

A recent report from United States of Care

WHAT PEOPLE WANT AND HOW TO ADDRESS A “ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL” HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | MARCH 2024

Colorado has long been a leader among states in developing innovative policies that improve the health and wellbeing of their residents, including through the recent adoption of “culturally responsive provider networks” as part of the Colorado Option standardized health plans. Despite this, the health care system remains fraught with issues stemming from structural racism and more needs to be done to reduce inequities. A recent report from United States of Care aims to capture Coloradans’ perspectives on finding and accessing culturally responsive health care and offers a series of recommendations for policymakers in Colorado and other states looking to advance access to culturally responsive care.

Background United States of Care worked with partners in the state to support the passage and ongoing implementation of the Colorado Option, the state’s public health insurance option, which included requirements for the development of first-of-its-kind “culturally responsive” provider networks. With over 80,000 people now enrolled in the Colorado Option, we sought to better understand the unique health care needs of Coloradans and how improved access to culturally responsive care can better serve what they want and need from the health care system. Through a series of key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and community conversations with people, providers, and other stakeholders over the course of 6 months, we captured their collective views on finding and accessing culturally responsive care. These perspectives built the foundation for subsequent policy recommendations we hope policymakers can act on to ensure people’s unique cultural identities are taken into account when they seek and receive health care.

Key Findings We completed 10 virtual key informant interviews with people representing various health care stakeholders in Colorado, including advocacy, government, and academic institutions; seven virtual in-depth interviews with health care providers practicing in Colorado; and four in-person community conversations (three in English, one in Spanish) with diverse groups of patients, including people of color, those who identify as LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, and those that live at the intersection of these identities.

Here’s what they had to say:

- Patients have low expectations of our health care system, with an understanding that it does not need to be perfect—but they feel **the status quo makes them feel disrespected**;
- Patients have a desire to have **their identity**—whatever that may be— **not impede their access to care and not be disregarded when receiving care**;
- **Implicit bias** among health care providers, health insurance carriers, and other health care professionals, **and a lack of understanding** about unique population-based needs (such as gender-affirming care or technology accommodations) **are negatively impacting patients’ experience in receiving care**;



Culturally responsive health care

seeks to close gaps and improves access to high-quality care and health outcomes for people with varied cultural origins and identities, regardless of their culture, race, ethnicity, language, geography, or ability. It acknowledges and provides an inclusive atmosphere where **patients’ cultural beliefs are respected and taken into account when providing care**. Health care professionals must be conscious of their own prejudices, preconceptions, and cultural beliefs that may be different from someone else’s. Being aware of cultural differences aids in reducing prejudices and prevents the stereotyping of patients according to their cultural background.

Understanding and accepting the patient’s cultural norms—even if it deviates from the provider’s—is a necessary component of culturally responsive care.

- There's a **lack of diversity in Colorado's health care workforce** and those that are able to practice in underserved and diverse communities face administrative burdens, high cost of living, low compensation, and high turnover; and
- A **fragmented system**, including a lack of standardization across data collection efforts and administrative requirements, **leads to rushed appointments**—and patients are left feeling burdened.

I feel like health care is one size fits all and that size is white.

– ASIAN WOMAN,
SUBURBAN COLORADO

Policy Recommendations

United States of Care worked with partners in the state to support the passage and ongoing implementation of the Colorado Option, the state's public health insurance option, which included requirements for the development of first-of-its-kind "culturally responsive" provider networks. With over 80,000 people now enrolled in the Colorado Option, we sought to better understand the unique health care needs of Coloradans and how improved access to culturally responsive care can better serve what they want and need from the health care system. Through a series of key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and community conversations with people, providers, and other stakeholders over the course of 6 months, we captured their collective views on finding and accessing culturally responsive care. These perspectives built the foundation for subsequent policy recommendations we hope policymakers can act on to ensure people's unique cultural identities are taken into account when they seek and receive health care.

1 Develop and train a culturally responsive care workforce.

- Establish standard culturally responsive care curriculum requirements for providers entering the workforce.
- For providers already practicing in Colorado, establish training and continuing medical education (CME) requirements related to culturally responsive care.
- Expand training requirements for plans' customer service representatives to non-Colorado Option plans.
- Increase the amount of funding dedicated to developing and implementing culturally responsive care training.

2 Advance culturally responsive care through health insurance.

- Expand network adequacy requirements to ensure more diverse providers are included and more Coloradans benefit from the existing requirements.
- Improve provider directory standards across non-Colorado Option plans to ensure patients can identify providers best suited to meet their cultural and health care needs.
- Increase access to services that are high-value and known to reduce disparities.
- Require health equity or cultural responsiveness accreditation for health plans and providers.
- Utilize a streamlined credentialing process for providers

3 Recruit and retain a diverse health care workforce.

- Create a health care workforce diversity task force or similar entity to analyze and implement programs intended to recruit and retain providers from underrepresented communities.
- Further incentivize both diverse providers to practice in Colorado and health care employers to recruit diverse professionals.

4 Address people's barriers to accessing culturally responsive care.

- Explore ways to better coordinate and provide whole-person, patient-first care such as integrating health care and housing or transportation.
- Expand the reach of language accessibility requirements.
- Embrace opportunities to improve and expand internet access and digital literacy in underserved rural communities.