

Accessing Health Care in Denver

Spotlight on the Denver Health FQHC

The Story of the Safety Net

Ensuring access to comprehensive, quality health care services is necessary to improve health across Denver's diverse populations and achieve health equity.

Many organizations partner across Denver to guarantee that even patients without insurance have access to the right care at the right time.

These **safety net institutions** provide care to uninsured and underinsured individuals regardless of their ability to pay. [Federally qualified health centers \(FQHCs\)](#) are an important part of the safety net, providing primary care services to uninsured patients.

Medicaid Expansion, Entering Care and the FQHC

When Colorado expanded its Medicaid program in 2014, many newly insured residents looked to their nearest FQHC to re-engage with healthcare, or enter into care for the first time.

Knowing that Medicaid expansion would increase its patient population, Denver Health hired many new primary care providers to ensure new patients could be seen. To identify eligible patients, Denver Health enrollment services helped screen uninsured families and individuals, and enrolled them in Medicaid. The Denver Health patient population grew substantially between 2012 and 2015 from 128,731 to 147,769. The number of Denver Health Medicaid patients increased by roughly 24,000 patients, or 37% in 2014 (see Figure 1).

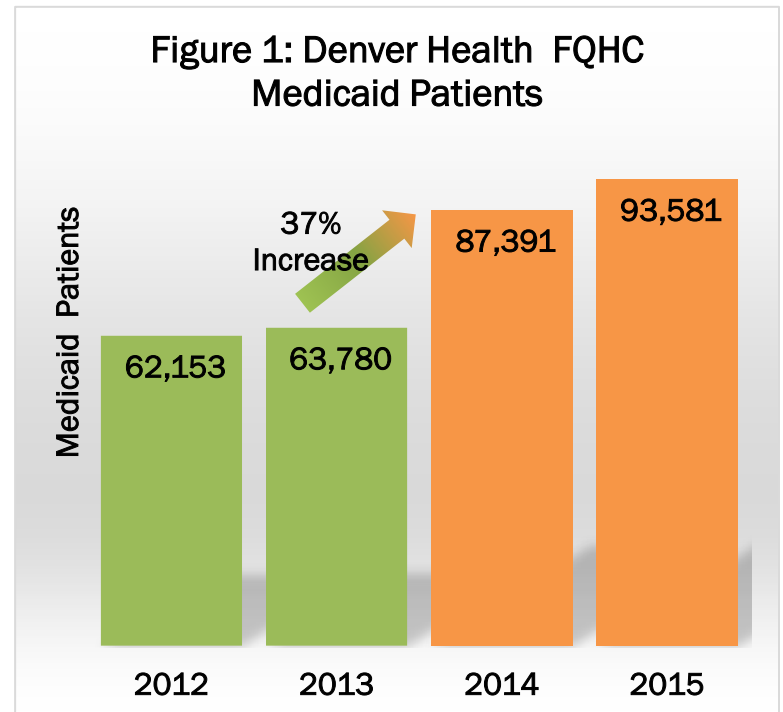
Many newly insured patients gained access to a Denver Health patient centered medical home, and access to affordable preventive health services. Though some studies suggest Medicaid expansions would cause an unmanageable increase in healthcare utilization, data from the 2015 Colorado Health Access Survey found that healthcare use among Medicaid and privately insured patients was similar.

What are Federally Qualified Health Centers?

According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), [FQHCs](#) are non-profit, private, or public entities that serve medically underserved populations like migrant farmworkers, the homeless or residents of public housing.

FQHCs receive benefits to help provide care to many vulnerable populations and receive a national designation through HHS.

Figure 1: Denver Health FQHC Medicaid Patients



Source: Denver Health

Who Remains Uninsured?

At the end of 2015, roughly 60,000 or 9.5% of Denver residents remained uninsured. Most uninsured Denverites are male. In fact, 40 percent of Denver's uninsured are males younger than 40 according to [a recent Colorado Health Institute report](#).

Some adults remain uninsured because they are not eligible for Medicaid, including recent immigrants and individuals in the criminal justice system.

The Impact of a Medicaid Expansion at Denver Health

The 2014 Medicaid expansion had a significant positive financial impact on safety net health care at healthcare institutions nationwide. Healthcare organizations monitor their payer mix, or the proportion of patients covered by each insurance type, to track financial health.

The 2014 Medicaid expansion caused unprecedented changes in the Denver Health payer mix (see Figure 2). From 2013 to 2014:

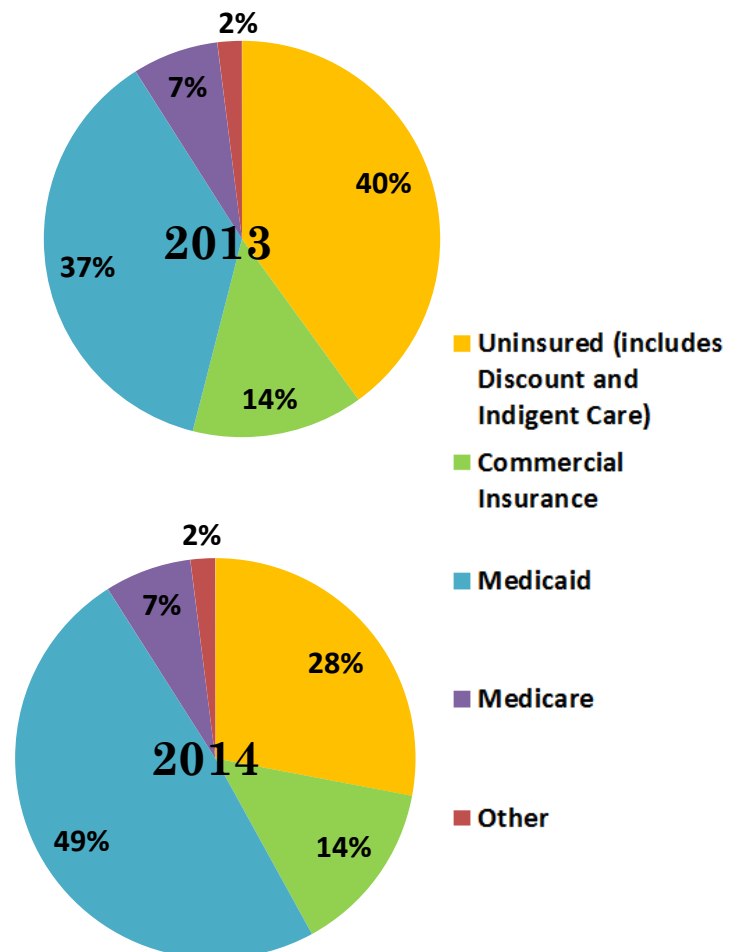
- The percent of Denver Health **patients without insurance dropped from 40% to 28%.**
- The percent of **care provided to Medicaid patients increased from 37% to 49%.**

This shift includes reductions in the percent of patients on indigent care and discount programs that reduce costs to patients, but do not lead to payment for services.

While high quality care is provided to uninsured patients by the safety net, the growing proportion of individuals who are now insured and covered by Medicaid is a big win for Denver. People who gain insurance have reduced cost to get the care that they need, and more access to care. Medicaid covers 100% of preventive and wellness services like immunizations, cancer screening, smoking cessation support and family planning services. Improved access is particularly relevant for specialty care services that are not available at FQHCs.

Medicaid reimbursement also supports the safety net in providing better access to other needed services such as dental, vision, behavioral health and substance abuse treatment.

Figure 2: 2013 and 2014 Denver Health Payer Mix



Source: Denver Health

What is Denver Health doing?

- Building FQHC community health clinics in the most underserved communities in Denver.
- Expanding hours at current FQHC clinics to increase access for patients after work, or on the weekends.
- Providing more extensive services at FQHC clinics such as behavioral health, podiatry and ophthalmology.
- Piloting tele-health technology to increase access to important specialty services like psychiatry and dermatology.

What can you do?

- Encourage uninsured individuals in your community to enroll in Medicaid, or other insurance programs.
- Advocate for the importance of community health centers and the safety net.
- Be a source for the right information about the positive impact the Medicaid expansion has had on the lives of many Denver residents.
- Help individuals who remain uninsured find where they can get care.