

# From Isolation to Innovation:

**How EPHC Is Strengthening the  
Future of Rural Health in Colorado**



## Overview

The Eastern Plains Healthcare Consortium (EPHC) is a dynamic alliance of 15 independent critical access hospitals (CAHs) and two large health systems serving some of Colorado's most rural and frontier communities. Formed in 2015, EPHC was originally created as a CEO grassroots driven networking and advocacy group, helping hospital executives align around shared legislative priorities and common operational challenges. But as the pressures on rural hospitals have intensified, from workforce shortages to reimbursement shifts and regulatory complexity, EPHC has rapidly evolved into a sophisticated hub for shared services, strategic partnerships, and performance improvement.

In 2023, EPHC's mission began to evolve well beyond advocacy with the pivot from grass roots efforts to a top-down strategic vision coinciding with the consortiums decision to hire a full-time CEO. The consortium continued to grow into a high-functioning regional engine for workforce development, shared services, and data-driven collaboration. As payment models shifted and regulatory requirements intensified, EPHC recognized the need to prepare its members for the future of value-based care, with population health management, clinical quality, and data integration at the core.

## Challenge

One of the most immediate and complex tests came with the launch of the Colorado Hospital Transformation Program (HTP), a state Medicaid initiative linking reimbursement to performance on a slate of clinical and quality measures.

For EPHC's member hospitals, each operating on a different EHR system, meeting the state's rigorous HTP requirements would require unprecedented regional coordination, standardized reporting, and new analytical tools to identify and close gaps.

"I inherited the HTP program, and it was overwhelming, I knew what we needed to accomplish from a quality standpoint, but I didn't have the time, or the technical support, to make full use of the data we had."

*Karma Wilson, MSN, RN, CPHQ, Informatics Nurse at Southeast Colorado Hospital*

Without a centralized approach to data sharing and quality tracking, EPHC hospitals like Southeast Colorado, risked falling short on critical measures and incentive payments.

"As a group of 15 independent critical access hospitals, we were operating in a rural frontier environment with slim margins, no shared infrastructure, and very little IT support. Yet the regulatory burden kept growing," said Zachary D'Argonne, CEO of EPHC.

"We needed to find a way to meet Medicaid reporting requirements and drive quality improvement without overwhelming our teams."

*Zachary D'Argonne, CEO of EPHC*



## Solution

To build the data infrastructure needed for collaborative performance improvement across 15 independent hospitals, EPHC turned to [i2i Population Health](#), an Azara Healthcare company. The consortium implemented both [i2iTracks®](#) and [PRiZiM®](#) to support data aggregation, quality benchmarking, and shared performance tracking across the network.

### Key goals included:

- + Pulling structured data from multiple disparate EHRs
- + Creating shared dashboards to benchmark performance on HTP and Medicaid quality measures
- + Identifying region-wide care gaps, like depression screening follow-ups
- + Supporting custom reporting and clinical documentation improvements (i.e., SDOH capture, ALTO measure compliance)
- + Delivering technical and clinical support to bridge on-the-ground and data/IT functions

“It gave us one source of truth for quality improvement and reimbursement.”

Alexandra Mannerings, *Data Advisor to EPHC*

“None of our hospitals have the same EHR, even within their own walls, so being able to pull apples-to-apples data, and benchmark it regionally, was a game changer,” said Alexandra Mannerings, Data Advisor to EPHC.

i2iTracks® is a real-time care coordination platform that integrates with each hospital’s local EHR and PM system, regardless of vendor. Tracks supports hundreds of clinical measures and registries tied to state and federal programs, and drives daily workflows by surfacing actionable insights, flagging high-risk patients, and helping frontline teams close care gaps more efficiently.

PRiZiM® provides advanced analytics and reporting capabilities, enabling hospital and consortium leaders to track trends, segment performance by site or population, and drill down into key metrics. With PRiZiM, EPHC can quickly identify variation, align best practices, and drive targeted improvements at both the site and system level.

## Results

With the right tools, data, and shared leadership in place, EPHC didn't just meet the demands of the Colorado Hospital Transformation Program, it built a foundation for lasting regional improvement. By aggregating structured data from 15 independent hospitals, aligning on shared benchmarks, and fostering cross-hospital learning, the consortium turned its geographic isolation into a strength.

Performance began to improve across key Medicaid quality measures, and previously siloed hospitals could now see (and learn from) each other's successes in real time.

The network's progress is mirrored on the ground, where care teams are using i2iTracks® to turn data into daily action.

"We've been using the care huddle, which helps us meet several value-based payment measures for Medicaid."

Jasmine Shea, *Chief Nursing Officer at Keefe Memorial Hospital*

"It gives us a quick way to see who's due for annual wellness visits, health exams and other preventive screenings. Over the past year, more patients completed colorectal cancer screenings than in previous years, even though we ordered fewer tests overall. That tells us our outreach and follow-through are making a real difference."

"i2i helped us spot outliers and opportunities," said Mannerings. "Follow-up on depression screening was lagging across most hospitals, except one. We used the platform to surface that insight and then brought the successful team in to share what they were doing. That's how you scale impact."

The impact was visible both in the metrics and on the ground: better care coordination, stronger clinical documentation, and more informed decision-making at every level of the organization.



**EPHC hospitals identified** key outliers on priority measures and used those insights to align workflows and spread best practices.



**Region-wide performance visibility enabled** data-driven advocacy, such as demonstrating social needs trends (i.e., housing instability, interpersonal violence).



**Shared tools reduced** reporting burden and equipped hospitals to meet both state and federal Medicaid requirements.

"As quality leaders in rural hospitals, we're stretched thin. With i2i, we finally had the infrastructure to see where we stood, track our progress, and take action," said Karen Hooker, RN, MHL, CPHQ, Director of Quality and Risk at Keefe Memorial Hospital. "Being able to clearly identify care gaps and improve follow-up workflows didn't just help our patients, it drove real financial impact. That kind of result is transformational for small hospitals like ours."

## Lessons Learned

EPHC's success didn't come from technology alone, it came from collaboration, structure and shared accountability:

- + A dedicated data lead or technical coordinator proved essential for bridging clinical, IT and reporting functions.
- + Standardizing data across EHRs unlocked statistically valid insights and enabled meaningful peer-to-peer learning.
- + Clinical leadership engagement at the site level was key to translating data into real-world improvement and ROI.

Together, these lessons highlight how the right mix of technology and teamwork can help even the smallest hospitals deliver outsized results.

## Looking Ahead

With a unified data infrastructure and a proven model for collaboration, EPHC is now positioned to expand its work beyond the Hospital Transformation Program. The consortium will continue leveraging i2i solutions to strengthen Medicaid value-based performance, advance collaborative reporting, and drive advocacy for rural health transformation statewide.

"We started EPHC to give rural hospitals a collective voice, and what we've built through data and collaboration is far more than compliance," said D'Argonne.

"It's a blueprint for sustaining high-quality care in the most remote parts of Colorado. The real transformation is seeing our hospitals thrive, not just survive."

Zachary D'Argonne, *CEO of EPHC*

EPHC's partnership with i2i has also served as a proof of concept, demonstrating that with the right tools and shared governance, even small, resource-limited hospitals can achieve system-level change. Building on this foundation, EPHC is pursuing new collaborative opportunities, including the creation of a Clinically Integrated Network, rural residency programs, and other shared services designed to strengthen the future of care across Colorado's Eastern Plains.

**To learn more about how our solutions  
can empower your organization, contact  
[info@i2ipophealth.com](mailto:info@i2ipophealth.com).**



In 2025, Azara Healthcare and i2i Population Health merged to further enhance Azara's offerings and serve the needs of critical access and community hospitals, Indian Health Services and health plans. The combination of i2i and Azara's platforms empowers provider and payer organizations to unify disparate data, identify and act on care opportunities, and improve patient outcomes and financial performance in value-based care.