



# IMPROVING THE SERVICE REFERRAL PROCESS

FOR ADAMS COUNTY

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# PURPOSE/PROJECT



**The Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County** has brought partners together since 2012 to improve the referral process for young children and families. Each year this work evolves to the next level. With funding from the Colorado Trust, the development of a best practices guide and referral roadmap, led to referral follow through increasing from 52% to 65%. Then through Project LAUNCH (2014-2019), Care Navigation was implemented, increasing the referral follow through rate to 80.4%. While Care Navigation improved follow-through rates, knowing which services were available remained a challenge. As a result, multiple organizations attempted to create resource directories that were often incomplete, outdated, and hard to maintain.

As a result, in 2021, ECPAC received funding for the next phase of planning from the Office of Early

Childhood's Preschool Development Grant mini-grant. This 8-month planning period supported the engagement of cross-sector organizational partners who serve Adams County residents across the life span to come together to develop a vision of recommending a referral platform for adoption to enhance the care coordination and navigation process to further ensure that those referred do not fall through the cracks and that data is available to inform decisions around disparities that exist in the referral process. The planning process was further informed by the Advancing a Coordinated Ecosystem for a Social Health Information Exchange in CO guide (S-HIE) and the [Department of Early Childhood's Local Early Childhood Systems Coordination Toolkit](#). Finally the collaborative kept equity top of mind through [ECPAC's Equity Impact Statement](#) for decision making, which was reviewed at the beginning of each meeting.

# TIMELINE



March 21

June 21

Oct-Dec 21

## Kick Off

ECPAC worked with a small group of partners to create a survey for organizations (see results below). This survey provided the opportunity for respondents to note interest in joining the cross-sector collaborative.

## Partner Engagement

Following the S-HIE framework, the collaborative spent several months engaging missing partners. The collaborative then established our vision and purpose.

## Community Engagement

The collaborative developed survey and focus group questions to ensure community engagement from residents to help inform decisions as well as further gathered data from organizations who had not yet completed the survey from March. The community survey (English and Spanish) was open in November and focus groups were held in December.

Jan-April 22

May 22 - Ongoing



## Informed Decision Making

The collaborative reviewed results in January and February and cross-walked these with the initial components identified to validate priorities. In March the collaborative received a demonstration of one of the final platforms that had not already been viewed.

## Recommendation Dissemination and Offer Training

Present final recommendation information and provide opportunities for training towards implementation.

# PARTNERS AND VISION

**Cross-sector collaborative partners:** Adams 12 Five Star Schools, Almost Home, Brighton Housing Authority, Children’s Hospital, Clinica Family Health, Colorado Community Care Managed Network, Creative Treatment Options, Early Childhood Partnership of Adams County, Front Range Clinic, Kids First Health Care, North Metro Community Services, SCL Health, and Tri-County Health Department.

**The cross-sector collaborative established a vision to:** Recommend referral platform(s) that include the following components (as validated by data) and support widespread adoption:

- **Screening** for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)
- Knowledge of up-to-date available **resources** - don’t want to send families to the wrong place
- **Make and track referrals**
- **Close the referral loop back to referral source**
- **Data sharing** with confidentiality
- **Analytics of data** that inform disparities and gaps and supports allocation of resources
- **Care coordination tool** - consider how to best support the interface with other tools and the human component
- **Interoperability** and integration with EMRs (recognizing this may be in the future)
- **Easy to adopt and user friendly** (effective and efficient: less time on paperwork and not data entry heavy)

Through data collection as noted below, having a **public facing** option so people can self-refer as well as ensuring **confidentiality** became additional components that were prioritized.

# INFORMED DECISION MAKING

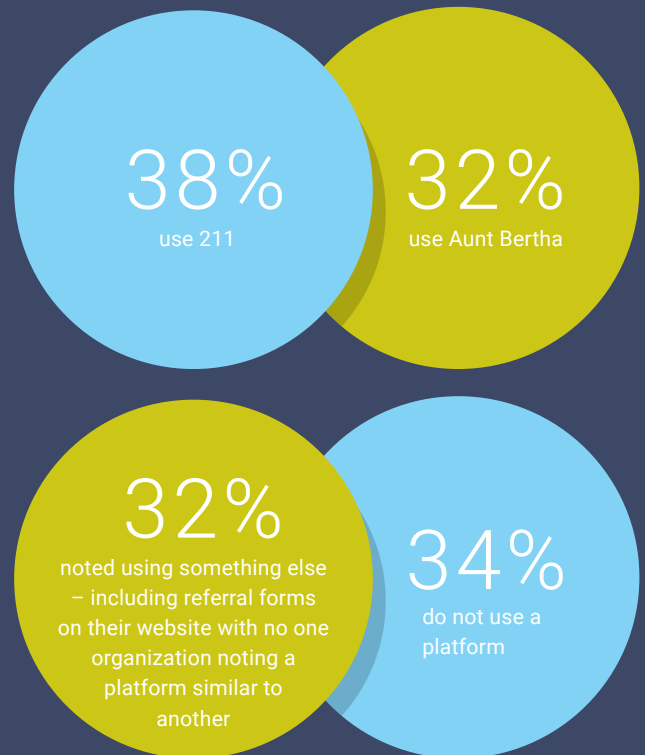
The collaborative set forth to gather data to inform and/or validate the necessary components to consider in the review and decision making of recommended platform(s). The collaborative wanted to hear from service organizations in Adams County about what platforms are

currently being utilized, what components of the platforms are most helpful, what components would organizations like to have in a platform, and what would be needed to support the adoption and implementation of a platform.

## Respondents:

43 unduplicated organizations responded from the following sectors: 12 from Education (28%); 11 from Family Support/ Education (25.5%); 16 from Health or Mental Health (37.2%); 4 from organizations who provide basic needs (9%). All organizations support lower income residents. Service organizations serving the full life span were represented.

Results indicated that of the 15 platforms available in Colorado:



Most organizations noted they were not actively looking at other platforms at the time of the survey.

Of those that use a platform – the most commonly used function was a **resource directory (40%)** followed by the **facilitation of referrals (33%)** or **one way referrals (21%)**.

Organizations' likelihood to adopt a recommended platform was as follows:

Likelihood of adopting a platform	Percent
If it is free/low cost	42.0%
If technical support was provided	31.0%
If partner organizations adopted	21.0%
If more information is provided	29.0%
Not likely	12.5%

For those who are open to adopting a platform the following components were noted as important:

Most important components of a referral platform	Percent
Resource directory	98%
Exchange Information and Interoperability	96%
Bi-directional referrals	94%
Pathway to outside resource directory	92%
SDOH screening	89%
Individual data on SDOH	84%
One way referrals	51%

The collaborative also wanted to hear from residents of Adams County who have received referrals or services for either themselves and/or for their children. Specifically, there was interested in what types of services are most important to residents so that the collaborative could target these types of organizations for adoption, and what are the biggest barriers to the referral process to consider how platforms could help address these. Both a survey and focus group (virtual and in person) were made available for gathering this information. Gift card incentives were provided. Interpretation and childcare were offered for the focus groups.

### Respondents:

A total of 19 individuals either completed a survey or attended a focus group. 37% identified Spanish as their preferred language with 63% identifying as a person of color. 84% reported lower incomes. Residents from 5 of Adams County's 10 cities were represented with 0% representation from the 3 rural cities.

### Results indicated:

100% of respondents are comfortable to very comfortable sharing information as part of the referral process.

### The most common services respondents utilize:

- English speakers: Public benefits – SNAP/TANF (58%), with Medical Health, Substance Use, Housing and Food all tied (47%)
- Spanish speakers: Parent Education (55%); Child development (44%), with Case Management, Oral Health, and Utility Assistance tied (33%)

### The services most difficult to connect to included:

- English speakers: 36% identified Food, Housing, Transportation, Child Development and Case Management
- Spanish speakers: 22% identified Mental Health

### Open ended responses include barriers related to:

- Not know what services are available
- Cost
- Lack of transportation
- Waitlists
- Connecting to a person by phone
- Feeling services are not helpful or not comprehensive

Respondents note that the internet/google (81%), on-line resource directory (75%), or social media (75%) are the primary way they find services, followed by their Doctor (50%), followed by either another type of service provider or family/friend (both at 30%).

- 81% said they would prefer to sign up for a new service on a website, with 75% willing to use an app and only 12.5% saying they only want to sign up over the phone

**Colorado Community Care Managed Network (CCMCN)** supported the crosswalk of data with referral platforms review process, lending knowledge they have gathered as part of their own work. Additionally, ECPAC and Tri-County Health Department had meetings with the Colorado Health Institute to align with metro-area efforts.

With these results and the initial vision in mind, the collaborative considered several available platforms in Colorado. It was important to the group to also consider what surrounding counties were using or considering knowing that mobility is a factor. Several organizations met with one of the top referral platform staff to discuss interoperability with electronic medical records.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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The cross-sector collaborative recognizes that expecting all service organizations in Adams County to use one platform is not realistic. Further we recognize that there is not a “one size fits all” platform and each organization must choose what works best for them. Furthermore, the collaborative acknowledges that many organizations are already successfully using one of the top three referral platforms – 211, Aunt Bertha (now called FindHelp.org), and Unite Us.

With this being said, the collaborative set out on this journey with the realization that referral platforms are only as successful as the number of actively participating partners and therefore the recommendation of a common platform would serve Adams County residents well. Finally, the collaborative understands that there are efforts for future interoperability between platforms that will further unify the referral process in Adams County. However until then, it would benefit Adams County residents if organizations used one common platform.

In the end, the collaborative chose to recommend [FindHelp.org](https://www.findhelp.org) (previously known as Aunt Bertha).

It shall be reiterated that this does not imply the other platforms are not beneficial. This decision was based on the data received by those who completed the organizational survey, those residents who completed the survey or focus group, and those partners who committed to the year long process of evaluating option.



### The primary reasons FindHelp.org rose to the top:

- 1 the public facing component which residents voiced was important as they often look for services on their own before engaging help to find services
- 2 the tighter confidentiality framework allowing only those organizations in which a person has given permission to see information
- 3 the ability to brand the platform if so desired to Adams County (while still allowing access to resources across the state/nation)
- 4 current efforts with interoperability



## NEXT STEPS

- Disseminate this report
- Offer demonstration presentations and training on the FindHelp.org platform
- Support implementation – including maintaining an updated profile
- Evaluate success and outcomes to ensure platform is meeting needs
- Seek funding to support higher level reporting if needed
- Support interoperability efforts as appropriate



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