

# Rocky Mountain MS Center: Rural Engagement Program

Expand an innovative pilot program for people impacted by MS and healthcare professionals (HCPs) in rural Colorado communities to increase HCP awareness of comprehensive MS care including earlier diagnosis, wellness strategies, mental and physical health, and nutrition

## Why it Matters

Getting an initial MS diagnosis is very challenging in rural areas. Because MS presents with varying symptoms, a referral to a neurologist, if it occurs, can take a patient months to be seen. According to the US Census Bureau, approximately 20% of the US population lives in rural areas, yet less than 8% of US physicians practice in rural areas.

The shortage of healthcare professionals and lack of mental health and physical therapy services tailored to MS particularly impacts patients in rural Colorado. According to a 2020 report from Rural Health Colorado, 22 counties in Colorado do not have a licensed psychologist. Approximately 80% of people with MS do not get enough physical activity weekly. And when it comes to the specialty services and care coordination needed to manage an MS treatment plan, rural MS patients are left with few options and many hurdles to overcome.



## Solution

Design and implement a multi-faceted campaign to increase HCP awareness and earlier MS diagnosis in a large, diverse rural area served by the Rural Engagement Program. Campaign will focus on early symptom recognition, diagnosis and access to treatment while emphasizing the importance of a comprehensive approach to MS care and preserving lifelong brain health.

### Campaign design and delivery will include:

- Input from community stakeholder advisory group comprised of patients, caregivers, & HCPs
- Education to rural HCPs and community-based organizations with tailored, accessible, and effective materials that highlight early MS signs and symptoms
- Consultation from University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, a partner institution

### Leverage of current pilot components:

- MS Community Forums events between patients, HCPs and community members
- Direct support services from MS educators including mental health counseling, wellness coaching and exercise classes
- Tailored rural clinic presentations
- Digital provider toolkit

## Impact

The following outcomes will be measured through surveys, interviews, and media data:



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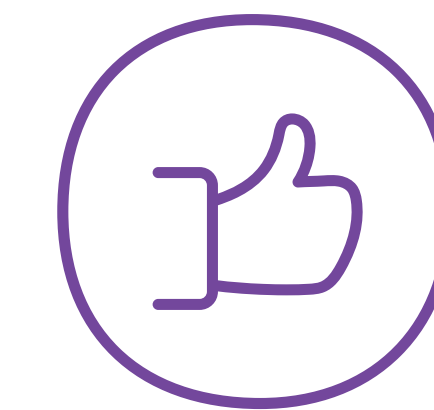
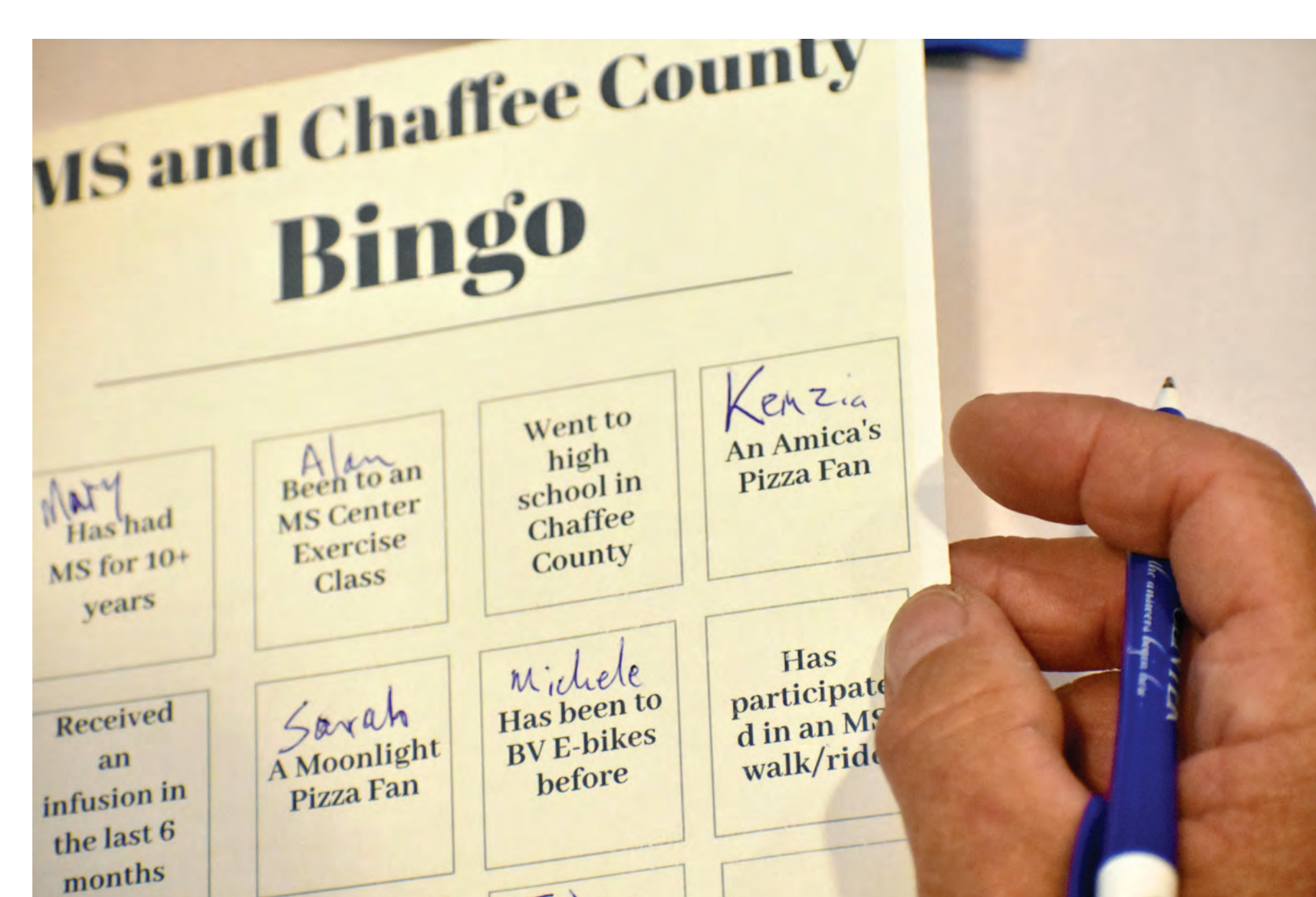
### Learning

- Percent of HCPs reporting increased knowledge of early signs and symptoms of MS
- Number of community-based organizations reporting increased knowledge of early signs and symptoms of MS
- Percent of HCPs with increased confidence referring patients to MS specialists



### Reach

- Number of Healthcare facilities
- Number of HCPs
- Number of community members



### Engagement

- Number of MS patients engaged as volunteers
- Number of MS patients and HCPs engaged in advisory groups
- Number of patients participating in program services and events

