



## **United States Congressional Delegation Visits Stout Street Clinic**

*August 6, 2009*

*Remarks by  
John Parvensky  
President and Chief Executive Officer  
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless*

On behalf of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, I want to thank you all for being here to witness our work and to learn about what we need to do to address the health and mental health crisis facing those experiencing homelessness in our community.

Thank you to **Speaker Pelosi** for choosing to focus on the important work of Health Care for the Homeless as part of the Community Health Center movement's role in advancing health care reform in America.

Thanks to **Congresswoman DeGette** for her long time support of our work, going back to her years as a volunteer helping people experiencing homelessness before she became a public official.

And thanks to **Congressman Polis** who we have worked with to address the needs of homeless youth in Denver.

Ask any American what are the three top issues facing our nation today, and nine out of ten will say the Economy, Health Care and Housing.

Through these doors, we see thousands of families and individuals each year facing the direct impact of these three life-threatening issues every day.

We are here today in the lobby of the Stout Street Clinic, the Coalition's Health Care for the Homeless clinic, which provide a full range of integrated health, mental health and substance treatment services for more than 15,000 families and individuals each year. We also have a mobile clinic, which is parked just outside, that takes health and mental health care to those who are not able to come into this clinic.

Eighty-five percent of all those we serve are uninsured. We are able to provide them the care they need due to the support of the community, the support of federal and state grants and the dedication and compassion of our staff.

Last night, the Coalition also provided housing to more than 2,100 households across the state who would have been on the streets if not for our help – because we have learned from our experience that housing IS health care.

Last December, we stood in this room and declared a State-of-Emergency for Colorado’s homeless and at-risk population. We were seeing record increases in foreclosures, evictions and job loss. The resources available to meet this increasing need were falling at the very time they were needed most. We predicted that things would get much worse before they got better.

Unfortunately, we weren’t wrong.

Tonight, there are more than 11,000 families and individuals who are homeless in Colorado. We estimate that more than 42,000 will experience at least one night of homelessness this year. Half of them are families with children. Twenty percent are veterans. These are frightening numbers. In the 24 years I have been working here at the Coalition, we have never seen this level of need.

Demand for our health services, particularly mental health care, is increasing rapidly. We have seen a 20 percent increase in homeless patient visits over the past year. We are forced to turn away many in need, due to our lack of space and lack of health care providers.

Our Mental Health Clinic was forced to create a waiting list for new homeless patients last October due to overwhelming demand. Today more than 450 persons are on this waitlist, seeking critical treatment for mental illness.

However, we are pleased to be here to announce that help is on the way, thanks in large part to the work of Speaker Pelosi, Congresswoman DeGette, Congressman Polis and President Obama.

Thanks to the Recovery Act, the Coalition has received a \$689,000 grant to help meet the increased service capacity for health and mental health care here in the clinic. These funds have allowed us to add four new mental health providers – psychiatrists and counselors – and to retain nurses and medical assistants to treat those most in need.

The Recovery Act has also provided the Coalition a \$680,000 Capital Improvement Program grant to implement an Electronic Health Records system for all of the Coalition’s health and housing service sites. This system will allow us to improve the quality and outcomes of patient care while achieving efficiencies in service delivery.

With this system, we can access the health record of any patient throughout our system to ensure they get the best care possible, while reducing the costs of duplicative procedures in the process. At least four new jobs will result from this investment.

Just today, the Coalition will be submitting an application to HRSA for additional Recovery Act funding through the Facility Improvement Program to double the size of this clinic to meet the health care needs of homeless families and individuals we are forced to turn away each day.

We are proposing a four-story addition connected with this two-story building, just next to our Off Broadway Lofts supportive housing development, to expand our capacity to meet this increasing need. If funded, this expansion will allow us to serve an additional 1,000 patients through 3,000 visits each year, while creating 25 construction and 13 permanent jobs.

The Colorado Health Foundation has committed \$1 million to match this request. We would like to thank Anne Warhover of the Foundation (who is here today) for their ongoing commitment to meet the health care needs of Colorado's most vulnerable citizens.

In April, the Coalition opened our newest supportive housing development, the Renaissance Riverfront Lofts, a 100-unit apartment building on the South Platte River, in the midst of luxury condominiums. The building, modeled after the Off Broadway Lofts located just next door to the clinic, was filled within two months.

We have another "shovel ready" supportive housing development ready to go at Colfax and Pearl Streets in Denver, just three blocks from the Capitol. The Coalition has also requested \$6 million of Recovery Act funding to complete the financing of this 98-unit, new construction, mixed use development.

We can begin construction immediately upon award of the Recovery Act funds by the Colorado Housing Finance Authority. We project that this development will create 50 full-time construction jobs, 156 retail jobs, and 7 property management and support service jobs, as well as generating an additional \$35 million of additional economic activity in the community, while meeting one of the most critical housing needs of our community.

We have other Recovery Act programs ready to be implemented, including the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program through HUD, and expanded TANF emergency funds for families in need. These are described in your packets.

In closing, I believe that we stand at a critical crossroad in our nation's history. We are at the convergence of crisis and despair on one hand, and opportunity and hope on the other.

If we do not take advantage of this unique opportunity to not only invest in our physical infrastructure to help rebuild our economy, but also to invest in the human capital needed to help those who have been most hurt by this recession, we will be held accountable to history for our failure.

The solutions are clear. We know how to solve the problems of homelessness and health care.

The answer is investment in housing and the reform of our health care system so that all of our citizens have access to the health, mental health and housing they need to live the American dream. Thank you.