Tackling Loneliness with Communities (TLC) & Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory (COMET)

Community partnerships to assess loneliness and support mental health in eastern Colorado

Presented by Maret Felzien & Kristen Curcija

Photo by Minnie Rodriguez, Holyoke, CO
DISCLOSURES

We have no financial investments and receive no funding from any of the private companies talked about in this presentation.

No off-label medication use will be discussed.

We are not mental health experts or care providers.
High Plains Research Network (HPRN)

- Housed at the University of Colorado Department of Family Medicine
- 16 counties of eastern rural and frontier Colorado
- 54 primary care practices
- 16 hospitals
- 10 local public health departments
- 160,000 people
- Community Advisory Council (C.A.C.)
Understanding loneliness & addressing mental health needs in rural communities
Loneliness

- Loneliness is associated with multiple negative medical and mental health outcomes and **increases the risk of mortality by 26%**
- Uptake of loneliness interventions is low, and little is known about effective strategies to address loneliness, particularly in rural communities
- The **Tackling Loneliness with Communities (TLC)** pilot project created a community-academic partnership in the HPRN region to assess loneliness in eastern Colorado and create a local resource for individuals experiencing loneliness in rural communities.
TLC Project

**Surveys (n = 214)**
- Using CBPR, community advisory co-created and distributed survey about loneliness in 6 counties
- Cross-sectional surveys using venue-based sampling (convenience sample) of adults in NE CO

**Interviews (n = 17)**
- Conducted Appreciative Inquiry (AI) interviews with small sample of survey participants
- Asked about experiences with loneliness and coping strategies
TLC Survey Results

• **More than a third** experienced loneliness

• Women who were younger, non-heterosexual, and had less religious attendance were more likely to be lonely

• Poor mental health and low social support were the strongest predictors of loneliness

• Partnering with local community members led to successful dissemination of surveys
COMET is a community-based intervention to activate community members and provide them with language, tools, and confidence to intervene when they notice someone around them is unwell – and before a crisis occurs.
COMET Community Training

• Designed to be accessible and used by a wide range of community members

• Conducted in a variety of settings, in-person and virtually (flexible)

• 90 minutes – 2 hours (max)

• Small or large groups

• Includes didactic portion and role-playing with scenarios tailored to local community/group

• Teaches a series of questions to engage a person recognized as not doing well
Community Trainings (CT)

• 90+ Community Trainings
• 1,300+ Attendees
• Colorado, Wisconsin, Wyoming, California, Montana, Minnesota
• Held at Sale barn, Elks Club, Sheriff’s Office, school districts, community colleges, ag departments, volunteer fire departments, primary care practices, veteran’s groups…
• Partnerships with local mental health organizations and Extension Agents
COMET CT Results

Table 1. Likelihood of telling someone you’ve noticed a change in mood/behavior (n=308)

Table 2. Likelihood of inviting acquaintance/co-worker to tell you more about potentially emotional situation (n=308)
Train the Trainer (T4T)

- 16 Train-the-Trainers
- 96 people trained as Regional Trainers
- California, Colorado, Illinois, Maryland, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Wyoming
- High demand = increased COMET Faculty
COMET in the Media

Aching from a string of farmer suicides and other rural mental health challenges, neighbors in eastern Colorado are learning how to check in on one another.

By Ashley Diaz Gonzalez and Michael Duerinck

How COMET has helped Colorado’s mental health

How Colorado training programs aim to cut mental health care stigma among farmers and ranchers

Hundreds of citizens, medical professionals and patients have been trained in early detection, intervention and ways to talk with ears tuned to the stressors and loneliness of rural life.

By Ashley Diaz Gonzalez and Michael Duerinck

The Colorado Sun
Field Note Comment:

“For many people Mental Health First Aid is too complex and goes too deep too quickly. It expects too much from the layperson. Some people need a gentler entry point, and COMET provides that very nicely.”

– a Regional COMET Trainer
THANK YOU!

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For information about COMET: COMET@cuanschutz.edu