, exposure to infection, genetics, geography, environment (natural and built), access to medical care, education, income, occupation, cultural and religious factors. Many people, unfortunately, do not appreciate the impact of these factors on their ultimate health. These risks can contribute to heart disease, cancers, diabetes, and other chronic diseases.

Poverty. Approximately 700 to 800 children in Colorado County are living in poverty, representing about 20–22% of the county’s child population, or roughly one in five children. Poverty rates are highest among younger children, with an estimated 25–28% of those under age five affected, compared to about 20–23% for children ages 5–11 and 17–20% for those ages 12–17. (American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimates)

Tobacco. Tobacco use in Texas causes over 28,000 deaths annually and costs over \$34 billion in healthcare expenses. As of recent data, 10%–11.8% of Texas adults smoke cigarettes, while 7.1% use e-cigarettes. Youth vaping is significant, with 18.7% of high schoolers using electronic vapor products in 2021. According to reports based on CDC data and state assessments as of early 2025–2026, tobacco use causes significant mortality in Texas Annual Deaths: Cigarette smoking kills more than 28,000 adults in Texas each year. Tobacco use caused an estimated 51,321 cancer cases in Texas in 2022.

Cancer Burden: Approximately 27% of all cancer deaths in the state are attributable to smoking.

Economic Cost: Smoking-related illnesses cost Texas more than \$34 billion in healthcare costs and lost productivity annually.

Youth Vaping: In 2021, 18.7% of high school students in Texas reported using electronic vapor products.

State Ranking: Texas consistently receives "F" grades from the American Lung Association for its tobacco control policies, including funding for prevention programs and smoke-free workplace laws. (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2019 Facts) In addition, in Figure 6, below there is a marked increase in the percentage of teens vaping for the first time.

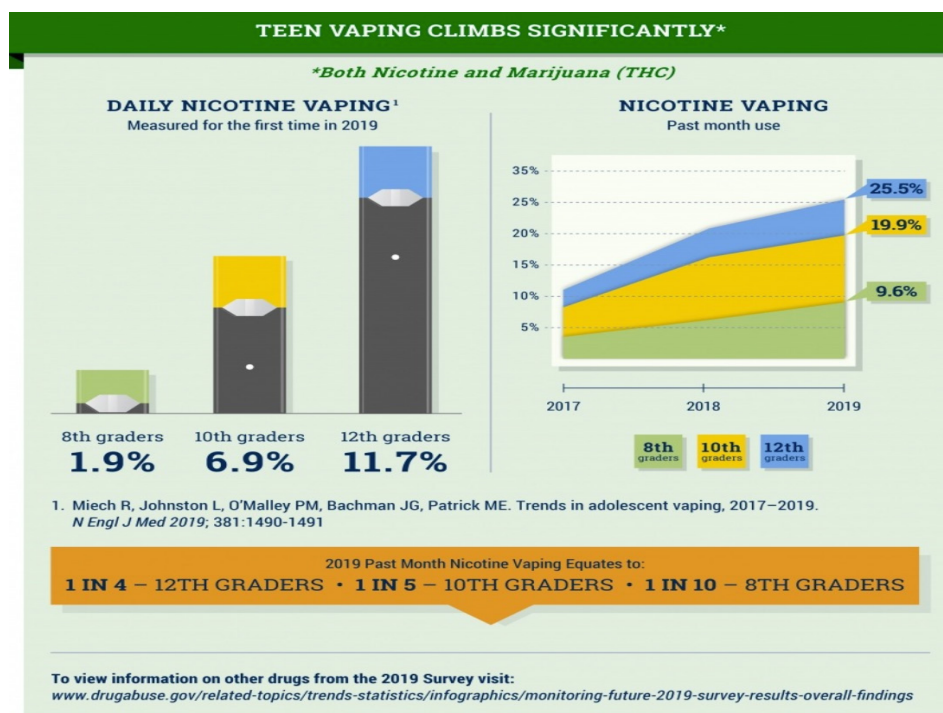
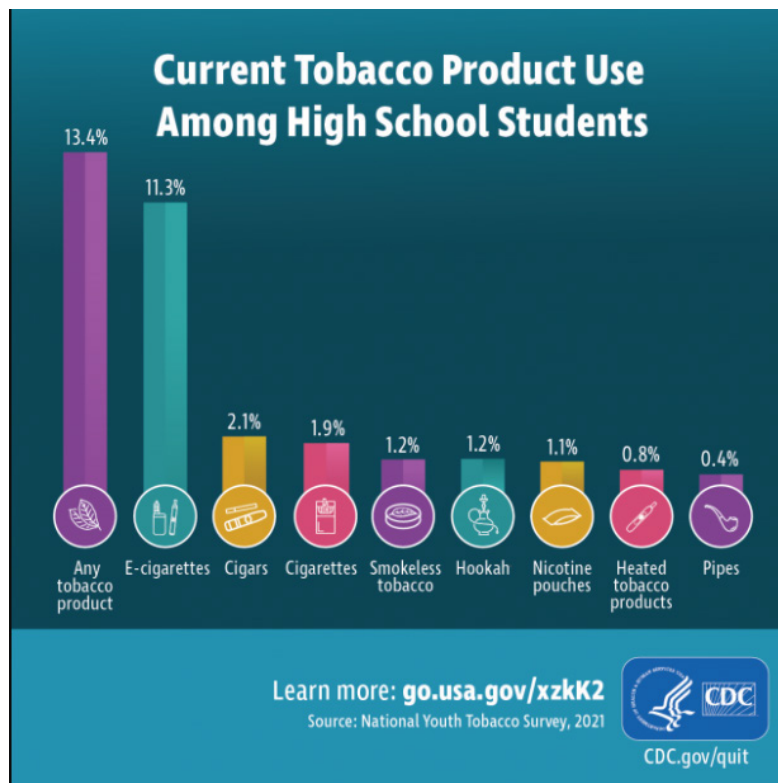


Figure 7 below, indicates the Current Tobacco Product Use Among High School Students.



Obesity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, based on 2023 data, the adult obesity rate in Colorado County, Texas, was approximately 35%, with some areas reaching as high as 41%. This rate is higher than the average for Texas Health Services Region 6 (28.5%–31.8%), which includes the county. Some factors that contribute to obesity include physical activity, access to fast food, poor access to grocery stores, and food insecurity. This reflects a high prevalence of obesity in the county, contributing to serious health risks.

Access to Food. Colorado County, Texas, has a Food Environment Index value of 8, placing it in a category with several neighboring Texas counties. As of 2022 data, Texas has a 22% food insecurity rate, affecting 1 in 6 people. While specific, detailed, broken-down, and updated food access charts for only Colorado County are limited, the county generally relies on regional food banks for assistance. (Plain Food Access, 2022) SNAP benefits (food stamps) in Colorado County, Texas, follow state-wide maximum allotment charts based on household size and income (e.g., up to 1 person, up to for 4 people, and higher for larger families). Benefits are calculated based on 30% of net income, with a \$5,000 asset limit. (Texas Health and Human Services)

Physical Inactivity: Colorado County residents was 28% compared to 25% Texas state average. The data, particularly the 28% physical inactivity rate, suggests that a significant portion of the adult population in Colorado County is not meeting recommended activity levels, which is a key risk factor for chronic diseases like diabetes. (Rural Health Information Hub, 2025)

Injuries. Colorado County, Texas, reports a lower overall crime rate (2,220 per 100,000 people) compared to the Texas state average of 5,489, with theft and property damage as the most frequent incidents. Motor vehicle crashes are a primary source of injury data, with recent figures indicating over 400 reported crashes. (Texas Department of Safety) Stress and Mental Health. Colorado County, Texas, faces significant mental health challenges, with 80% of Texas counties, including rural areas, designated as Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas (MHPSAs).

Statewide data indicates over 43% of Texas adults report anxiety or depression symptoms, while one in three high school students report poor mental health. As of 2024, Texas continues to face significant mental health challenges, with over 1 in 5 U.S. adults experiencing mental illness, while Texas ranks low (46th).

Chronic Diseases. Most chronic diseases have behavioral factors that contribute to the disease, thus explaining the vital need for good understanding of determinants of health. In a county like Colorado that has an older-than-average population, the rates of chronic diseases are expected to be higher. Based on 2011–2022 Texas Department of State Health Services data, the leading causes of death in Colorado County, TX, are Heart Disease and Malignant Neoplasms (Cancer). These are followed by unintentional injuries, cerebrovascular diseases (stroke), Alzheimer's disease, and chronic lower respiratory diseases.

Maternal and Child Health. Based on 2025 March of Dimes data, Texas faces significant maternal health challenges with a 11.1% preterm birth rate and high rates of maternity care deserts. Rural areas, likely including Colorado County, often experience limited access to obstetric care and higher risks of limited prenatal care (20.4% statewide). Key trends include a rise in Texas maternal mortality, with a 2021 ratio of 37.7 deaths per 100,000 live births, and a 2021 infant mortality rate of 5.29 per 1,000 live births. (Texas Department of Health and Science.)

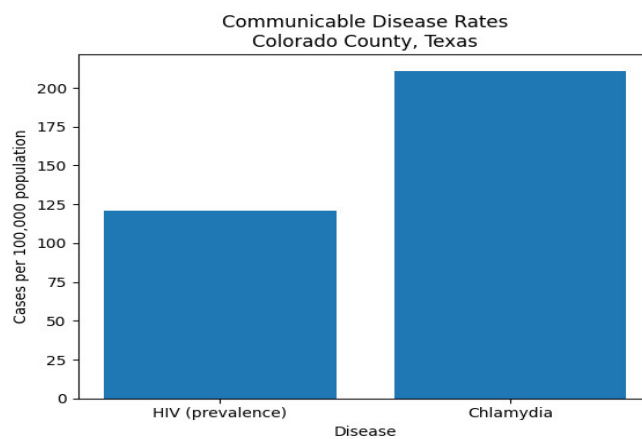
Diabetes. Diabetes prevalence in Colorado County, Texas is estimated at approximately 14.7% of the adult population, meaning roughly one in seven adults has been diagnosed with diabetes. This rate is higher than both the Texas average of about 13.9% and the national average of 11.3%. The data, derived from CDC and County Health Rankings estimates, highlights diabetes as a significant public health concern in the county and underscores the need for prevention, education, and chronic disease management programs. (CDC)

Hypertension & Cardiac Problems. In Colorado County, heart disease prevalence is 8.5% of adults have heart disease. This compares to Texas, 7.8% and United States, 7.1%. This indicates that heart disease prevalence in Colorado County is higher than both state and national averages. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Colorado County. These figures show that cardiovascular mortality in Colorado County has consistently been higher than the state average. (Source CDC) Hypertension Prevalence: 23.9% of adults in Colorado County have been diagnosed with high blood pressure Comparison: Texas: 23.9–32% depending on dataset and year and the United States: 26.5% of adults. This means roughly 1 in 4 adults in Colorado County has been told by a health professional that they have hypertension.

Cancer. The age-adjusted invasive cancer incidence rates in 2023 was 449.7 per 100,000. This is higher compared to the incidence rate of 430.6 per 100,000 for Texas. In 2025, an estimated 148,598 new invasive cancer cases are expected to be diagnosed in Texas, with an overall age-adjusted incidence rate of approximately 430.6 cases per 100,000 population.

Communicable Diseases. Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). These are the most commonly reported communicable diseases in the county Colorado County, Texas, is generally ranked among the middle to lower-performing counties in the state for health outcomes, often reflecting challenges common to rural areas, such as limited access to care. In the 2022 Texas County Health Rankings, it was positioned in the middle, while many rural areas in Texas face similar disparities.

Figure 8 below shows trends in communicable disease rates.



Immunizations. For 2024 (school year 2023–2024), the best available statistics for Colorado County come from the Texas school immunization compliance dataset reported by the Texas Department of State Health Services. These statistics measure vaccination coverage among students attending public and private schools in the county (home schooled children are not included).

Colorado County, TX – Immunization statistics (2023–2024 school year)

Kindergarten vaccination coverage (selected vaccines):

Vaccine	Estimated coverage
DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis)	94%
Hepatitis A	94%
Hepatitis B	95–96%
MMR (measles, mumps, rubella)	94%
Polio	94%
Varicella (chickenpox)	93–94%

Access to Care. Access to health care depends on many factors such as availability of providers, types of services, insurance providers, vulnerable populations, and safety net organizations. These factors contribute to a person having the ability to get healthcare when needed.

Facilities. The National Rural Health Association based on information from the Chartis Center for Rural Health named Columbus Community Hospital (CCH) as one of the top 100 rural and community hospitals in the U.S. CCH has made the top 20 on this list on multiple occasions. In terms of public health, the Columbus area is supported by the 6-5S Region of the Texas State Department of Health Services.

HPSA. Health Professional Shortage Area (HPSA) is a federal designation for a geographic area that meets certain criteria. Columbus Community Hospital is designated a HPSA site. The scores are: Primary Care: 13 and Mental Health : 14. As of 2025, all of Colorado County has been designated as a Primary Care HPSA, Dental HPSA and Mental Health HPSA sites.

Medicaid/Medicare/CHIP. In 2024, approximately 12.6% of Colorado County, Texas residents were uninsured, a decline from 14% in 2023, while 23.7% of the general Texas population was enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP. The county's health landscape includes a 1,875-to-1 patient-to-primary care physician ratio. Statewide, 4.55 million Texans (14.6%) are covered by Medicaid insurance.

Preventable Hospital Days. Colorado County, Texas, experiences high rates of preventable hospital stays, contributing to a #74 health ranking out of 221 Texas counties. Key drivers include limited access to care, high adult obesity (29%), and high rates of chronic, ambulatory-care sensitive conditions like asthma and diabetes.

Community Needs Assessment Summary – Colorado County (2026)

As part of the Community Needs Assessment, Columbus Community Hospital held information sessions with hospital executives, nursing staff and focus groups with community leaders, a representative from the school system, the health care and representatives from local businesses. The following section summarizes findings from the information session and focus groups.

Community Safety and Substance Use. Public safety remains a significant concern, particularly related to substance abuse. Community stakeholders report increased methamphetamine use and a troubling rise in opioid and Xanax misuse among youth. Law enforcement has implemented a crime suppression unit to address narcotics activity, with known hotspots in the community and certain residential properties. These locations are associated with repeated criminal activity, including drug trafficking and violence, posing ongoing risks to community safety.

Housing and Environmental Health. Substandard housing conditions contribute to health and safety concerns. There are designated areas that are identified as a high-risk property, presenting issues such as mold, pest infestations, and unsafe living environments. Efforts to remediate these conditions are hindered by legal access limitations and lack of cooperation from property ownership. More broadly, the county faces challenges related to affordable housing availability, which impacts workforce recruitment, economic development, and population stability.

Healthcare Access and Affordability Health Care. Respondents describe the Columbus community as no longer being just Colorado County; it includes Fayette, Austin and Lavaca counties because of the disparity of healthcare in the surrounding counties. Columbus Community Hospital (CCH) is the only hospital in a 45-mile radius that provides obstetric (OB) Labor and Delivery services, making it the primary location where families in the area can give birth locally. Texas Elite provides a therapist that provides education for breastfeeding.

Mammography. CCH purchased a 3-D Mammography unit to improve breast-cancer screening and make advanced imaging available locally.

Collaboration with Medical Schools. CCH is working with the Columbus High School Healthcare Center. Students interested in medicine, nursing, or other health careers can take Health Science classes that teach basic medical knowledge and skills. Wharton Junior College and Victoria College collaborate with CCH so nursing students can complete their clinical training.

Wellness Center at CCH. CCH opened a Wellness Center which creates a place where residents can improve their physical and mental health. Physical activity reduces anxiety and depression symptoms and improves sleep and brain health

Access to Affordable Healthcare. Access to Affordable Healthcare remains a critical issue. High insurance costs, including Medicare premiums and deductibles, create barriers for many residents, particularly those on fixed incomes who do not qualify for assistance programs. Insurance denials for low-cost medications and high out-of-pocket expenses often force individuals to delay care or seek treatment through emergency services. Hospitals report substantial uncompensated care, driven largely by increased emergency room utilization.

Public Health Concerns. Key health concerns identified include mental health conditions, chronic diseases such as diabetes, and rising rates of youth vaping. Mental health issues are increasing significantly, particularly among students, with schools reporting a sharp rise in behavioral alerts and crisis interventions. Contributing factors include social media exposure, technology use, and limited access to consistent mental health care. Gaps in behavioral health services and medication continuity further strain emergency resources. Obesity concerns include Childhood Obesity is a very serious problem and one that we as a community needs to be further addressed.

Social Services and Community Resources. Despite these challenges, Colorado County benefits from a range of community-based supports. Local initiatives include food pantry services experiencing record demand, school-based programs supporting economically disadvantaged students, and health education efforts such as screenings and wellness events. Prescription assistance tools and discount programs are utilized, though eligibility gaps persist. Collaboration among healthcare providers, schools, nonprofits, and community organizations remains a key strength.

Transportation and System Gaps. Transportation barriers affect access to healthcare and continuity of care, particularly for patients discharged from hospitals without reliable means of returning home. Emergency medical services face logistical challenges due to the large service area. Additionally, inconsistencies in mental health service providers and insurance acceptance contribute to lapses in care and increased reliance on emergency departments.

Education and Youth Development. Schools are addressing both academic and social needs, with approximately 60% of students identified as economically disadvantaged. Programs such as dual credit courses, career and technical education and college readiness initiatives aim to expand opportunities. Extracurricular participation is encouraged regardless of financial status, though access to affordable recreational activities remains limited.

Economic and Infrastructure Factors. Economic growth is influenced by workforce challenges, housing shortages, and infrastructure disruptions. Ongoing highway construction has negatively impacted local business revenue, while housing affordability continues to affect workforce retention. Efforts to expand housing and attract development are underway but have yet to fully meet community demand.

Conclusion. The assessment highlights interconnected challenges across public safety, healthcare access, mental health, housing, and economic stability. While Colorado County demonstrates strong community collaboration and existing support systems, significant gaps remain. Addressing these issues will require coordinated efforts, expanded resources, and strategic planning to improve long-term health, safety, and quality of life for residents.

Attachment 1 – Focus Group Invited Participants

James Vanek, Columbus Community Hospital CEO

Greg Pritchett, Columbus Community Hospital CFO

Kristy Nelson, Columbus Community Hospital Director of Nursing

Ashley Mathis, Columbus Community Hospital Director of Quality & IT Services

Betty Hajovsky, Columbus Community Hospital Community Relations

Andrew Lopez, Colorado County Mental Health Deputy

Diana Sarao, Columbus High School ISD, Principal

Bay Trojacek, Frank Surveying, Business Development Manager

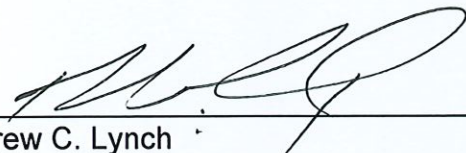
Lori An Gobert, Columbus, TX, Mayor and Business Owner of Skin Health & Wellness

Debora Shimek, RN, Wesley Nurse

Brenda Anderson, Colorado County Extension Agent

Troy Millican, M.D., Columbus Medical Clinic

Sharin Hjella, D.O., Columbus Medical Clinic



Drew C. Lynch
CCH Board President