

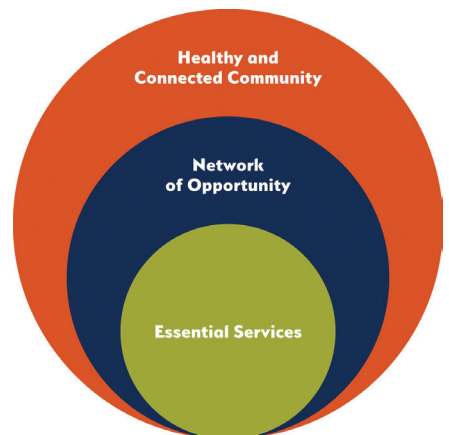


FROM OUTPUTS TO OUTCOMES: A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH TO DELIVERING SERVICES WITH DENVER HUMAN SERVICES

Don Mares, Denver Human Services

A quarter million people in Denver turn to Denver Human Services for support at all stages of life. Our employees help children, seniors, families, and individuals navigate social and economic pressures by connecting them to services and experts who support their overall well-being. We help connect people to supports, such as food, housing, shelter resources, parenting classes, child care, employment support, and other essential services. No matter the need, our team helps Denverites be supported. Together with our community, we work to build well-being and resiliency for every child, adult, and senior in need. Since stepping into my role at the department in 2015, I have identified a need to provide deeper, smarter service delivery to families. At the outset of my journey through the Aspen Institute Colorado Children and Families Fellowship, I set out to understand with colleagues how to usher in a new culture of working in innovative, more proactive, and creative ways while maintaining our commitment to provide the benefits and services to families and individuals in need.

Our department is successful when families are healthier and happier. And for a long time, our measure of success was the number of narrowly applied outputs we provided in the form of benefits and access to assistance programs. However, we could and should be doing more for our community. We should measure our success not only by outputs, but by our capacity to ensure better outcomes for the families and individuals that we touch. Consider, for example, turning the provision of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefits into a conversation about what a family might need to improve its state holistically.



Time, intentionality, and support are key to affecting real change in organizational culture. The bigger and older the organization, the harder it is to change culture, typically. I knew that we needed to get colleagues at all levels of the organization on board, enlist the support of community organizations and agencies with whom

we could partner to effectively expand our portfolio of services, and develop new measures to assess short- and long-term success around key strategic metrics.

In July of 2019, we finalized and adopted a Denver Human Services value sphere and an associated vision statement as the department's three-to-five-year strategic vision. Upon completion, we held a retreat for the department's roughly 45 managers to develop an implementation plan. In January 2019, we held a press event to unveil [Human Together: the Denver Human Service Strategic Vision Framework](#) to our workforce and to our community partners.

THROUGH HUMAN TOGETHER, WE HAVE IDENTIFIED FIVE DEPARTMENT-WIDE GOALS THAT WE WILL BE WORKING TO ACHIEVE OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS:

- **Equity & Access:** Ensure every individual in Denver has access to the support they need to live a healthy, high-quality life
- **Safety & Wellness:** Support and advance sustainable health, wellness, and safety outcomes for the community
- **Connectivity:** Increase connectivity as a department to improve community partnerships, reduce internal silos, and work collaboratively with city and state partners
- **Economic Resilience:** Strengthen economic well-being across the lifespan to increase access to opportunity
- **Workforce:** Support a healthy and connected workforce that is equipped to strengthen the communities of Denver

Through our process, we have been reminded of the importance of engaging stakeholders at all levels of an organization to spur change that is lasting, effective, and consistently applied and interpreted across the organization. In 2019, we plan to put all department employees through a set of trainings designed to crystalize the connection between their work and our newly adopted vision for success and to give them a voice in identifying initiatives for the future of our work.

We know that creating equity and access includes reducing stigma around asking for help when you need it. To begin that effort, we have also unveiled our new [#BeHuman](#) brand campaign. The campaign features real stories from employees, customers, and residents and a new, easier-to-navigate website. The campaign's key messages of "Let's Start Where You Are," and "Together, We've Got This," are meant to evoke the sense of a community that is accepting and supportive, not judgmental or critical of your situation.

At the top level of city government, we have presented our strategic vision framework to Denver Mayor Michael B. Hancock, to which he responded favorably. But the true test of our effectiveness in convincing his office of the approach will come as we present expanded budget requests to expand services. We are confident though, that an approach to the work of Denver Human Services that is a little more human will be well-received and prioritized accordingly.



Don Mares
Executive Director
Denver Human Services

Don Mares serves as the executive director of Denver Department of Human Services. The Department provides assistance benefits and protection and prevention services to one in three Denver residents, including including food, cash and medical benefits, child care, and child support.

“Our journey in Aspen all started with the question, “what would it take for Colorado to be the best place to have and raise a family?” At the outset of my journey through the Aspen Institute Colorado Children and Families Fellowship, I set out to understand how at Denver Human Services, we could usher in a new culture of working in innovative, proactive, and creative ways to improve lives of all Denverites, while still maintaining our commitment to providing benefits and services to families and individuals in most need.

Currently one in three people in Denver receive support from Denver Human Services. Being an Aspen Institute fellow has initiated reflection on our strong position in the community to ponder how our work could be more impactful. Given the many lives that we touch coupled with an incredible network of community partners, we have a tremendous opportunity and moral obligation to help those in need and perhaps to even prevent people from needing our services in the first place.

For Colorado to be the best place to have and raise a family it will take all of us ensuring that communities are strengthened and that families and individuals have the tools and resources they need to be safe, supported, connected, and well.”