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ANNUAL CONFERENCE August 20–22, 2025

HYATT REGENCY 13200 EAST 14TH PLACE, AURORA

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CommonSpirit Mountain Region is proud to support the Eastern Plains Healthcare Consortium's mission. We aim to be a collaborative partner in advancing the health of the communities we serve across the Eastern Plains and beyond.

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SCHEDULE-AT-A-GLANCE

EPHC Annual Meeting | August 20-22, 2025



Wednesday, Aug. 20th

5:00pm-7:00pm **Welcome Registration & Happy Hour**

Thursday, Aug. 21st

7:30am-8:30am **Breakfast & Registration Welcome & Logistics** 8:30am-8:45am 8:45am-9:00am **Sponsor Speed Dating**

The Network Niche: Healthcare's Collaborative Advantage 9:00am-9:45am

Linda Weiss, National Cooperative of Health Network

Associations

EPHC Stronger Together Awards 9:45am-10:00am

10:00am-10:30am **Networking Break**

10:30am-11:45am Keynote: Lessons from 45 Years in the NFL

Steve Antonopulos. Retired Denver Bronco Trainer

EPHC Stronger Together Awards 11:45am-12:00pm

12:00pm-1:00pm

Breakout Panels | First Session 1:00pm-1:45pm **Breakout Panels** | Second Session 1:45pm-2:30pm

Networking Break 2:30pm-2:45pm

Breakout Panels | Third Session 2:45pm-3:30pm

3:30pm-3:45pm **Networking Break**

3:45pm-4:00pm **EPHC Stronger Together Awards**

4:00pm-6:00pm Day 1 Wrap & Happy Hour

Friday, Aug. 22nd

7:30am-8:30am **Breakfast & Registration**

8:30am-8:45am **Recruiting & Retaining Talent for the New Generation**

Workforce

Steve Hartz, H&H Leadership Solutions

9:30am-10:15am **CAH Best Practices & Pitfalls to Avoid**

Ken Harmon, Rural Health Redesign Center

10:15am-10:45am **Networking Break**

10:45am-11:00am **EPHC Stronger Together Awards**

11:00am-11:45am **Transforming High Performers into Unstoppable Achievers**

Sean Douglas, The Success Corps

11:45am-12:00pm Day two Closing Remarks and Giveaway

Itinerary subject to change

BREAKOUT PANELS August 21st

Session 1:00pm-1:45pm

Pricing Transparency & Payer Accountability

Chris Kemp & Sean Crandell, Claritev

Panel: The Future of CO Policy & **How to Get Involved**

Kevin Stansbury & Beth Bell, Colorado Rural Futures

Addiction Care in Frontier America

Dr. Don Stader, Colorado Roots

Session 1:45pm-2:30pm

Updates in Evaluation & Diagnosis of Lung Nodules & Lung Cancer

Dr. Chakradhar Kotaru, HCA

Leadership Resiliency in Healthcare Chris Whetzel, Coaching2TNL

Key Strategies to Mitigate the Impact of Rising Costs

Peter Stille, Forvis Mazars

Session 2:45pm-3:30pm

The Cultural Transformation of CAH

Bill Auxier, Center for Rural Health Leadership

Alignment in CAH: How HRO principles build best practices Dr. Jeff Bacon, Banner Health

CRHC's Role in the National Political Landscape

> Michelle Mills, Colorado Rural Health Center



Our Mission & Vision



Mission:

To advance rural healthcare through collaboration, resourcesharing, and advocacy for hospitals and communities across Colorado's eastern plains.

Vision:

A future where every rural hospital has the tools, support, and resilience to provide exceptional care to their communities.





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EASTERN PLAINS HEALTHCARE CONSORTIUM Meet Our Leadership Team



CFO of FPHC ZACHARY D'ARGONNE LCSW

Zachary D'Argonne is the CEO of the Eastern Plains Healthcare Consortium, a rural health association in Colorado focused on advocacy and hospital sustainability. Since joining EPHC in early 2024, he has led a transformation in teamwork and collaboration across the consortium.

fostering a culture of innovation and shared purpose. Zachary began his career as a child and adolescent grief and trauma therapist before moving into healthcare leadership. He held senior roles at Health Corporation of America and Swedish Medical Center, specializing in rural health, telehealth, and business development. He holds a Master's in Clinical Social Work from Columbia University and a Bachelor's from the University of Denver. He also serves on the board of Friends for Youth, supporting mentorship for at-risk youth in the Denver area.



Board Chair CLARESSA MILLSAP CEO. KEEFE MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Claressa Millsap, MBA, is the Chief Executive Officer of Keefe Memorial Hospital, where she brings over 30 years of healthcare experience and a deep commitment to rural health. After serving as interim CEO for two years, she

officially stepped into the permanent role in 2023, leading the hospital through a period of measurable growth in community engagement, mental health services, and aging care. Her leadership has been pivotal in securing funding for high-impact projects and advancing initiatives like telehealth expansion, 3-D mammography, and the Zero Suicide Program.

Claressa's background spans both clinical and executive roles, with a focus on organizational leadership, strategic planning, and cultural transformation. She is co-owner of Pathway Design Group, where she has developed leadership programs and facilitated training in performance culture and executive coaching. Her purpose-driven approach centers on connecting the clinical and business aspects of healthcare to improve patient outcomes. Claressa holds a Bachelor of Science in Health Administration and an MBA, and she continues to champion innovation and collaboration in rural healthcare delivery.

Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success. **EDWADS EVERETT HALE**



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Board Elect LINDA THORPE. CEO. BANNER HEALTH

Linda Thorpe is the Chief Executive Officer of East Morgan County Hospital, part of the Banner Health system. Appointed CEO in 2012, she has been a driving force behind the hospital's growth and commitment to high-

quality rural healthcare. Linda joined Banner Health in 1992 and has held several leadership roles, including Chief Financial Officer and Interim CEO, before stepping into her current position.

A licensed Certified Public Accountant, Linda holds a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration with an emphasis in Accounting from the University of Northern Colorado. With over three decades of experience in healthcare leadership, she is known for her strategic insight, operational excellence, and dedication to serving the Brush, Colorado community and surrounding areas.

EPHC Board Members

Heidi Gearhart, Interim CEO

Arkansas Valley Regional Medical Center La Junta

Linda Thorpe, CEO, Board Chair Elect

East Morgan County Hospital **Banner Health**

Julia Biesemeier, Interim CEO

Haxtun Health

Haxtun

Angela Linden, VP, Outreach

HealthONE, Rural Health Network

Claressa Millsap, CEO, Board Chair

Keefe Memorial Health Service District *Cheyenne Wells*

Bryan Bogle, CEO

Kit Carson County Memorial Hospital **Burlington**

Kevin Stansbury, CEO, EPHC Founder

Lincoln Health

Hugo

Michael Hassell, CEO

Melissa Memorial Hospital *Holyoke*

Karen Bryant, CEO

Prowers Medical Center

<u>Lamar</u>

Aidan Hettler, CEO

Sedgwick County Health Center *Julesburg*

Rex Walk, CEO

Southeast Colorado Hospital District *Springfield*

Kay Whitley, CEO

Spanish Peaks Regional Medical Center *Walsenburg*

Beth Bell, CEO

Weisbrod Health

Eads

John Hart, CEO

Wray Community District Hospital **Wray**

Anne Kreutzer, CEO

Yuma District Hospital

Yuma

A Consortium Built on Collaboration and Care

The Eastern Plains Healthcare Consortium (EPHC) unites independent hospitals across Colorado's eastern plains to tackle the unique challenges of rural healthcare. By sharing resources, advocating for supportive policies, and collaborating on innovative solutions, we ensure that rural communities continue to receive quality care.



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AGENDA

EPHC Annual Meeting | August 20-22, 2025

Wednesday, August 20th

5:00-7:00 pm

Registration & Networking Happy Hour

Thursday, August 21th

7:30-8:30 am

Registration Open & Breakfast

8:30-8:45 am

Welcome & Logistics

8:45-9:00 am

Sponsor Speed Dating

9:00-9:45 am

The Network Niche: Healthcare's **Collaborative Advantage**



Linda Weiss National Cooperative of Health Network **Associates**

Linda's extensive experience in mental health, crisis intervention, and leadership will equip attendees with tools for navigating stress, supporting

supporting team well-being, and managing disruptive events. Her session offers guidance for healthcare professionals seeking to lead with resilience, balance, and compassion.

9:45-10:00 am

Stronger Together Awards



10:00-10:30 am **Networking Break**

10:30-11:45 am

Lessons from 45 Years in the NFL



Steve "Greek" Antonopulos Former Denver Broncos Athletic Trainer

Prepare to be inspired as Steve shares powerful stories from his 45-year NFL career, highlighting the resilience and teamwork that defined his journey. His keynote will energize healthcare

professionals with hard-earned wisdom on healing. leadership, and the human spirit.

11:45-12:00 pm

Stronger Together Awards



12:00-1:00 pm Lunch

Session 1:00pm-1:45pm

Conference Room 3

Pricing Transparency & Payer Accountability Chris Kemp & Sean Crandell, Claritev

Panel: The Future of CO Policy & How to Get Involved

Kevin Stansbury & Beth Bell, Colorado Rural Futures

Conference Room 7

Addiction Care in Frontier America Dr. Don Stader, Colorado Roots

Session 1:45pm-2:30pm

Conference Room 3

Leadership Resiliency in Healthcare

Chris Whetzel, Coaching2TNL

onference Room 4

Updates in Evaluation and Diagnosis of Lung Nodules and Lung Cancer

Dr. Chakradhar Kotaru, HCA HealthONE

Conference Room 7

Key Strategies to Mitigate the Impact of Rising Costs

Peter Stille, Forvis Mazars

2:30-2:45 pm **Networking Break**

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Access to shared resources and expertise.

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strengthen and sustain rural healthcare. Our member hospitals benefit from:



Advocacy efforts focused on rural healthcare needs.

INNOVATION



Opportunities for collaboration and innovation.

HEATHCARE POLICIES



A unified voice in shaping healthcare policies.

AGENDA continued EPHC Annual Meeting | August 20-22, 2025

3rd Session 2:45pm-3:30pm

Onference Room 3

The Cultural Transformation of CAH

Bill Auxier, Center for Rural Health Leadership

Alignment in CAH: How HRO principles build best practices

Dr. Jeff Bacon, Banner Health

CRHC's Role in the National Political Landscape

Michelle Mills, Colorado Rural Health Center

3:30-3:45 pm Networking Break

3:45-4:00 pm Stronger Together Awards



4:00-6:00 pm Day One Wrap-Up & Happy Hour



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Friday, August 22th

7:30-8:30 am Registration Open & Breakfast

8:30-8:45 am Welcome Back

8:45-9:30 am

Recruiting & Retaining Talent for the New Generation Workforce



Steve Hartz
H&H Leadership Solutions Founder
Steve will share proven leadership strategies and innovative tools to strengthen culture, enhance safety, and drive meaningful transformation in healthcare environments.

9:30-10:15 am
CAH Best Practices & Pitfalls to Avoid

Ken Harmon



Rural Health Redesign Center
Ken Harman will share real-world strategies for sustaining rural healthcare systems. Learn how to navigate challenges and build strong community partnerships for long-term success.

10:15-10:45 am Networking Break

> 10:45-11:00 am Stronger Together Awards



11:00-11:45 am
Transforming High Performers into Unstoppable Achievers



Sean Douglas The Success Corps

Sean will challenge and empower attendees to break through limitations, build resilience, and unlock their full potential in high-pressure environments. With contagious energy

and real-world insight, he'll inspire lasting personal and professional transformation.

11:45-12:00 pm
Day two Closing Remarks & Giveaway



Linda Weiss



Executive Director, National Cooperative of Health Network Association

Linda is an executive, therapist, educator, and consultant with extensive experience in child welfare and mental health services. She is the Executive Director of the National Cooperative of Health Networks Association and a

consultant with R3 Continuum. A former network director, she helped design a 24-hour mental health crisis system. Linda has presented nationally on leadership, crisis intervention, and self-care. She volunteered at Ground Zero after 9/11 and taught for 20 years at the University of Illinois. She holds a BSW, MSW, and a healthcare executive certificate, and is a licensed clinical social worker in Illinois and Florida.

Steve "Greek" Antonopulos

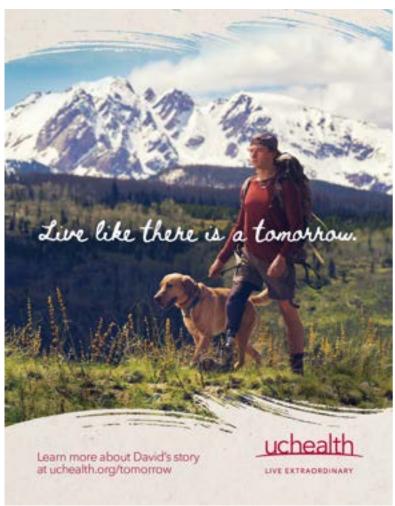


Former Denver Broncos Athletic Trainer
Steve "Greek" Antonopulos is a legendary force in sports medicine, having spent 45 unforgettable years with the Denver Broncos as their athletic trainer and Director of Sports Medicine. A proud Hugo, Colorado native, he's the only staff member to stand on the sidelines

for all eight of the Broncos' Super Bowl appearances. In 2024, his extraordinary career was crowned with the Pro Football Hall of Fame's prestigious Awards of Excellence. Now retired, Steve brings his powerful stories and hard-earned wisdom to the stage as an inspirational speaker. His message—rooted in resilience, teamwork, and the heart of healing—resonates deeply with healthcare professionals everywhere.







Steve Hartz



Founder, H&H Leadership Solutions
Steve, President of Leadership and Executive
Recruitment, brings 25+ years of experience
in military leadership, healthcare
recruitment, and organizational
transformation. A Navy veteran and former
COO at COORS Leadership Capital, he led

through the COVID-19 crisis, tripled revenue, and launched the HROrx system to improve hospital culture and safety. With advanced degrees in IT and Orbital Mechanics, he cofounded H&H Leadership Solutions and is a Fellow of the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Ken Harmon



Regional Liaison, Rural Health Redesign Center

Ken is a Regional Liaison with the Rural Health Redesign Center and Rural Emergency Hospital Technical Assistance Center, supporting the Midwest and Western U.S. With over 30 years in healthcare, including

20 as a rural hospital CEO, he has served in six states. Ken holds a Master's in Healthcare Administration and a BS in Economics. He is passionate about helping rural communities sustain healthcare services to meet evolving local needs.



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Sean Douglas



Founder, The Success Corp Sean Douglas is a U.S. Air Force veteran, TEDx speaker, and founder of The Success Corps, known for his dynamic presence and powerful insights on leadership and resilience. With a background in high-stakes environments and a passion for personal growth, Sean inspires

audiences to break through limitations and unlock their full potential. His message is rooted in real-world experience, authenticity, and a deep understanding of what it takes to thrive under pressure. Sean's energy is contagious, and his impact is lasting. Get ready to be challenged, empowered, and transformed.





BREAKOUT: 1:00pm-1:45pm

Dr. Don Strader

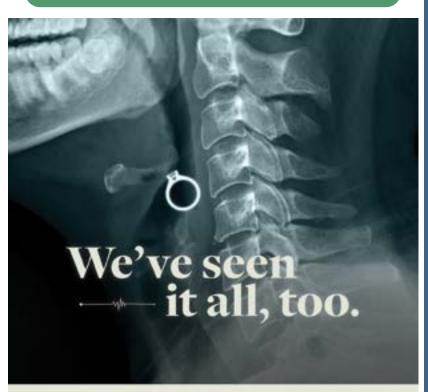


Founder & Executive Director, The Naloxone Project & CEO, Epifluence

Dr. Don Stader is a board-certified emergency and addiction medicine physician, national opioid crisis expert, and CEO of Epifluence. He leads multiple initiatives including The Naloxone Project and Compass Opioid

Stewardship Program. A former hospital leader and nonprofit founder, Don is also an Emmy-winning film producer and editor of key medical texts. He speaks nationally on rural healthcare, provider burnout, and addiction treatment, blending clinical expertise with innovation and advocacy.

When we stand together, our voices become a symphony of change.



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BREAKOUT: 1:00pm-1:45pm

BREAKOUT: 1:00pm-1:45pm

Kevin Stansbury



Founder, EPHC & CEO, Lincoln Health

Kevin Stansbury is CEO of Lincoln Health in Hugo, Colorado, with over 35 years of experience in community healthcare. He has led initiatives in hospital administration, strategic planning, and global health projects. Kevin serves on the CHA Board and Executive Committee, the Colorado e-Health Commission, and the Colorado Option Advisory Committee. He holds degrees in Business, Health Services Administration, and Law, and is a passionate advocate for rural health at both state and national levels.

Beth Bell



CEO, Weisbrod Health

Beth Bell is the Chief Executive Officer of Wiesbrod Health in Kiowa County, Colorado. A native of Eads, she brings extensive leadership experience from her previous role as Administrative Director at Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City. With a background in hospital operations and ambulatory care, Beth is passionate about rural healthcare and community impact. She is committed to advancing quality care and sustainability for the region she proudly calls home.

Chris Kemp



Senior Vice President, Provider Markets & Client Development, Claritev

Chris Kemp is Senior Vice President of Provider Markets and Client Development at Claritev, with over 25 years in healthcare. He leads strategic relationships with providers, payors, TPAs, and government partners. Previously, he was Area VP at LeanTaaS, driving growth through provider partnerships, and held leadership roles at Cerner, advancing EHR and population health solutions. Chris is known for building strong client relationships and driving innovation across healthcare markets.

Sean Crandell



Data & Decision Science Services General Manager, Claritev

Sean Crandell is the General Manager of Claritev's Data & Decision Science Services, leading its Employer/Consultant, Provider, Payor, and Data-as-a-Service verticals. With over 25 years in healthcare, he has held

leadership roles at Viant Health Payment Solutions, Texas True Choice, and Corporate Health Plans of America. Sean earned his MBA from Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business and brings deep expertise in healthcare strategy, data solutions, and operational leadership.



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BREAKOUT: 1:45pm-2:30pm

Chris Whetzel



Founder & CEO, Coaching2NTL
Chris is the Founder and CEO of
COACHING2TNL, a leadership development
firm empowering leaders and transforming
teams. With experience across healthcare,
education, and corporate sectors, he
specialized in coaching, team development,

and executive search. A former school superintendent and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt executive, Chris brings a systems-level view of leadership. Based in Colorado, he helps leaders align purpose, potential, and performance through a grounded, strategic, and people-centered approach.

Dr. Chakradhar Kotaru



Pulmonary & Critical Care Physician, Comprehensive Care Physicians
Dr. Chakradhar Kotaru is a board-certified
Pulmonary and Critical Care Medicine
physician with over 25 years of experience. He
earned his medical degree from the University
of Pittsburgh and completed residency at

University Hospitals of Cleveland, followed by fellowships at the University of Colorado and National Jewish Health. Practicing since 1998, Dr. Kotaru is known for his compassionate, evidence-based care in pulmonary disease, critical care, and internal medicine.

Peter Stille



Managing Director, Forvis Mazars
Peter is Managing Director at Forvis Mazars in
the Healthcare Performance Improvement
practice, leading the national non-labor cost
reduction advisory services. With over 30 years
of consulting experience, he has helped
healthcare organizations save millions.

Formerly CEO of Strategic Sourcing Results and an executive at Andersen, he co-founded the first non-labor strategic sourcing service line. A CPA and Certified Purchasing Manager, Peter is a frequent speaker and author on cost reduction, contracting, and negotiations.

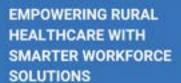












HWL helps rural health systems fill critical staffing gaps, lower costs, and build more resilient workforce strategies.



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BREAKOUT: 2:45pm-3:30pm

Bill Auxier



President & CEO, Center for Rural Health Leadership

Fondly referred to as the "Professor of Rural Health Leadership," Dr. Bill Auxier is President & CEO of the Center for Rural Health Leadership. He empowers rural health leaders nationwide through coaching, training, and

education. Dr. Auxier leads NRHA's Certification Programs and supports cultural transformation in rural healthcare. An award-winning author and Harvard Medical School Institute of Coaching Fellow, he is dedicated to advancing leadership, innovation, and excellence in rural health.

Dr. Jeff Bacon



Chief Medical Officer & Divisional Medical Director, Banner

Dr. Jeff Bacon, raised in rural Kansas and Nebraska, studied at Bethany College and Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine. He completed his Family Medicine residency in Kansas City and practiced in rural lowa before

moving to Sterling, Colorado, where he's served for 18 years. He is Chief Medical Officer for three hospitals and has held multiple leadership roles. A rural health advocate, he speaks nationally on recruitment, retention, and provider burnout, and recently completed a rural health fellowship.

Michelle Mills



CEO, Colorado Rural Health Center
Michelle Mills is CEO of the Colorado Rural
Health Center, the State Office of Rural Health
and Rural Health Association. With 30+ years
of experience, she is a leader in rural health
advocacy, collaboration, and system
improvement. Michelle serves on several

national boards, including NRHA (2025 President) and NOSORH. She holds a BA in Communications from Regis University and believes the future of rural health in Colorado is rooted in one word: community.



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18



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Why Rural Leaders Choose Caret Health

No Additional Hiring Needed

Caret integrates with your team to drive quality without new staff or workflow disruptions.

Significant Frontend ROI: >\$410K per 1,000 Patients

From increased visits, labor savings, and better patient retention - before bonuses or performance incentives.

>50% More Gap Closures and Performance Revenue

Achieve quality targets faster with evidence-based engagement and data-driven care.

Patients Stay Local

20% reduction in out-migration. More care, more revenue, more community trust.

What Rural Leaders Are Saying

Caret Health strengthens rural communities. People are staying in our clinics to receive their care-keeping both patients and dollars local.

- Gabbie Wikle, Finance Director at SMP Health

Proactive engagement that delivers essential care. Caret identifies what patients need-then delivers care with a sophisticated yet personal touch.

- Dr. Clint Mackinney, Chief Medical Officer for Cibolo Health

Let's talk

financial sustainability

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Rural healthcare deserves better IT

It's time for a new option.

The OLD WAY VS THE ELEVATE WAY



11	The Old Way	Elevate IT Health
Staff	One or two overworked IT staff	Health and Hospital "Pods", staffed with dozens of rural health IT specialists
Planning	Short-Term & Reactive	Long-Term & Proactive
Processes	Chaotic or Non-Existent	Clear and Optimized
Tools & Tech	Outdated	Modern tech (often acquired via grants at discounts or no cost)
Grants & Funding	Confusing. Underwhelming. Limited funds gained.	Expert funding guidance to unlock new opportunities
Security & Compliance	Exposed and uncertain	Confident and secure.
Community	No peer collaboration or roadmap	Active peer network for leadership and IT staff

