

# THE RESPONSE OF HINSDALE COUNTY, COLORADO TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

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## Abstract

**Background:** Historically, it has been recognized that urban solutions to public health issues have yet to be easily translated to rural areas and often lose their effectiveness in the rural setting. With the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an increased need to examine rural areas directly and highlight strategies and challenges unique to those areas.

**Objective:** To identify strategies utilized by key stakeholders within Hinsdale County, one of the most rural and remote counties in the contiguous United States, and their effectiveness in combating the pandemic. The secondary aim is to identify areas of weakness exacerbated by the pandemic and caused strain on the community.

**Methods:** 7 community members, who were felt to represent various aspects of the county, including medical, public health, government, education, emergency, and the general public, were interviewed using a standardized questionnaire to understand their level of preparation for the pandemic, challenges encountered, and strategies and solutions used. The interviews were dissected qualitatively using a framework analysis approach, and subsequently, a thematic matrix was created.

**Results:** Numerous underlying themes were appreciated, but the most common across all interviews were the following: the importance of partnerships, the concern of limited resources, the fears of the economic impact on the town, and the overall lack of public health information applicable to rural areas.

**Conclusions:** Compared to other qualitative studies, rural areas were heavily affected by the lack of resources, specifically with staffing, and the overall difficulty with adapting public health guidelines to rural areas. The study demonstrated the importance of the rural regions creating an interlinked network between their public health, medical, and civilian agencies in preparation for public health emergencies.

