

2019

2021

IMPACT REPORT COVID-19



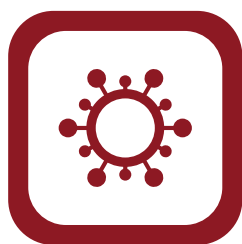
**MESA COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH**
Working Together for a Healthy Community



WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE (AND WHERE)

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It's all connected



COVID-19



ECONOMIC
STABILITY



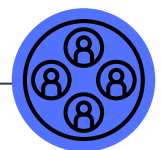
EDUCATION



HEALTH
CARE AND
ACCESS



NEIGHBORHOOD
AND BUILT
ENVIRONMENT



SOCIAL AND
COMMUNITY
CONTEXT

IMPACT REPORT COVID-19

COMMUNITY HEALTH
NEEDS ASSESSMENT



OUR FRAMEWORK

In Mesa County we work hard, we play hard, and we take care of each other. Yet not everyone has the same opportunities to make choices that allow them to live a long and healthy life. People in Mesa County lose time, money, and years of their life to preventable and treatable illnesses. Mesa County's foundation is strong in some ways and weak in others. When the foundation is weak, healthy choices feel out of reach as people struggle to meet basic needs.

The community data provided in this impact report is designed to help us see where our community has strong foundations, and where there are opportunities to strengthen the foundations. Every change we make as a community gives Mesa County residents the opportunity to make choices that allow them to live a long and healthy life.

HEALTH DOESN'T START IN THE DOCTOR'S OFFICE,



**IT STARTS WHERE WE LIVE,
LEARN, WORK, AND PLAY.**

INTRODUCTION

Two years after Mesa County saw its first case of COVID-19, Mesa County Public Health is releasing its COVID-19 Impact Report. The purpose of the report is to assess how different aspects of our community have been impacted by the pandemic and to inform community organizations in their plans for action over the next few years.

Key findings from the report are organized into five areas of impact; economic stability, education, health care and access, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context. These are the same areas of impact assessed in the 2021-2023 Mesa County Community Health Needs Assessment. It is our priority to address the disparities within each of these five areas and throughout the report, you'll see **it's all connected**. Takeaways are organized within each area including:

- Economic trends included a drop in employment, increased unemployment benefits, and an uncertain job and child care market, especially among workers coming from jobs with low wages.
- Educational support activities were restricted at schools for many months in order to implement COVID-19 protocols to mitigate risk to students and staff. child care and preschool facilities faced workforce challenges and Mesa County saw the closure of some facilities, reducing the number of available child care spots.
- Telehealth was utilized more frequently, 911 calls for emergency medical services increased, and Medicaid enrollment increased for both children and adults.
- Housing became more expensive for renters and owners with new housing becoming increasingly difficult to find. Changes to public safety protocols and increased stress levels impacted front line responders. There was increased use of public lands and trails across the County.

In order to effectively achieve our community vision of Mesa County as a vibrant, caring, connected community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, Mesa County Public Health works to address these opportunities at the foundational level. With two years behind us, we know there's so much ahead for our community as we continue to bounce back and move beyond COVID.

2 YEARS
behind us **so much ahead.**



Economic Stability

TAKEAWAYS

COVID-19 had a dramatic impact on Mesa County's economy. The employment landscape changed, with a huge drop in employment and a corresponding increase in unemployment recipients in the Spring of 2020. Increased unemployment benefits and an uncertain job and child care market served to incentivize waiting to re-enter the workforce, especially in people coming from jobs with low wages.

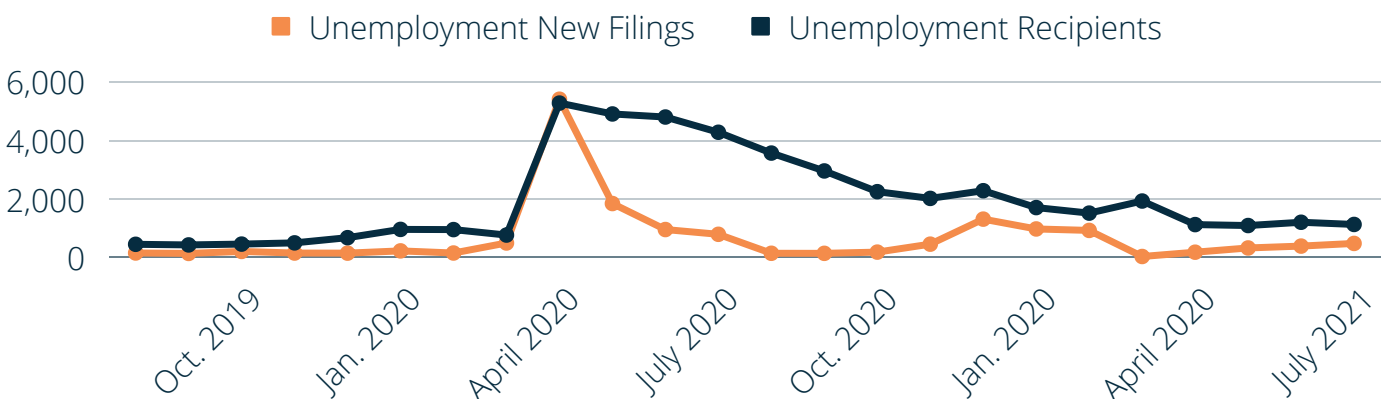
During this time, enrollment dropped in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP), two programs designed to improve economic stability for Mesa County families.

This may be because families had other boosts to stability, or may reflect extra challenges in completing enrollment. Despite the economic challenges of the pandemic, county sales tax revenues saw only a brief drop and recovered by the second half of 2020.

Unemployment increased by nearly 6 times between March and April of 2020, then declined fairly steadily throughout the following months.

Unemployment spiked in March and April 2020.

Unemployment, 2019-2021



Does it Pay to Stay on Unemployment?

WHAT YOU HEARD

“Unemployment remains high because people can make more without returning to work.”

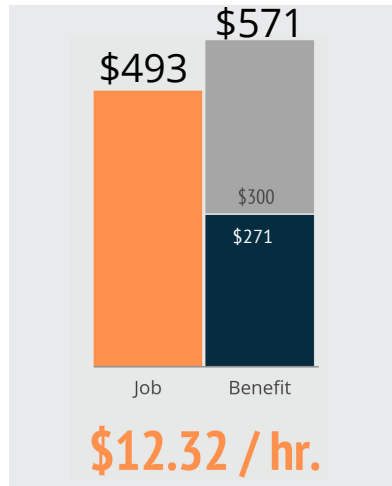
WHAT WE FOUND

After an initial increase of \$600 per week to unemployment benefits in the spring of 2020, unemployment recipients continued to be eligible for an additional \$300 per week on top of their typical benefits of 55% of previous wages until September 4, 2021.

This \$300 per week brought the unemployment benefits higher than the typical wages for jobs that paid less than the Essential Income defined in the 2021-2023 Mesa County Community Health Needs Assessment — \$17.50 per hour.

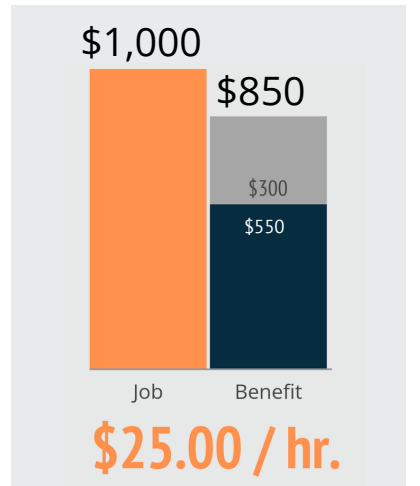
Starting September 4, 2021, unemployment recipients who remained eligible for benefits chose between receiving 55% of their previous earnings in unemployment, or returning to a job which pays considerably less than the amount determined to be necessary to thrive during the pandemic, and less than the Essential Income of \$17.50 per hour.

BELOW essential
WAGE



Workers earned
- \$78
less per week
in their jobs.

ABOVE essential
WAGE



Workers earned
+ \$150
more per week
in their jobs.

1 in 6

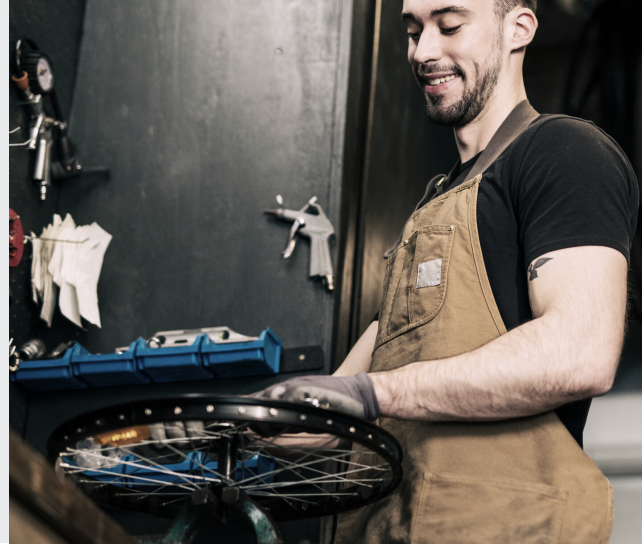


3rd through 5th graders reported missing meals at home because there wasn't enough food.

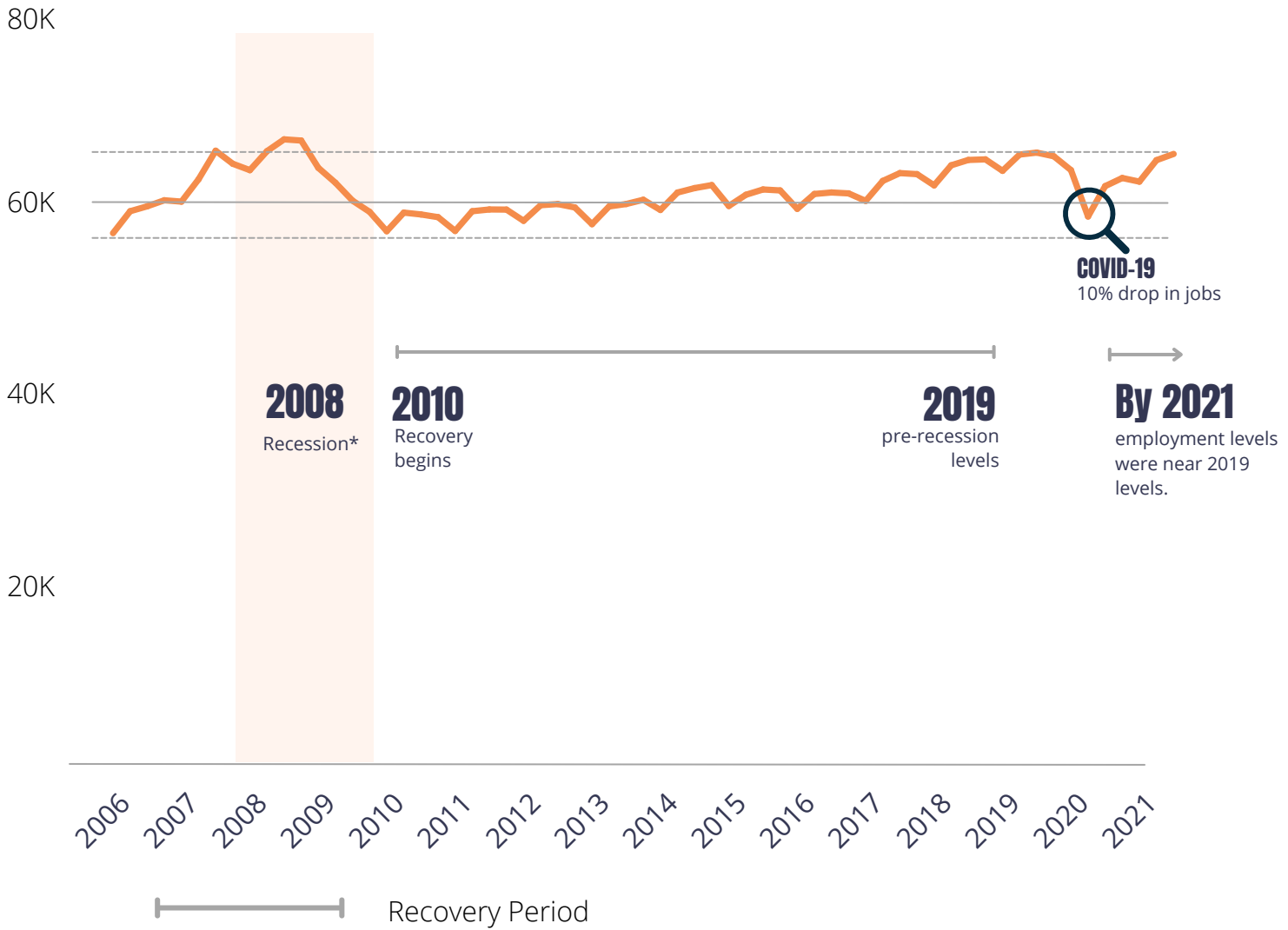


QUICK DIP

COVID-19 job loss was comparable to the 2008 recession with a **↓10%** drop in jobs in 2020. Recovery was much faster. 2022 is on track to show job numbers at or above **↑** 2019 levels.



Number of Jobs (Employment) in Mesa County, 2006-2021



*period defined by the Colorado Dept. of Labor

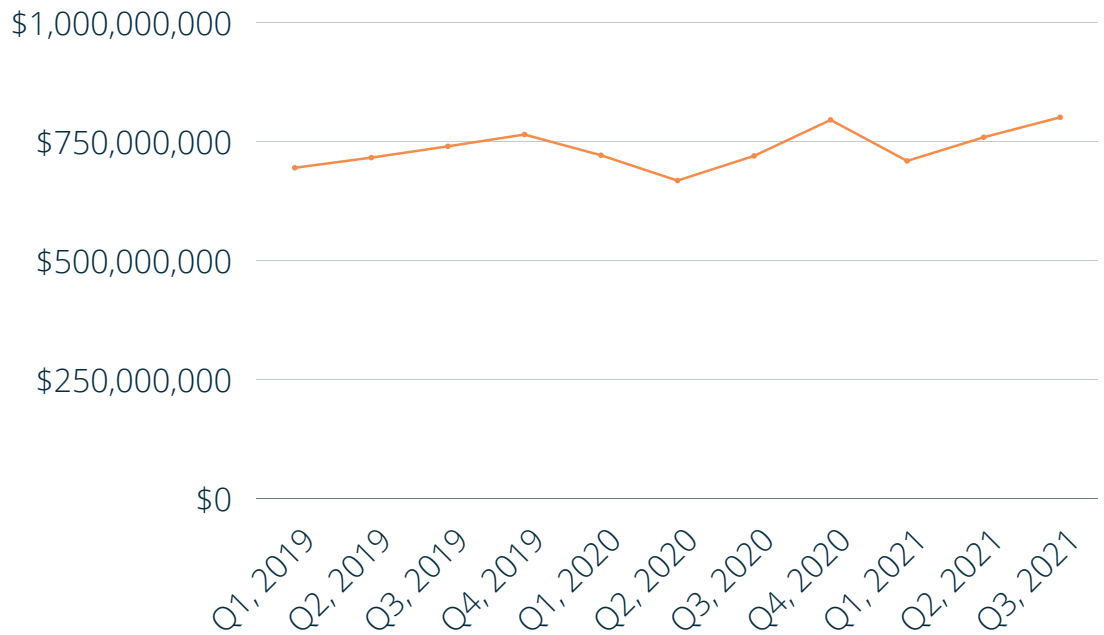
Monthly Mesa County Sales Tax



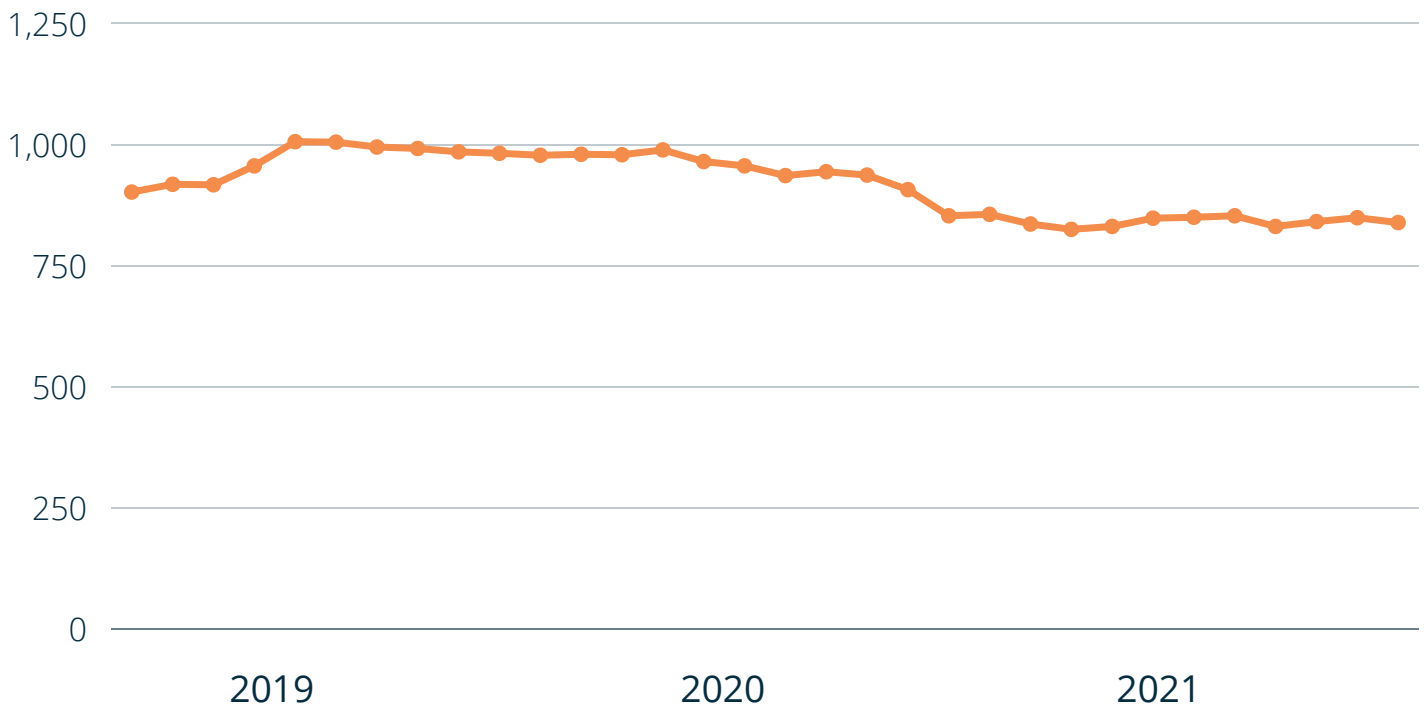
Although Mesa County sales tax revenue was low in Spring of 2020, by Spring of 2021 it exceeded 2019 levels by 35%. Colorado state taxable sales also saw a drop in 2020, and showed a similar, though less strong, recovery by spring of 2021.

Quarterly Total Wages Paid, Mesa County, 2016-2021

Total wages paid rises and falls cyclically in Mesa County, typically dropping in Q1 and increasing until Q4. In 2020, this pattern was disrupted by a significant drop in total wages in Q2, but the year ended with more wages in Q4 than in 2019. 2021 started slower than 2020, but higher than 2019, and continued to climb.



Number of Children Receiving Child Care with a CCCAP Benefit, 2019-2021



CCCAP enrollment declined slowly between March 2020 and September 2020 before remaining relatively stable. In an effort to keep child care facilities open for essential workers, CCCAP authorized payment for 22 absent days per month while Mesa County was under a stay at home order, so this graph reflects enrollment with the program, but not necessarily attendance during that period. Between June and August 2021, there was a 12% increase in applications to CCCAP over the same period in 2019.

For more information about licensed child care, see page 8.



Education

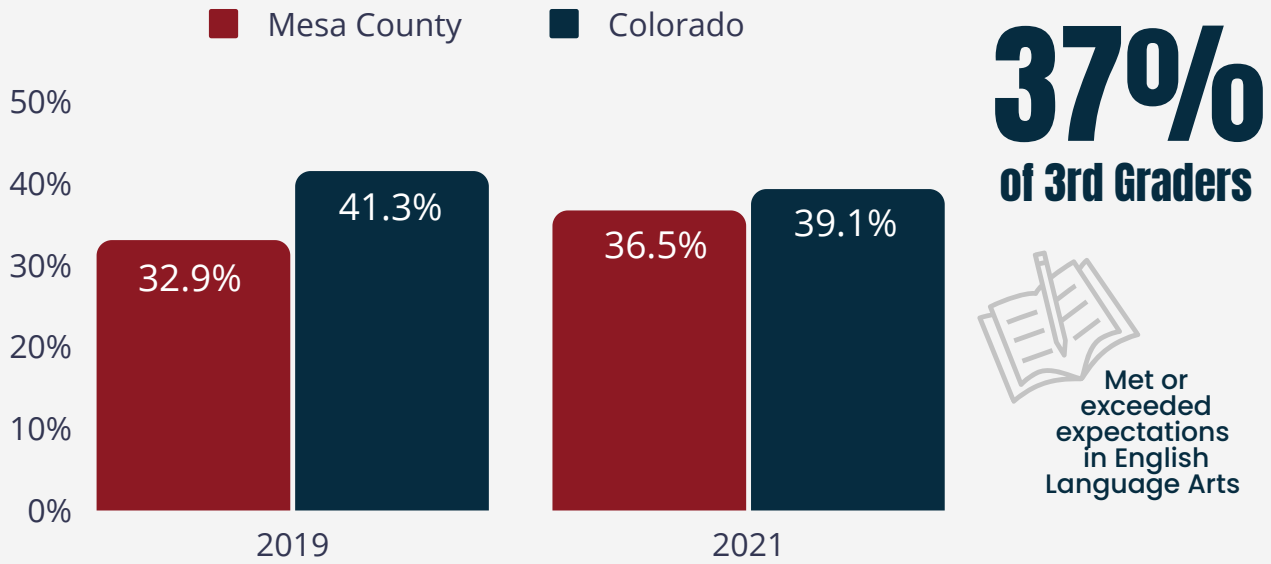
TAKEAWAYS



The impacts of COVID-19 on education in Mesa County were shaped by a number of factors. For school-age children, this included the initial move to remote learning in Spring 2020, followed by schools reopening with COVID-19 mitigation protocols in place that restricted educational support activities in the interest of maintaining student and staff safety. For younger children, child care and preschool facilities faced challenges as workforce needs shifted, and some facilities closed in both 2020 and 2021.

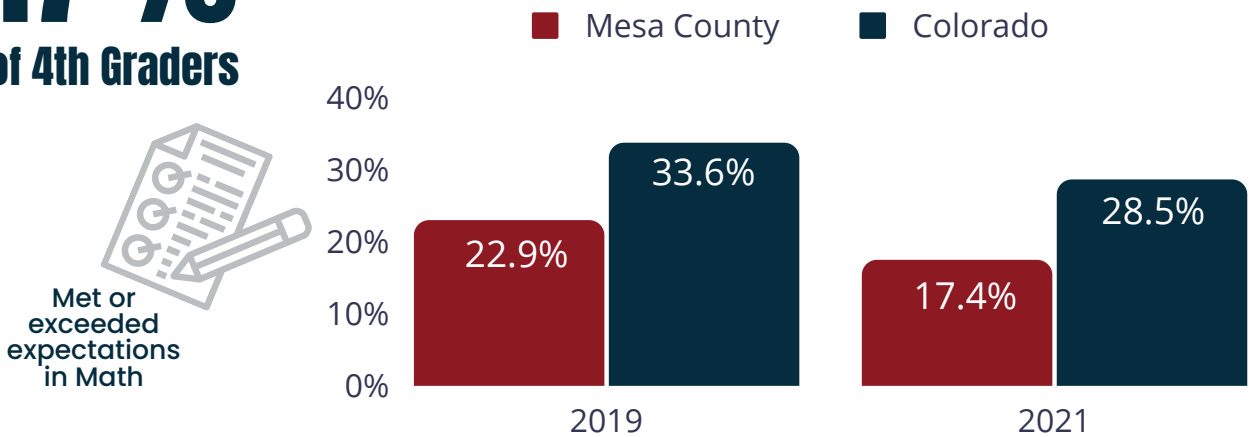
Elementary test scores in English Language Arts improved between 2019 and 2021, potentially as a result of changes to curriculum. At the same time, post-secondary enrollment at Colorado Mesa University (CMU) and Western Colorado Community College (WCCC) declined in both 2020 and 2021.

CMAS Scores, 2019 and 2021, Mesa County and Colorado
 Percent of 3rd Graders who met or exceeded expectations in English Language Arts



17%
of 4th Graders

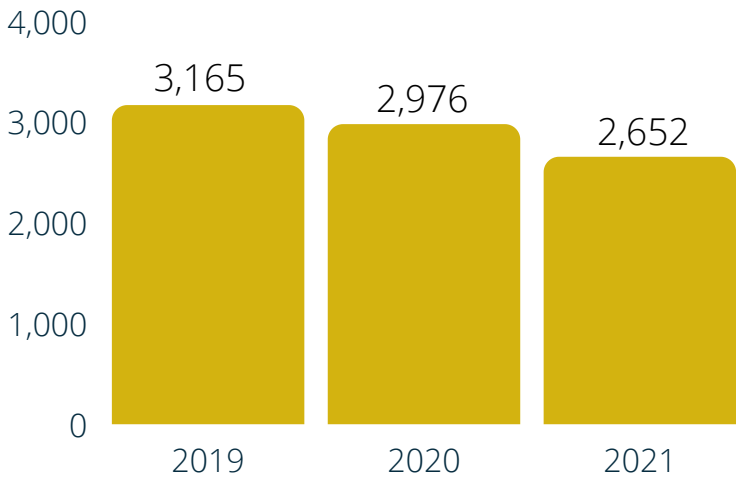
CMAS Scores, 2019 and 2021, Mesa County and Colorado
 Percent of 4th Graders who met or exceeded expectations in Math



While math scores were approximately 5% lower in 2021 compared to 2019 in both Colorado and Mesa County (in Mesa County this means approximately 40 fourth graders lost their proficiency), English Language Arts scores actually improved in Mesa County. This may be in part due to changes to elementary school literacy curriculum, or may reflect a change in the testing population.



*Mesa County Total Licensed Child Care Capacity
September 2019, 2020, 2021*



Licensed child care capacity for children ages 0-5 **dropped by**

6% between 2019 and 2020, and an **additional**

11% between 2020 and 2021.

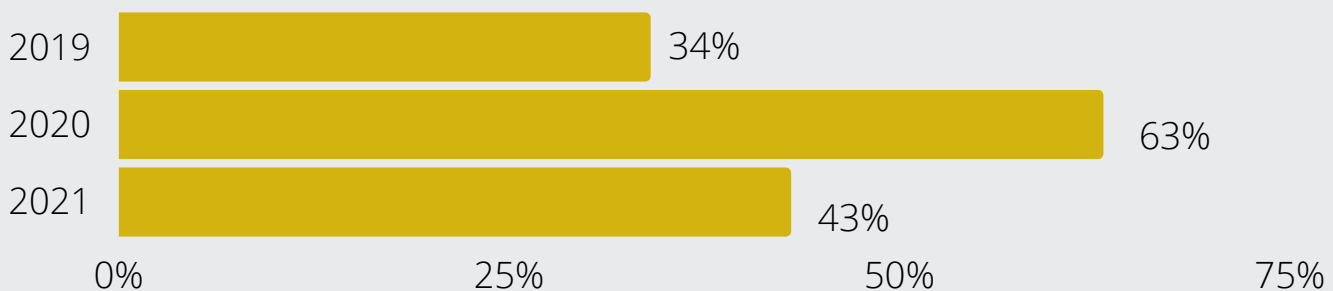
Enrollment

While concurrent enrollment declined slightly in 2020 and 2021, overall enrollment was bolstered by a large expansion in programs in 2019. In 2020 and early 2021, students faced challenges with carrying out quarantines in concurrent enrollment classes with advanced coursework requirements.

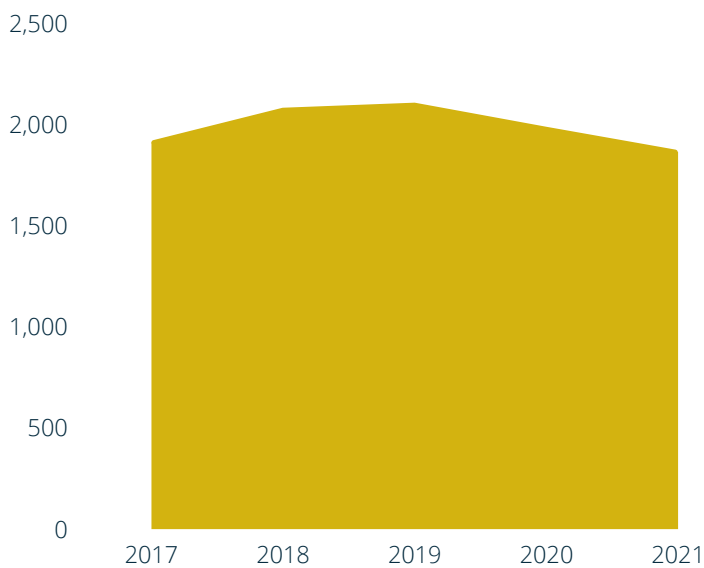
High School Concurrent Enrollment, Colorado Mesa University (CMU), Fall Semester 2017-2021



Percent of CMU Students Enrolled in at least One Online Course, 2019-2021

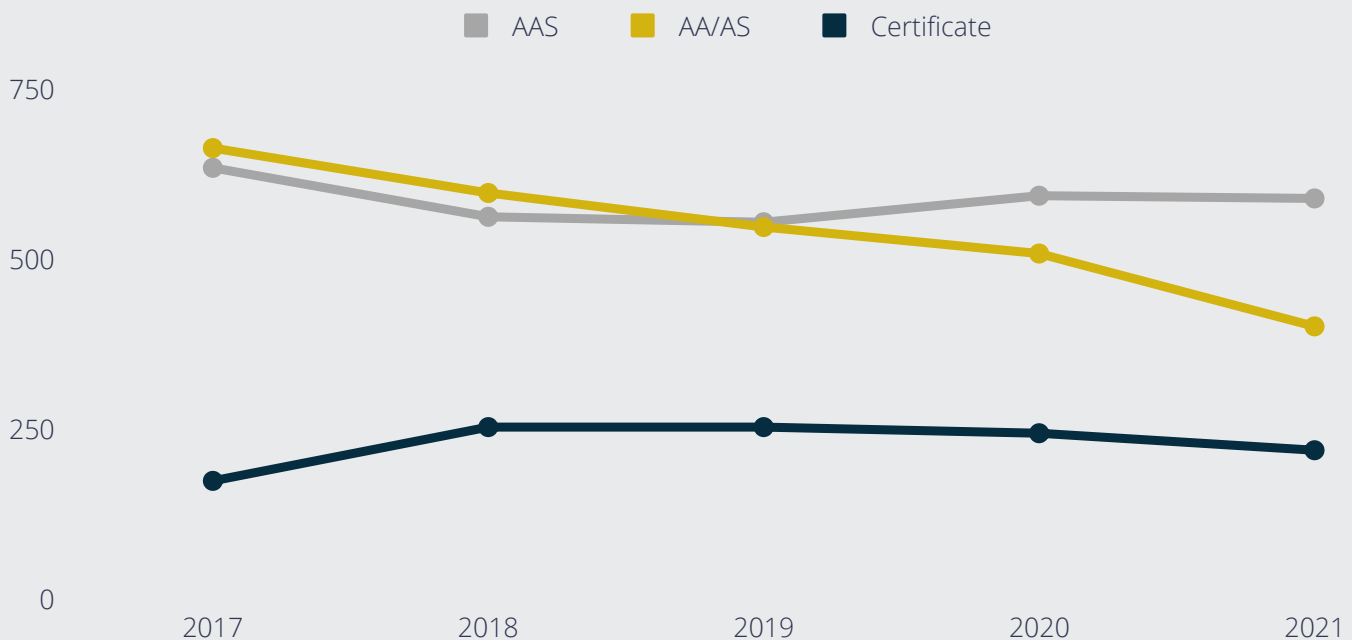


*First-Time Freshman Enrollment,
CMU Fall Semester 2017-2021*



Enrollment by first-time freshmen dropped significantly in 2020 and again in 2021. Although for many students, the 2020-2021 school year was less disrupted than the complete remote learning experience of Spring 2020, these students often received no school visitors to talk about college applications, financial aid opportunities, or selecting a university, decreasing their likelihood of enrolling.

AAS, AA/AS, and Certificate Enrollment at CMU, Fall Semester 2017-2021



While academic associate's degrees (AA/AS) saw a steep drop in 2020 and 2021 enrollment, applied associate's degrees (AAS, such as in manufacturing or health care) saw an increase over 2019 numbers. Students may see a 2-year applied associate's degree program as a clear advantage in an uncertain job market at a lower financial and time cost than a four-year degree.



Health Care and Access



TAKEAWAYS

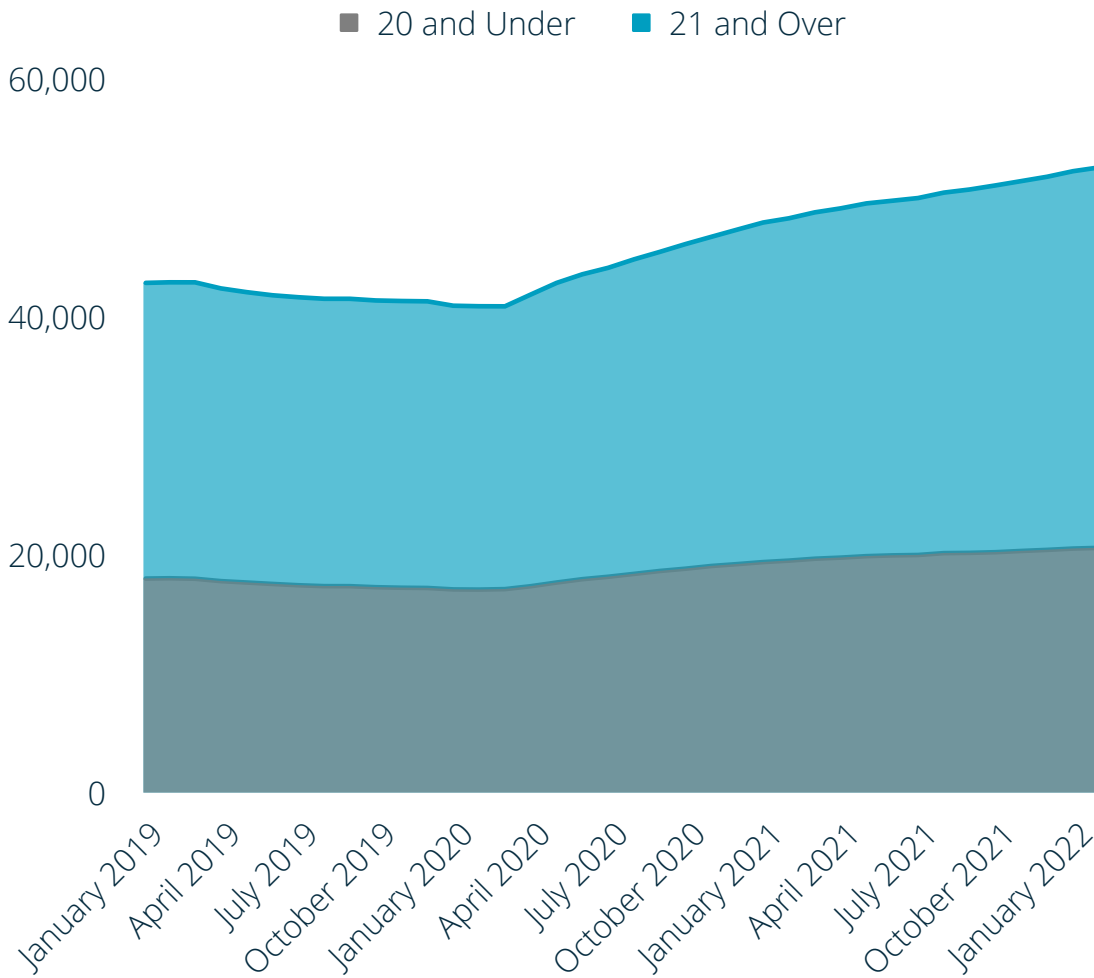
While the medical system was significantly impacted by COVID-19, it can be hard to see these impacts in the data that is traditionally collected in health care settings. The length of stay in emergency departments showed increased variation at the end of 2020 and in 2021, and hospital visits to the region's rural Fruita hospital showed no clear changes.

There were measurable changes in the way patients accessed and paid for their health care. Telehealth visits jumped and then declined, surgeries slowed for a month in the Spring of 2020 and then recovered, 911 calls for emergency medical services increased in 2021, and Medicaid enrollment increased for both adults and children.

Nonetheless, these numbers fail to reflect the experience of health care workers on the front lines of the pandemic response or administrators working to keep systems functioning. These data should be interpreted as limited to the specific metric they display, and shouldn't be extrapolated to the larger experience of health care providers.

Medicaid Enrollment

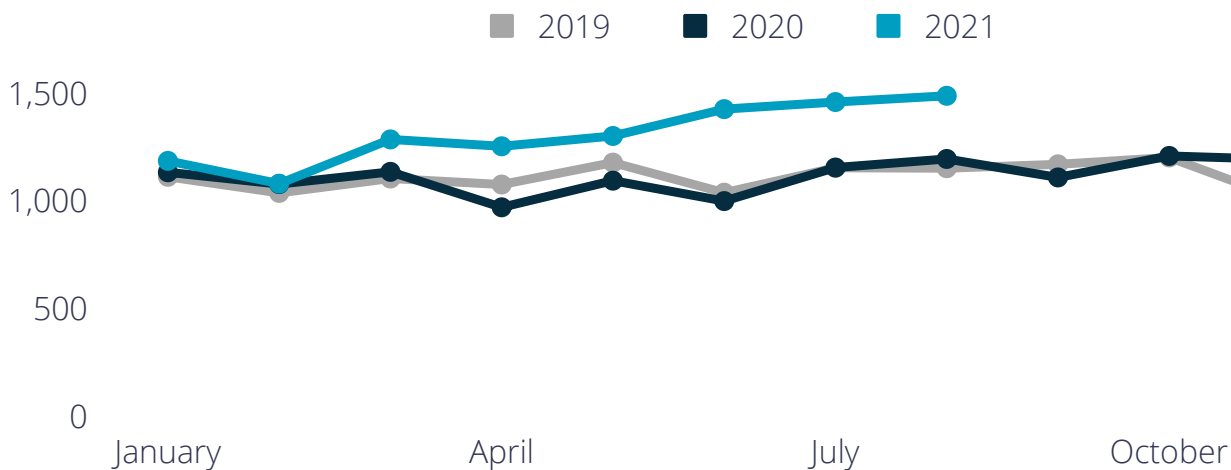
Mesa County Medicaid Enrollment by Age, January 2019 - February 2022



Medicaid enrollment was impacted by increased eligibility as a result of both job loss and federal legislation that required continuous coverage for all enrollees - in other words, individual coverage was not discontinued during the public health emergency. This has resulted in an increase of 20% in enrollment for residents 20 and under, and an increase of 34% for enrollees 21 and over between February, 2020 and February, 2022.

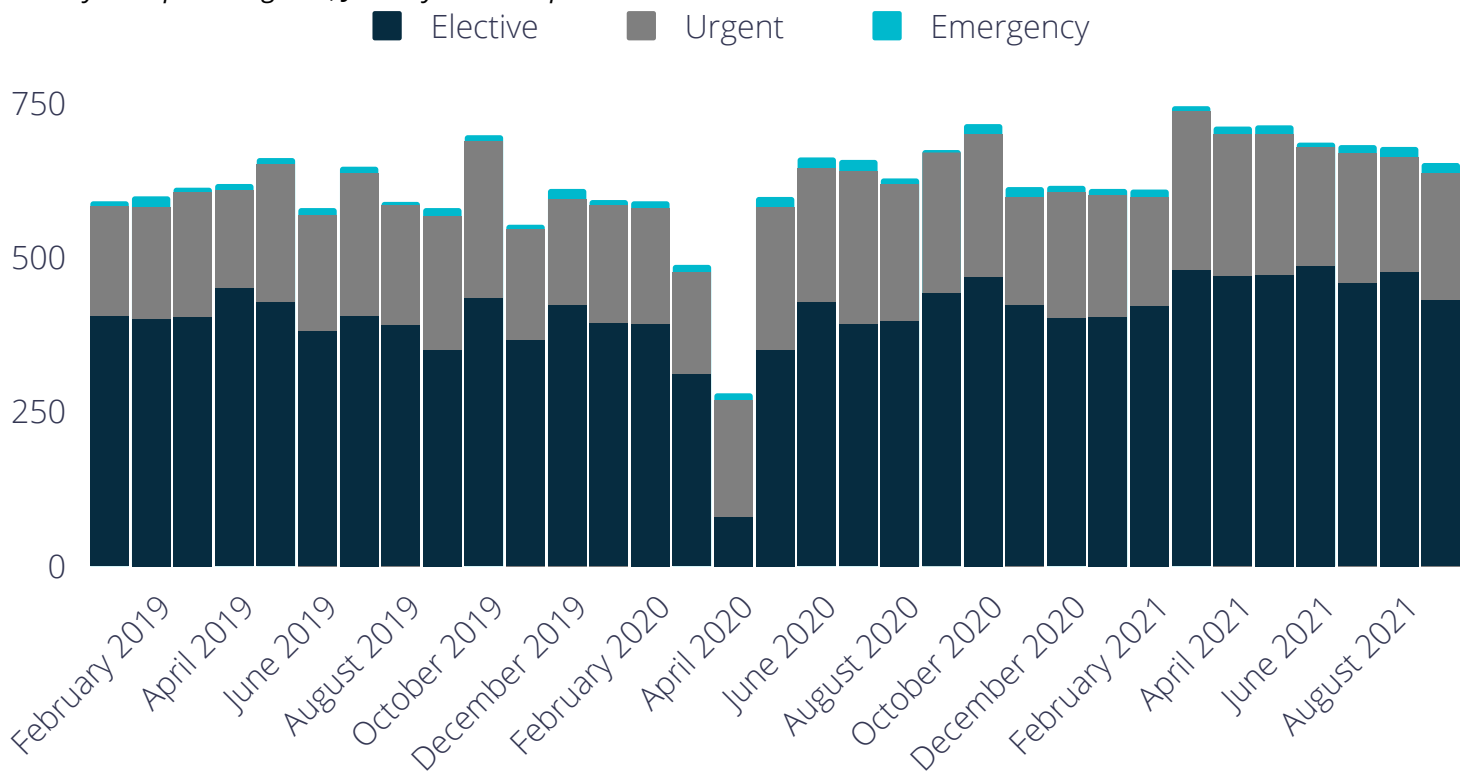
2020 saw a small drop in EMS calls in the spring, but similar levels to 2019 overall. 2021 has had significantly more EMS calls than either of the previous two years. It's not clear what impacted this trend, but it isn't uncommon for EMS incident calls to increase each year.

Mesa County EMS calls, January 2019 - September 2021



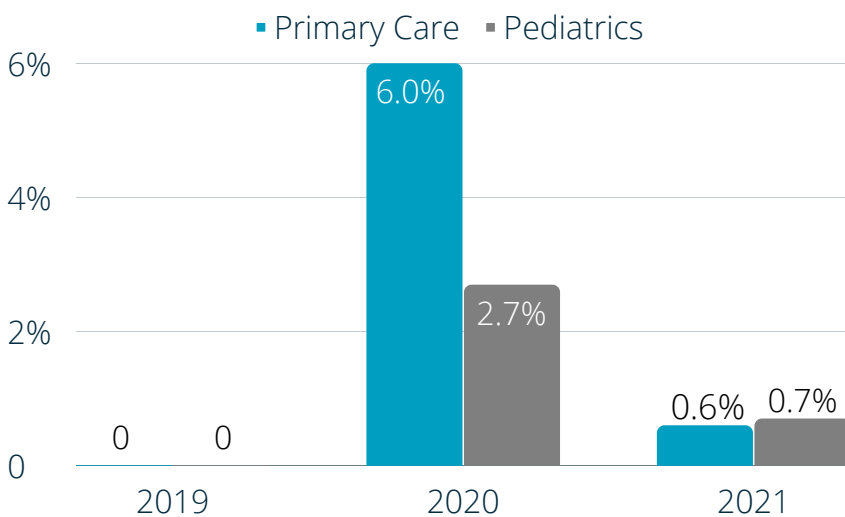
Health Care Visits

St. Mary's Hospital Surgeries, January 2019 - September 2021



Surgeries at St. Mary's Hospital declined in April, 2020, but rebounded quickly. By March, 2021, counts surpassed 2019 levels.

Remote Care through Community Hospital Network, 2019-2021



Community Hospital Network providers did not use remote telehealth services in 2019. In 2020, use in adult primary care jumped to 6% - nearly 1,700 visits were conducted this way. A small share of pediatric visits were also completed remotely, and the use of remote care in primary care and pediatric appointments declined to less than 1% of 2021 visits.



In 2019, about one in four survey respondents had accessed an Emergency Department two or more times in the past 12 months.

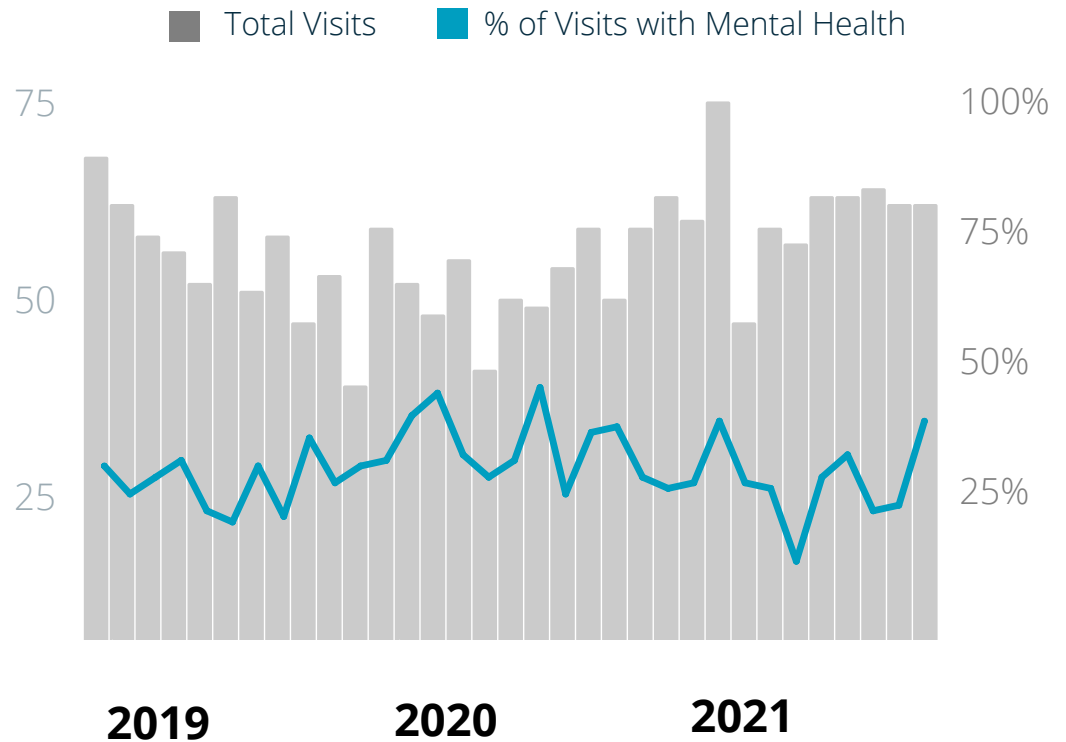
In 2020 and 2021, that number dropped to about one in five.





Between January, 2019 and September, 2021, total visits per month at Colorado Canyons Hospital in Fruita varied from a low of 39 in November, 2019 to a high of 75 in January, 2021. Among those visits, an **average of 30% of the visits included a diagnosis including a mental health concern.** That percentage varied from a low of 14% in April, 2021 to a high of 45% in June, 2020.

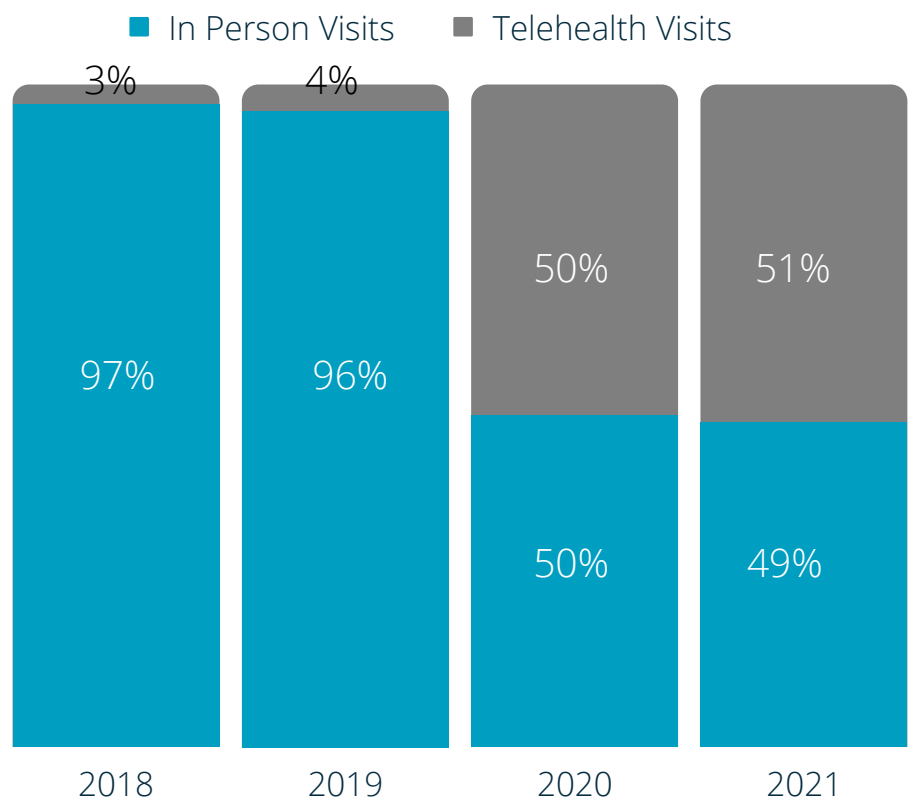
Colorado Canyons Hospital Visits, 2019-2021



Mental Health

Mind Springs Health completed a small proportion of total visits via telehealth before COVID-19, whereas in July 2020 and 2021, roughly half of visits were conducted remotely. This is notably different from the telehealth usage at Community Hospital's Primary Care offices above, which spiked in 2020 but declined in 2021.

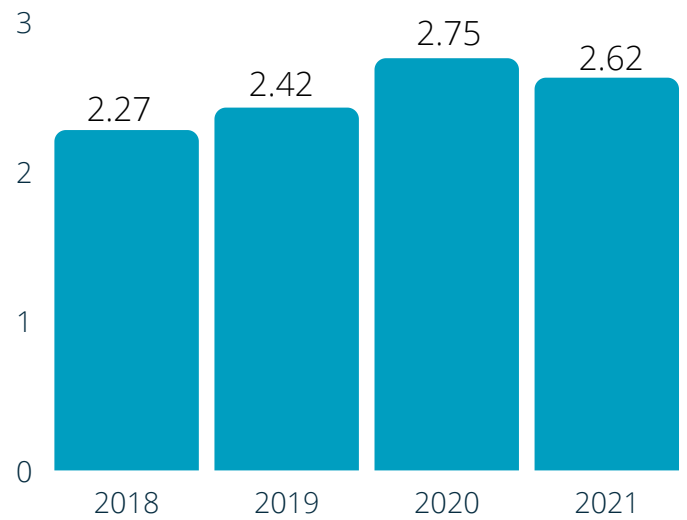
Mind Springs Health - Visits by Type, July 2018-2021



Mind Springs Health served between 3,000 and 3,700 clients in the month of July over 2018-2020. In 2020, each client received an average of 17.5% more services than the pre-COVID-19 baseline of 2018/2019. In 2021, that number dropped to 12.0% more services.

This suggests that clients had more acute needs that required additional connection with a care provider during 2020 and 2021 than before the COVID-19 pandemic began.

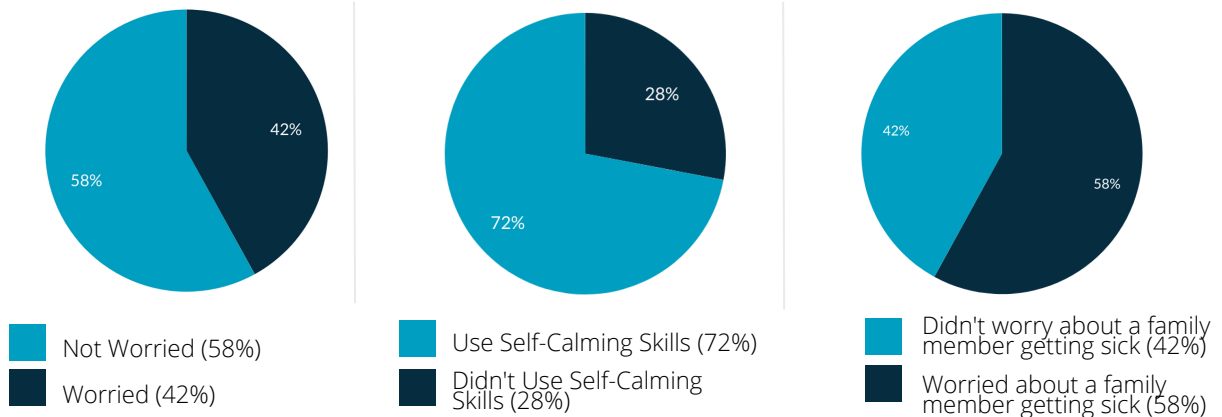
Mind Springs Health - Services per Client, July 2018-2021



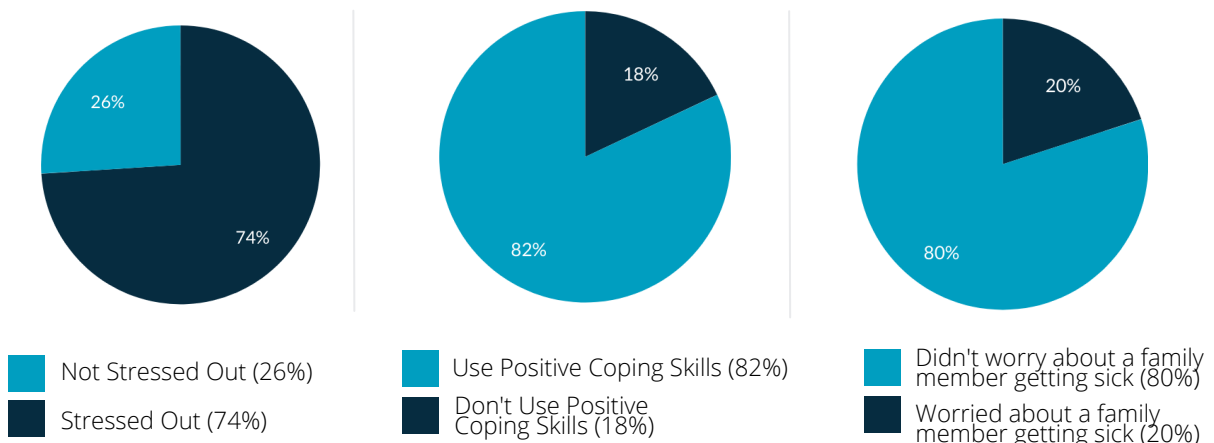
Why July? Occurring after the stay at home order but with students not yet in school, July provides a consistent comparison point across years.

Panorama Survey (School District 51, Fall 2021)

In 2021, 42% of 3-5th grade students reported sometimes, frequently, or almost always feeling worried, an increase of 1% over 2020. 72% reported using self-calming skills when they need to. 58% worried about a family member being sick.

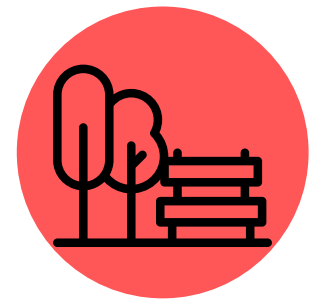


74% of 6-12th graders reported sometimes, frequently, or almost always feeling stressed out, an increase of 6% over 2020. 82% reported using positive coping skills to deal with emotions. 20% worried about the health of their family members.





Neighborhood and Built Environment



TAKEAWAYS

COVID-19 impacted housing, public safety, and movement around the valley. Housing became more expensive for renters and owners, and finding new housing was doubly challenging because of a lack of inventory despite record numbers of building permits.

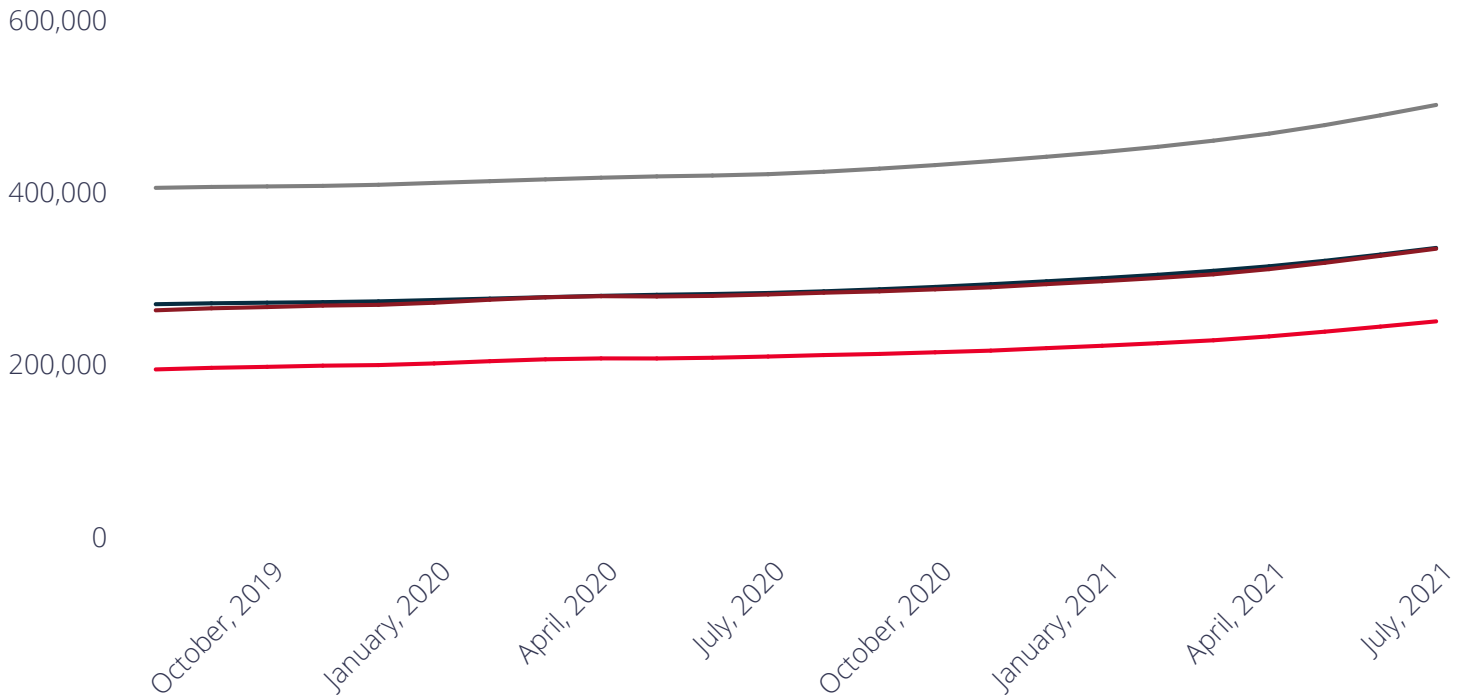
Public safety was impacted by changes in behavior as well as changes in the protocols and interventions available to officers. Warrant arrests dropped by two-thirds between 2019 and 2020 with a small increase in 2021, and firefighters and code compliance officers experienced stress as their workloads and protocols shifted.

Mesa County residents traveled to workplaces less, grocery stores a little more often than usual, and trails in record numbers.

 **Trail use soared among Mesa County residents.**

Home Sale Values, Seasonally Adjusted, Mesa County and Colorado, 2019-2021

- Mesa County-Bottom Tier
- Colorado-Bottom Tier
- Mesa County-Typical
- Colorado-Typical



Home sale values increased modestly between October 2019 and October, 2020, then began to rise more steeply. The trend is consistent across typical and bottom tier (the average price of the bottom third of home sales) sales, and the Mesa County trend mirrors the state-wide trend. In the chart above, the blue and maroon lines (Colorado bottom tier and Mesa County typical sales) overlap so closely that they appear to be a single line. Bottom tier Mesa County home prices increased 28.6% over this period, and typical home prices increased 27.1%.

**Typical
Home
Prices in
Mesa
County**



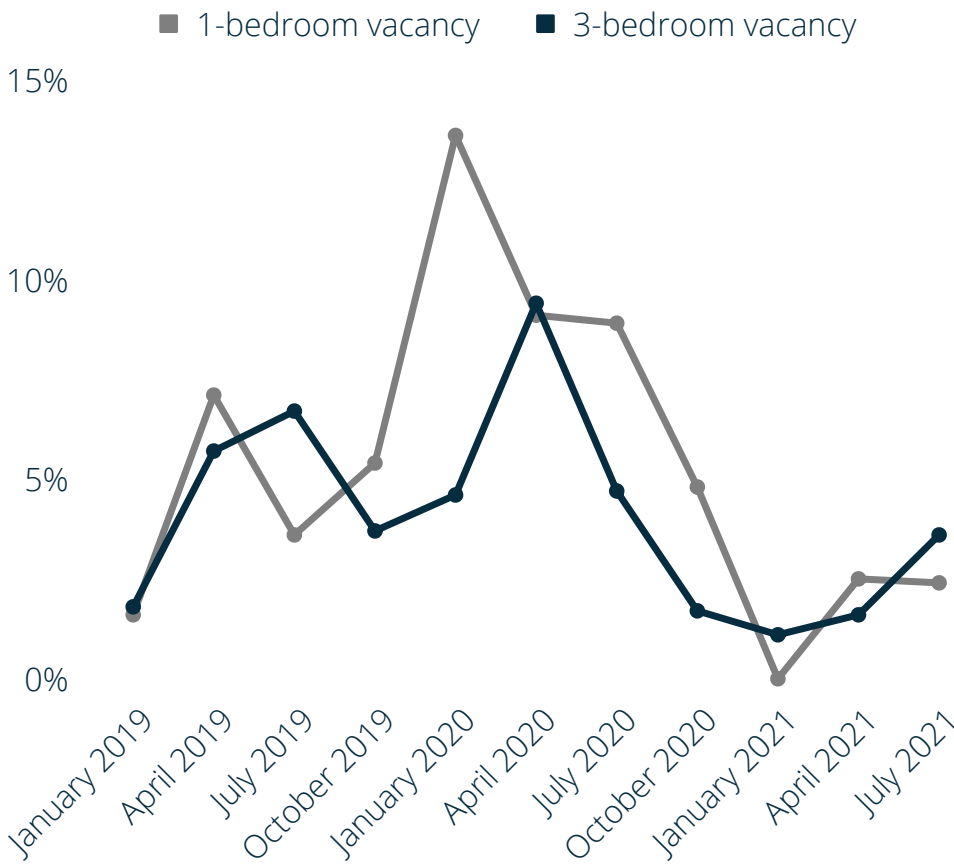
**Increased
27%**

Oct 2019- Oct 2021



Housing Data

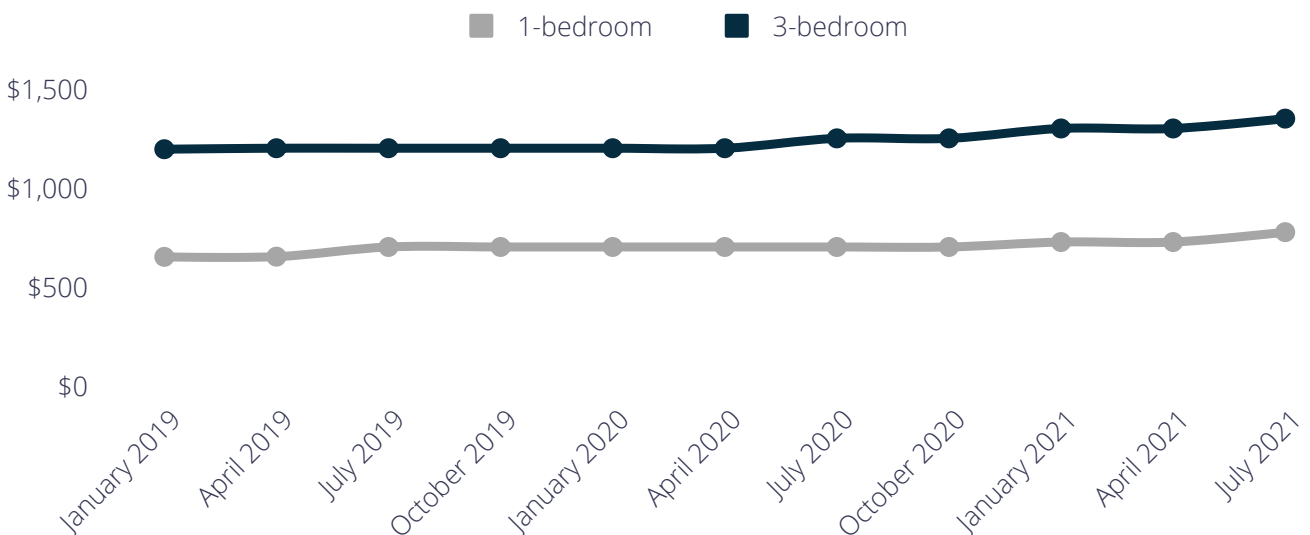
Trends in Rental Prices and Capacity
 Quarterly Vacancy Rate (%) at Bray Property Management



According to records at Bray Property Management, a company with over 500 Mesa County rentals in their portfolio, rental vacancy rose in late 2019 and early 2020, but then declined in late 2020 and early 2021. There is indication of a small amount of recovery. Statewide, the rental vacancy rate (which includes off-the-market rentals) was 4.1% in the third quarter of 2021.

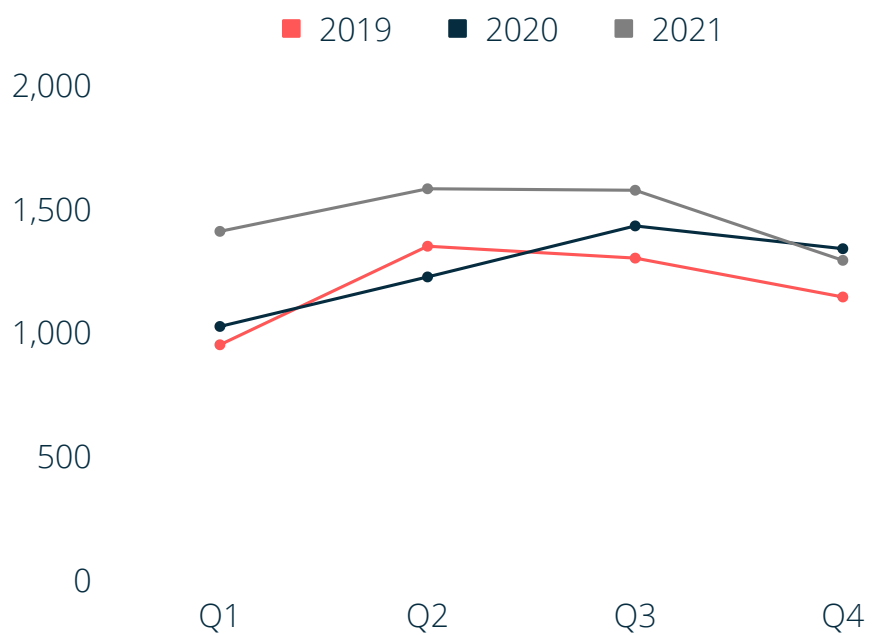
Between January 2019 and July 2021, Bray Rental Properties one bedroom housing units increased in cost by 19% (\$125 per month or \$1,500 per year) and three bedroom housing units increased in cost by 13% (\$155 per month or \$1,860 per year). Nationwide, rents increased 13% in that time period.

Average Quarterly Cost of Rental Units at Bray Property Management, 2019-2021

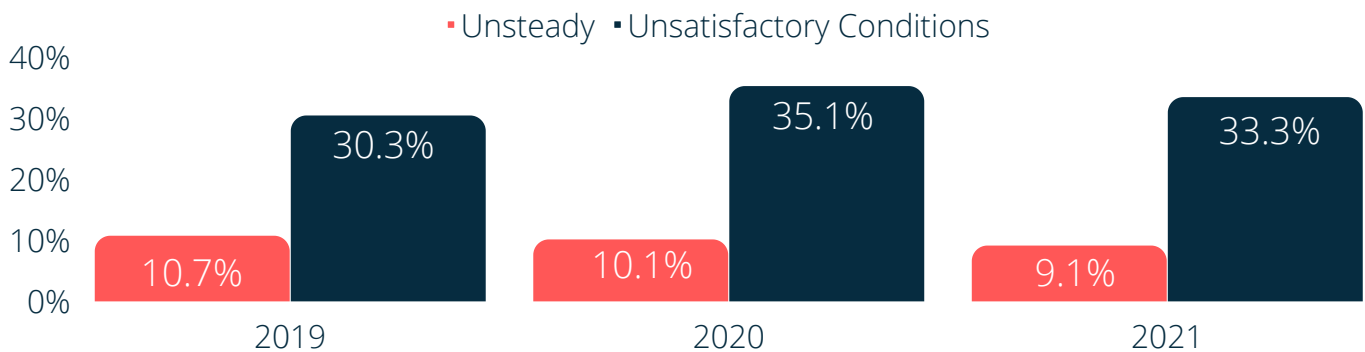


In spring 2020, fewer building permits were issued than in 2019, but the number recovered by summer. 2020 went on to have a record number of building permits, and 2021 saw an even higher number of building permits. Labor and materials shortages and cost increases may have impacted the timeline for completion on these projects, but the County does not track data on certificates of occupancy for homes or other measures of completion.

Quarterly Building Permits Issued in Mesa County, 2019-2021



Percent of AHCM Respondents with Housing Issues, 2019-2021



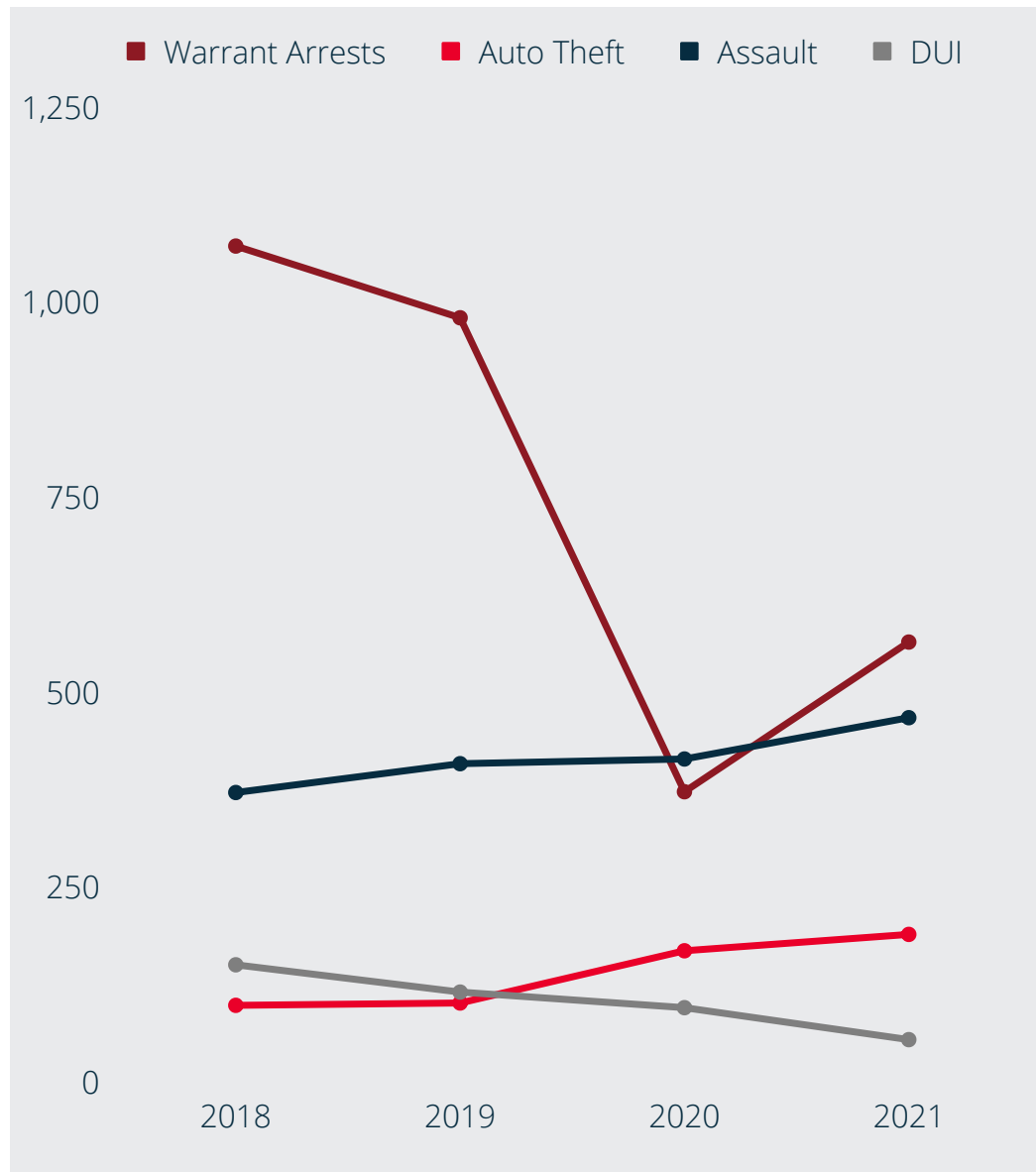
Rates of unsteady housing (defined as “no steady housing” or “housing unsure”) did not significantly change between 2019 and 2021, which likely reflects the impact of the eviction moratorium. There was, however, a significant increase in the percent of respondents indicating unsatisfactory conditions such as bug infestations, a lack of a functioning oven, water leaks, or inadequate heating. This may be because landlords and tenants were less likely to want to interact in person with each other or service providers who could make repairs.



PUBLIC SAFETY

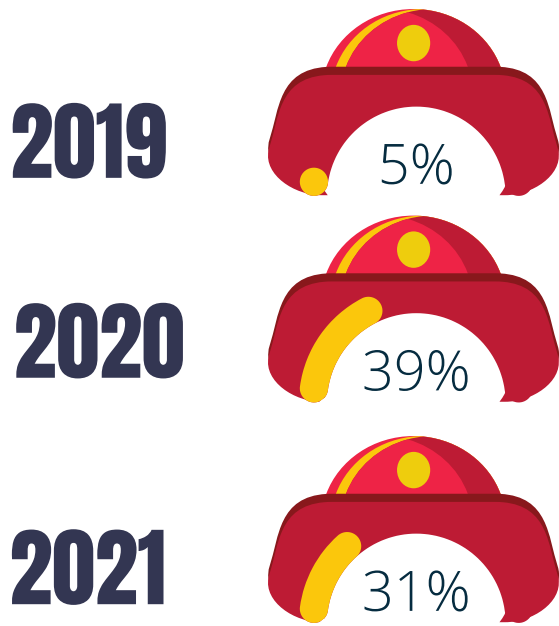
Mesa County Sheriff's Office cases for different kinds of crimes changed in several ways between 2018 and 2021. Some increased, such as auto theft, and some decreased, such as DUI. During 2020, a key priority of the criminal justice system was keeping the jail free from outbreaks that would lead to premature release of incarcerated people. As a result, between 2019 and 2020, warrant arrests (leading to incarceration) decreased by 63% as arrest standards changed to only jail suspects who posed a threat to the community while they waited for trial. In spring of 2021, pre-COVID arrest standards were re-applied and warrant arrests rose somewhat, but not to 2019 levels.

Mesa County Sheriff's Office Cases, 2018-2021



To address the risk of COVID-19 while continuing to process some charges while all in-person proceedings were halted in 2020, the Mesa County criminal justice system added remote technology. In 2021 and 2022, routine procedural hearings are often conducted online, while weightier processes still occur in person.

Percent of Mesa County firefighters who Indicated Job-Related Stress as "Severe" or "Extreme"



In 2021, firefighters were surveyed about job-related stress, looking back at 2019, 2020, and 2021. 5% of Mesa County firefighters rated their job-related stress as "severe" or "extreme" for 2019. In 2020, firefighters faced evolving COVID-19 protocols, reduced recovery time between calls while on shift, and frequent exposure to COVID-19 patients. 39% indicated their stress that year as "severe" or "extreme" levels of job stress. In 2021, many of these protocols remained more consistent or de-escalated, and that rate sits at 31%.



Trails Usage

Between March and June 2020, the Lunch Loops Mountain Bike Trails had nearly 100,000 visits, an **increase of 38%** over the same period in 2019.

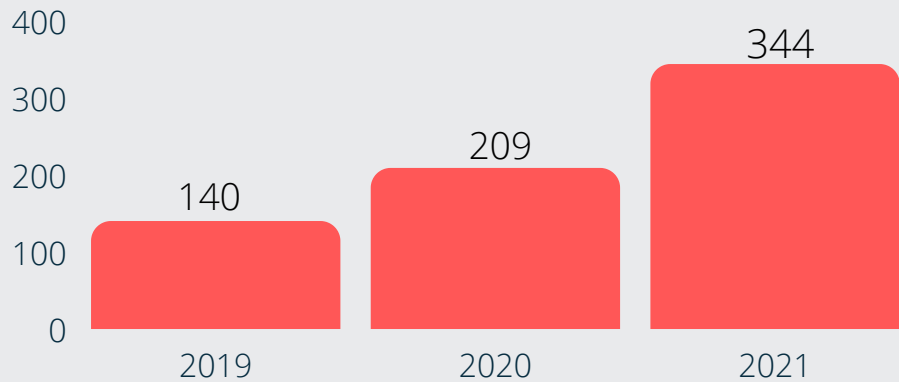
100,000
visits to Lunch Loops





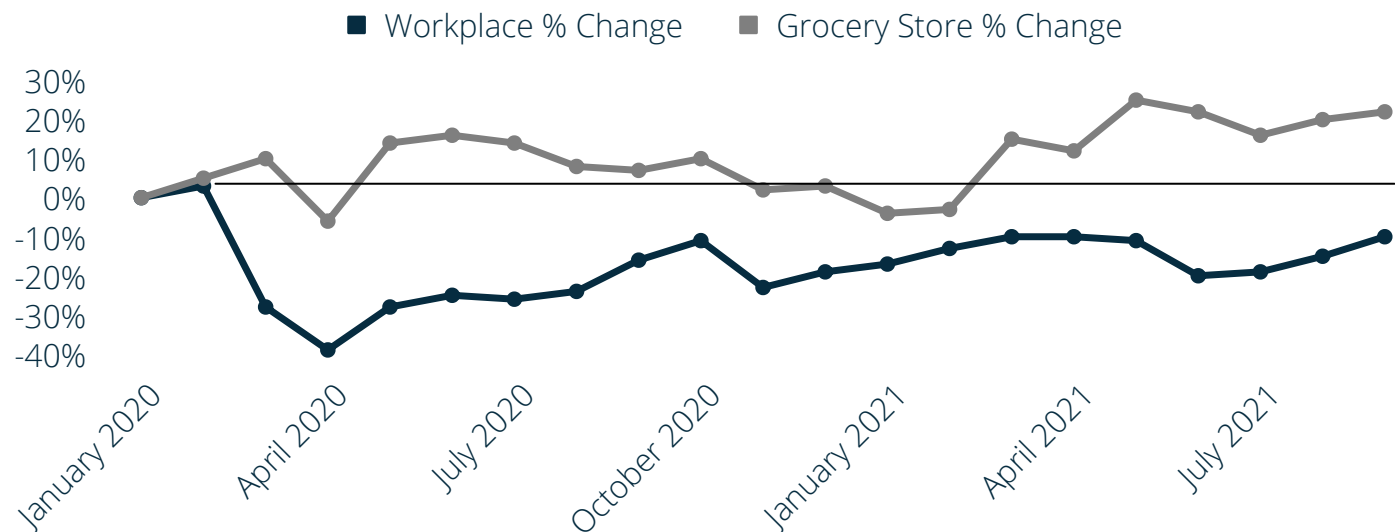
Starting in February of 2020, Google tracked cell phone movements and compared the hours spent at different types of locations, which were compared to a six week period over January and February 2020. Visits to workplaces declined significantly in March, 2020 and never fully returned to the baseline. In contrast, visits to grocery stores dropped in April, 2020, but then recovered until winter 2021, which was followed by another recovery.

Tons of Trash Collected by Clifton Community Cleanup, 2019-2021



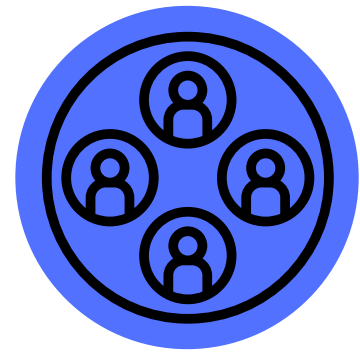
While the overall work of Mesa County's Code Compliance Services was significantly hampered by the necessary safety protocols to protect officers and clients from COVID-19, one notable success was the Clifton Community Cleanup. In 2021, its third year, the cleanup covered three square miles and collected 344 tons of trash, an increase over its first two years that was partially facilitated by a contract with a local construction company.

Percent Change from Baseline in Hours Spent at Workplaces and Grocery Stores*, January 2020-September 2021



*Data measured on 3rd Wednesday of each month to account for weekday differences

Social and Community Context



TAKEAWAYS

Participation in recreational activities and volunteer programs declined in 2020, but made significant improvements in 2021, in some cases returning to 2019 levels. In addition, surveys by District 51 indicated that many students have a trusted adult at home or at school.

Nonetheless, reports of loneliness and isolation as well verbal abuse increased in both 2020 and 2021.

2021 participation in youth and adult sports returned to similar levels as 2019. Sports were impacted differently based on their timing, population, and indoor/outdoor requirements.

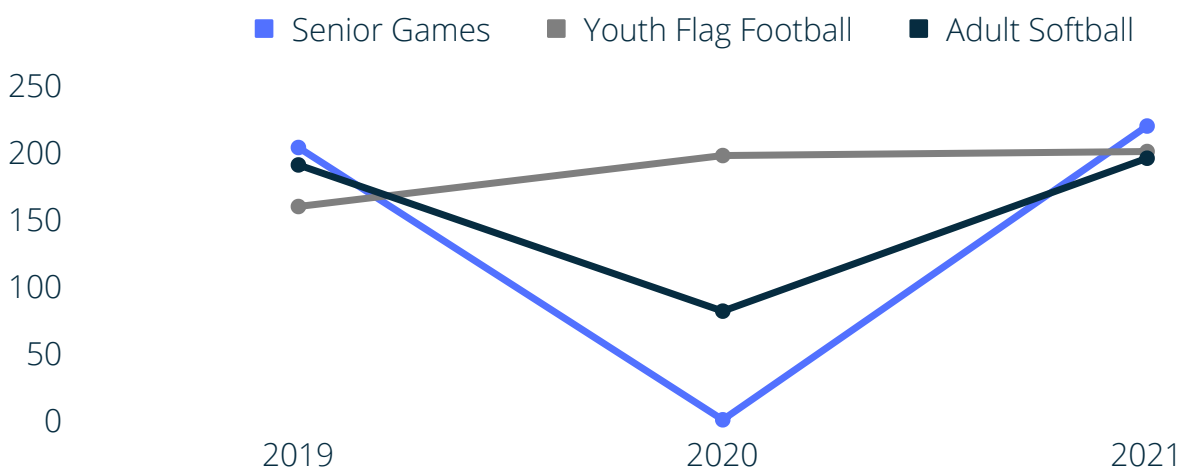
81%

of high school students said social media **almost never or only occasionally** had a **negative impact** on their life.



Panorama Survey, Fall 2021

Grand Junction Parks and Recreation Youth and Adult Sports Participation, 2019-2021



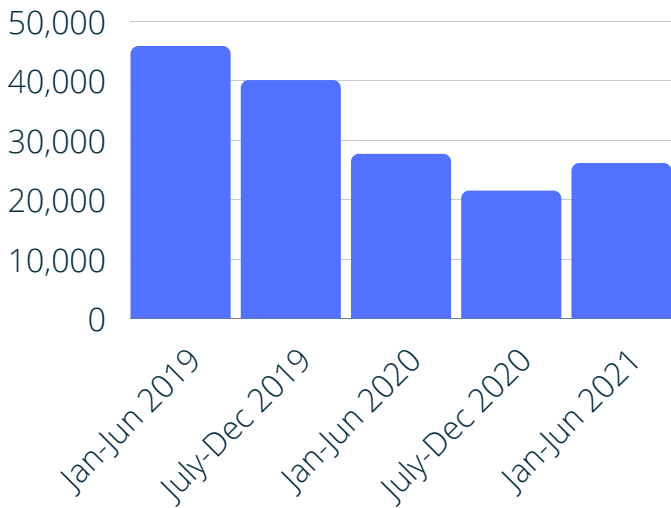
Lincoln Park Swim Lesson Participants

2019 6,422

2020 0

2021 8,244

RSVP Volunteer Hours, 2019-2021



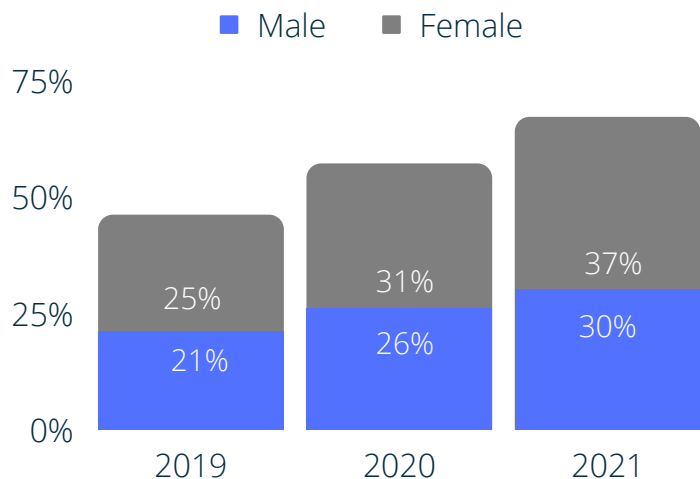
The Mesa County RSVP (a senior volunteer program) saw a steep decline in volunteer hours during 2020, and a slight increase in 2021. This increase is at least partly driven by the availability of vaccines to their volunteer population, but more time is needed to see if volunteers eventually return to pre-COVID levels. Senior organizations in general are still assessing how best to protect members from COVID-19 while attending to their mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health.



Reports of frequent feelings of loneliness increased slightly between 2019 and 2021.

Although women are more likely than men to report feeling lonely or isolated, both groups expressed an increase in the feeling during 2020, and a further increase in 2021. While the 2020 increase in isolation and loneliness is likely due directly to policies and protocols that encourage social distancing, many of these practices have been removed in 2021.

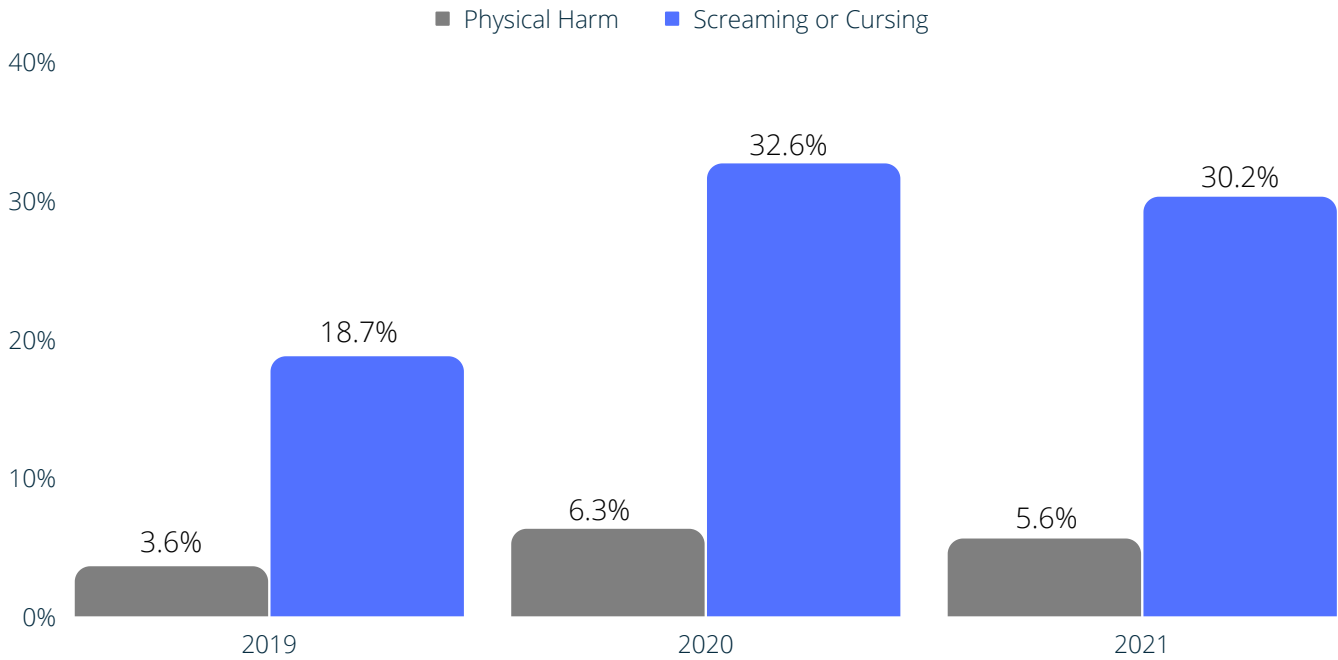
Percent of AHCM Respondents who Feel Lonely or Isolated "Sometimes," "Frequently," or "Fairly Often," 2019-2021



While reports of physical violence remained relatively steady, the rate of reports of verbal abuse increased in 2020 and stayed elevated in 2021.

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Percent of AHCM Respondents, 18 years and older, who Experience Personal Violence or Verbal Abuse, 2019-2021



Causes of Death

2020



Deaths from influenza and chronic lower respiratory infections dropped considerably.



Deaths from accidents, overdose, and alcohol increased.

In 2020, deaths from influenza and chronic lower respiratory infections dropped considerably, while deaths from accidents, overdose, and alcohol increased. The dramatic decrease in deaths from influenza is likely due to the fact that significant disease prevention and mitigation strategies were in place for COVID-19 during flu season 20-21. These likely limited the spread of COVID-19 and other respiratory pathogens.

younger overdose deaths

In 2020, the average age of overdose death was **39** a nearly 10-year drop compared to the 2017–2019 average.

Top 5 Causes of Death

	Rate <i>Per 100K 2020</i>	% change (+/-) <i>2017-2019 baseline</i>
1. Heart Disease	248.1	4%
2. Malignant Cancer	193.5	1%
3. Chronic Lower Respiratory Disease	61.7	19%
4. Non-Transport Accidents (e.g. falls and drowning)	70.7	27%
5. Cerebrovascular Disease (e.g. stroke and aneurysm)	59.1	10%

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Mesa County Department of Human Services
Mesa County Emergency Medical Services
Mesa County Sheriff's Office
Mesa County Valley School District 51
Mesa County Workforce Center
Mesa County RSVP
Mind Springs Health
St. Mary's Hospital
West Springs Hospital

Sources

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Zillow Research, "Zillow Home Values Index"

IMPACT REPORT COVID-19

COMMUNITY HEALTH
NEEDS ASSESSMENT



2 YEARS
behind us

so much ahead.

