

## Pueblo Community Health Center

### ABOUT US

In 1983, Pueblo Community Health Center (PCHC) began providing primary health care services to Pueblo's underserved population from Colorado State Hospital but purchased its own building in 1987. From the very start, PCHC's mission was to provide primary health care to those in need. In 2000, PCHC expanded its services to provide health care to people experiencing homelessness and to rural communities. They also began the new construction of their East Side Clinic in 2020, located in a neighborhood with a high concentration of Medicaid recipients.



### UNDERSTANDING OUR PATIENTS' SOCIAL NEEDS

Pueblo's economy has been historically reliant on industries, like steel and mining, that output lead, mercury, and other toxic pollutants into the environment. Neighborhoods with residents that are primarily people of color or people with limited incomes are often closest to this industrial activity and have a higher risk of experiencing negative health effects. Additionally, climate change is one of the most prominent issues of our time, bringing extreme weather events such as droughts, wildfires, flooding, and catastrophic storms that disproportionately affect the populations that have been systemically marginalized and have contributed least to the problem. Specifically, in July 2022, Pueblo experienced record-breaking heat waves and a wildfire in April 2023 that prompted emergency evacuations.

### HEALTH CENTER RESPONSE TO PATIENTS' SOCIAL NEEDS

To address these environmental and climate issues, Pueblo City and County announced their goal of having Pueblo completely phase out fossil fuels and run on 100% renewable energy power by 2035. PCHC has become a leader in helping the city and county achieve this goal. During construction in 2020, PCHC decided to turn the East Side Clinic into the first zero-net energy health center in the United States. A net-zero energy building produces enough renewable energy to meet its own annual energy consumption requirements. For the East Side Clinic, a combination of high-performance fiberglass windows to reduce solar gain (or when the sun's rays increase the building temperature), efficient lighting, geothermal energy, and



solar panels on the roof and parking lot carport have contributed to the achievement of zero-net energy status.

The initial cost of the renewable energy systems for the East Side Clinic was about \$1.5 million; after initial installation, the pay-back rate was estimated to be 11-13 years. However, due to rising energy costs, the pay-back rate has decreased to about a 7-8 year timeframe. The combination of the 160 kW solar installation on the roof and 120 kW installation on the parking lot carport generates enough electricity to offset the entire building's usage on a net-annual basis. In the first year of solar installations, 435,744 kWh were produced, and 194,784 kWh were sent back to the Black Hills Energy Utility company, demonstrating their net-zero energy verification. PCHC could see the financial benefits of renewable energy systems almost immediately.

In the first year of installation, their total billed amount for utilities was \$26,557, which saved them \$67,848 in utility costs in the first year. Costs will continue to be saved annually as East Side Clinic has become more resilient to planned and climate-driven power outages.

## CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

“Approach the idea from a cost-benefit analysis lens... the economic benefits can't be passed up” CEO Donald Moore shared with NACHC staff. He also touched upon the environmental and community health benefits, which would have long-lasting positive impacts. Moore also recommends involving engineers at the very beginning of the solar installation process because this factor made the entire design process easier to manage for the health center. The Inflation Reduction Act also has [tax credits](#) that can be taken advantage of. The investment tax credit (ITC) reduces the federal income tax liability for a percentage of the cost of a solar system that is installed during the tax year. The production tax credit (PCT) is a per-kilowatt-hour for electricity generated by solar for the first 10 years of a system's operations. This tax credit reduces federal income tax liability and is adjusted annually for inflation, which adds to the overall financial savings that come with solar installations.

If you're looking to learn more about the solar installation process for your health center, the [Community Health Access to Resilient Green Energy \(CHARGE\) partnership](#) provides energy options for health centers supporting communities most vulnerable to grid outages, disproportionately burdened by chronic disease, and most impacted by poverty and racial and ethnic health inequities. CHARGE is a collaboration between NACHC, Collective Energy, and Capital Link.

Working as a team, CHARGE offers education, assessment, design, installations, and financing options to make clean and reliable energy easy and affordable for health centers.