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Introduction

A recent report by the RAND Drug Policy Research Center has estimated the social price tag of meth abuse in the United States at \$23.4 billion. These estimates take into account the cost of lost productivity at work, the cost of drug treatment and hospital care, social programs to care for the children/ families of users and criminal intervention. Colorado ranks eighth in the nation in per capita meth use, costing the state \$1.4 billion a year, or \$73,700 per user according to Colorado Attorney General John Suthers.

Larimer County Statistics

Exact levels of meth use in Larimer County are unknown; however, many indicators of its prevalence can be observed. This section of the report provides data on the number of arrests/meth lab seizures, child protection reports, meth-related deaths, hospital admissions, admissions to treatment facilities and Drug Court participation.

Table 1: Methamphetamine Arrests by Law Enforcement Agency

	Larimer County Sheriff	Larimer County Drug Task Force	Estes Park Police	Fort Collins Police	Loveland Police
<i>Methamphetamine (synthetic narcotic) Arrests</i>	*	2004=57 2005=95 2006=65 2007=43 2008=73	None	2004= n/a 2005=111 2006=119 2007= 87 2008= 75	2004=240 2005=104 2006=100 2007= 96 2008= 61
<i>Methamphetamine Lab Seized/Dismantled</i>	See LC Drug Task Force	2004=13 2005=19 2006= 7 2007= 7 2008= 3	None	See LC Drug Task Force	See LC Drug Task Force

* Per Sergeant Joe Shellhammer of the Larimer County Sheriff's Office, they are unable to pull exact figures regarding meth-related arrests. However, he estimates that the average number of arrests per year to be around 250. He has seen no downward trend in arrests.

The above table shows methamphetamine arrests and the number of meth lab busts (seizures) among Larimer County law enforcement agencies. All meth lab seizures are reported by the Larimer County Drug Force, a multi-jurisdictional drug task force staffed by personnel from Fort Collins Police Services, Loveland Police Department, Colorado State University Police Department, Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Colorado National Guard. Until 2008, the Larimer County Sheriff's Office was also a participant. The Larimer County Sheriff's Office

still relies on the Task Force for meth lab seizures/dismantling and the investigation of mid-level and large meth distributors, limiting their investigations to the street level dealers.

While a dramatic decline in meth lab seizures can be attributed to retail and federal restrictions on the sale of the drug's base ingredient – ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, commonly found in over-the-counter cold medicines, the supply of meth remains readily available per Sergeant Joe Shellhammer of the Larimer County Sheriff's Office. Despite increases in the cost to obtain meth, Sergeant Shellhammer reports that the drug remains very popular with drug users in Larimer County.

Lieutenant Jerry Schiager of the Larimer County Drug Task Force concurs that meth use continues to be a serious problem in Larimer County. While Lieutenant Schiager acknowledges the dramatic decline in the number of meth lab seizures, from a high of 19 in 2005 to three in 2008, he states that user demand is as strong as ever.

When the crack-down on meth labs dramatically decreased the amount of domestically produced meth beginning in 2003, mega-labs opened in Mexico to fill the demand. However, according to a 2009 report released by the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC), domestic meth production is projected to increase in 2009. Many users and distributors are being compelled to begin producing the drug domestically again because of decreased production and flow of meth from Mexico.

The NDIC report also indicates the decline in Mexican meth production is related to import restriction of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. These restrictions will continue to drive a rise in domestic production, fueled by an increase in domestic pseudoephedrine trafficking by individuals and criminal groups focused on circumventing national retail pseudoephedrine sales restrictions – known as “smurfing”, a method used by some meth trafficker to acquire large quantities of precursor chemicals. Meth producers purchase the chemicals in quantities at or below legal thresholds from multiple retail locations. The meth producers often enlist the assistance of several friends or associates in smurfing operations to increase the speed of operation and the quantity of chemicals acquired

A meth-related crime, ID theft, continues to be problematic in the state and the County. Colorado now ranks sixth in the nation in ID theft. Colorado Attorney General Suthers states that two-third of ID thefts are caused by meth users. Meth users also frequently resort to stealing checks from mail boxes, ‘washing’ them clean and rewriting them.

Another indicator of meth use is the Drug Court case load within the County's Judicial District. Drug Courts are designed to bring drug treatment into the criminal justice system, providing treatment for offenders with a history of drug abuse while simultaneously ensuring supervision and court sanctions when needed. According to Paul Cooper, Chief Probation Officer, of the 47 Drug Court cases currently before the court within Larimer County, meth was the drug of choice at arrest for 20 of the Drug Court participants.

Further, as the table below, indicates, in 2008 Larimer County had an estimated 135 child protection referrals (where abuse or neglect was reported) that were meth-related. However, these numbers may understate the severity of the problem in Larimer County as records do not consistently indicate the drug of choice in abuse/neglect cases related to parental substance abuse.

Mesa County, on the western slope of Colorado, has determined that as many as 75% of their child protection cases are related to parental meth abuse as stated by County Commissioner Janet

Rowland during a recent interview regarding the impact of meth on Colorado families. Were these same percentages applied to the total number of Larimer County Child Protection Referrals, approximately 3750 in 2007, the figures below could be greatly understated.

Table 2: Methamphetamine-Related Child Protection Referrals (January 1st, 2008 to December 31st, 2008)

Demographics	Number of Children	
Age	0 to 5	64
	6 to 10	42
	11 to 16	20
	Over 16	5
	Unknown	4
Ethnicity	African American	1
	Caucasian	73
	Hispanic	44
	Native American	1
	Unknown	16
Gender	Female	59
	Male	76

“Promising steps are being taken by our department to help parents suffering with addiction to methamphetamine. These efforts include Family Treatment Court and integration of substance abuse and mental health treatment. Many parents involved with our department have co-occurring disorders and will benefit from the integration of these forms of treatment. A biopsychosocial approach to assessing and treating meth addiction is more effective. Our department promotes family and community inclusion in our efforts to help parents with meth addiction and believe they will have a better chance of remaining clean and sustaining positive changes in their lives. “

--Angela Mead, Director of the Hub, Larimer County Department of Human Services

The number of *methamphetamine-related deaths* in Larimer County has remained relatively low over the last several years, according to the Larimer County Coroner’s Office. Accidental deaths involving meth were three in 2004, one in 2005, five in 2006, two in 2007 and three in 2008. This means there was a five-year average rate of 1.01 per 100,000, compared to a three-year rate of .63 for the period of 2001 through 2003.

While the number of deaths may be low, hospitals continue to see many patients who have conditions related to meth use in the emergency room and for inpatient services, though at much lower levels than reported previously. (See Table 3) This decrease in meth-related hospital admission and ER visits may be a reflection of the large increase in meth users who have received treatment from publicly-funded facilities.

In 2008, there were approximately 337 Larimer County residents receiving publicly-funded treatment for meth use, compared to 676 who received treatment for alcohol abuse ([Colorado Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division](#)). This represents a 176% increase over 2003, when only 122 residents were treated in publicly funded facilities.

Local Intervention Efforts

In January 2007, a community in Nevada tried a new approach to educate the public and fight back against meth. A 30-minute documentary titled “Crystal Darkness” was aired on virtually all TV stations at once, making it one of the most watched programs in Nevada history.

Since the Nevada airing, Crystal Darkness campaigns have spread throughout the country, with a goal to bring communities together to fight to protect their youth and neighborhoods against meth. With a message of “not even once” the campaigns hope to prevent youth from ever trying meth.

Aired in January 2009 and filmed on location in Denver, Longmont, Grand Junction, and other parts of the state, the Colorado version of Crystal Darkness is one of the most poignant versions to date, telling the story of the tragic impact of meth on families and communities. The documentary consists of powerful interviews of community leaders, elected officials, law enforcement and recovery experts. Also featured are the testimonies shared by many Colorado recovering meth addicts or the families of meth addicts, including:

Christy, a young mother whose children were molested because “all I cared about was meth”;

Justin, who first tried smoking meth when he was fourteen. The second time he used it, he snorted it and by the third time, he was injecting it. Not long after starting on meth, he reached bottom when he filled his syringe with bleach and tried to kill himself;

Jessica, who described her desire for meth “like needing air or water”. She described unspeakable acts she was willing to perform, “all for a sack of dope”;

Charlene, who came from a long line of drug abusers, who led her son into meth addiction when he was eleven; or

Twenty-three year old Mitchell Gray, of Loveland, who committed suicide in the family garage, after battling a meth addiction that began when he was seventeen.

In discussion hosted by KBDI after the airing of the Colorado Crystal Darkness documentary, a panel of meth experts/service providers discussed the growing need for services beyond the simple treatment of addiction. Stan Paprocki, of the Colorado Department of Human Services, stated there is a common belief that once the addiction is treated, the work is done. However, he states that we are now aware that full recovery support services are needed to reframe the meth treatment model to allow addicts with children to create new healthy patterns and fully become part of the sober community again.

Within Larimer County, there are several addiction treatment and recovery support services providers:

[Larimer County Alliance for Drug Endangered Children \(DEC\)](#) works to increase awareness of the dangers that drug use poses to children -- and work to prevent drug abuse. Where drug abuse is already a problem, they provide resources to individuals, children, and families. DEC is a coalition of organizations: non-profit groups, government agencies, treatment centers, churches, and others. The group formed in response to the epidemic of methamphetamine abuse in our community. Larimer County DEC works locally, but has also embraced the mission and values of the Colorado Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, which is part of a national alliance. They are working aggressively to break the cycle of drug abuse in our county.

[Turning Point’s Methamphetamine Treatment Program](#) provides research-based, enhanced substance abuse treatment with the goal of educating youth to prevent substance abuse and to prevent relapse where problems have already developed. Education is specific to the physical, psychological, neurological and social impacts of meth use. Clients participate in 12-Step recovery groups and individual and group therapy, and develop a relapse prevention plan with their therapist.

[Harmony Foundation](#) in Estes Park approaches addiction treatment as a medical disease. With an understanding that as the disease progresses, it has dramatic, often devastating consequences that impact many areas of the addict's life – health, jobs, finances, relationships and value systems, their comprehensive approach to recovery is designed to treat the physical, emotional, spiritual and psychosocial aspects of the disease. Using a program designed to build a strong foundation for long-term recovery and with guided help through a process of on-going change, Harmony clients find their way back to the responsible, productive, and caring individuals they know themselves to be.

Opportunities for Action and Resources

- [Arapahoe House, Comprehensive Drug, Alcohol, and Behavioral Health Services](#), Thornton, CO 80260, (303) 657-3700
- [Colorado Alcohol & Drug Abuse Division \(ADAD\)](#), (303) 866-7480
- [Colorado Alliance for Drug-Endangered Children](#), 9101 Harlan St., Suite 250, Westminster, CO 80031, (303) 413-3460
- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment - [Methamphetamine Lab Cleanup Guidelines](#)
- [United Way 2-1-1](#), Dial 211 (no charge) or (970) 407-7066
- [Jacob Family Services](#), (970) 484-8427
- [Larimer Center for Mental Health](#), (970) 221-2114
- [Larimer County Child Protection](#), (24 hours) (970) 498-6990
- [Larimer County Drug Task Force](#), (970) 416-2560
- Methamphetamine Information Line, (888) 8NO-METH (888-866-6384)
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#), (970) 282-8079
- [National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#)
- [Turning Point Center for Youth and Family Development](#), 1644 South College Avenue, Fort Collins, CO 80525, (970) 221-0999