

eConsult Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2023-2024

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COLORADO
Department of Health Care
Policy & Financing

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I. Executive Summary

Background

This report evaluates the early performance and impact of the eConsult initiative launched by the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF) to improve access to specialty care for Medicaid Members.

To address access to specialty care, HCPF introduced the eConsult initiative in 2020, with the platform becoming operational in February 2024. Colorado Medicaid eConsult allows Primary Care Medical Providers (PCMPs) to electronically communicate (asynchronously) with specialty providers, allowing collaborative decision-making on the best treatment options for Medicaid Members. This asynchronous communication ensures a convenient and Member-centered approach to care and enhances access to specialty services.¹

On average, Medicaid Members face significant challenges in accessing specialty care, with wait times adding up to 1.4 times longer than those for patients with commercial health insurance. They are three times more likely to report not receiving necessary care due to provider non-acceptance of Medicaid. In 2019, the Colorado Health Institute (CHI) did a survey and estimated that around 486,000 specialty care visits were unmet for Colorado Medicaid Members, potentially delaying crucial medical interventions and worsening health conditions.²

Safety Net Connect (SNC) was selected through a procurement process to create and manage the Colorado Medicaid eConsult platform and is responsible for outreach and recruitment to all eligible providers, including PCMPs, specialists, and Regional Accountable Entities (RAEs). This first annual report covers data from the initial five months of eConsult activity—February 2024 through June 2024. The report focuses on evaluating SNC’s performance, providers’ experiences and participation, and eConsult outcomes. Given that this report is based on only five months of data, it is too early to draw broad conclusions about the overall effectiveness of the program. Future annual reports will incorporate a full fiscal year of data for a more comprehensive analysis.

¹ Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing eConsult Platform. (2024).

<https://hcpf.colorado.gov/eConsult-Platform>

² Colorado Health Institute. (2019). Colorado’s Unmet Demand for Specialty Care.

https://www.coloradohealthinstitute.org/sites/default/files/file_attachments/Telligen%20Specialty%20Care%20Access%20Report.pdf

Key Findings

There are several key findings covered in this report:

- **Platform Performance:** SNC has continuously monitored eConsult platform activities to ensure performance standards are met, promoting adoption and enhancing specialty care access. All eConsults were signed off (PCMP has reviewed the eConsult response from the specialty provider and has signed off on the eConsult) within 30 days, and specialists responded to all eConsults submitted by PCMPs within three business days.
- **Provider Participation:** A total of 44 PCMP sites were trained and 135 trained PCMPs, with the majority in urban areas. The platform offers 21 adult specialties and 14 pediatric specialties, with ongoing recruitment.
- **Successes:** Of the 31 eConsults, 67.7% (21 out of 31) were managed by the PCMP without needing a face-to-face visit with a specialist. Both PCMPs and specialists reported high levels of satisfaction in the Satisfaction and Annual Experience Surveys.
- **Challenges:** SNC has faced resistance from providers during recruitment due to billing issues and other HCPF initiatives (i.e. Administrative Payment Model 2, and the pharmacy tool).
- **Next Steps:** SNC will collaborate with RAEs to expand provider engagement and increase training and support. SNC will continue to work on EHR (electronic health record) integration to enhance utilization.

II. Introduction

An eConsult, or online medical consultation, facilitates asynchronous communication between healthcare providers, aiming to improve access to specialty care. The eConsult platform allows participating providers to electronically communicate with specialty providers, enabling collaborative decision-making on the best treatment options for Medicaid Members. This asynchronous communication ensures a convenient and Member-centered approach to care, enhancing access to necessary specialty services.³

By facilitating the easy submission of clinical questions by PCMPs, specialists can provide timely medical guidance and effectively triage Members to appropriate face-to-face specialty care visits when necessary. This approach allows some conditions to be managed by the PCMP, saving the Member time, and avoiding unnecessary specialist visits.

Implementation and Outreach

SNC is working directly with PCMP practice sites, specialists, and other providers to coordinate participation activities for the Colorado Medicaid eConsult Platform.⁴ When the platform launched in February 2024, it offered 21 adult specialties and 14 pediatric specialties.

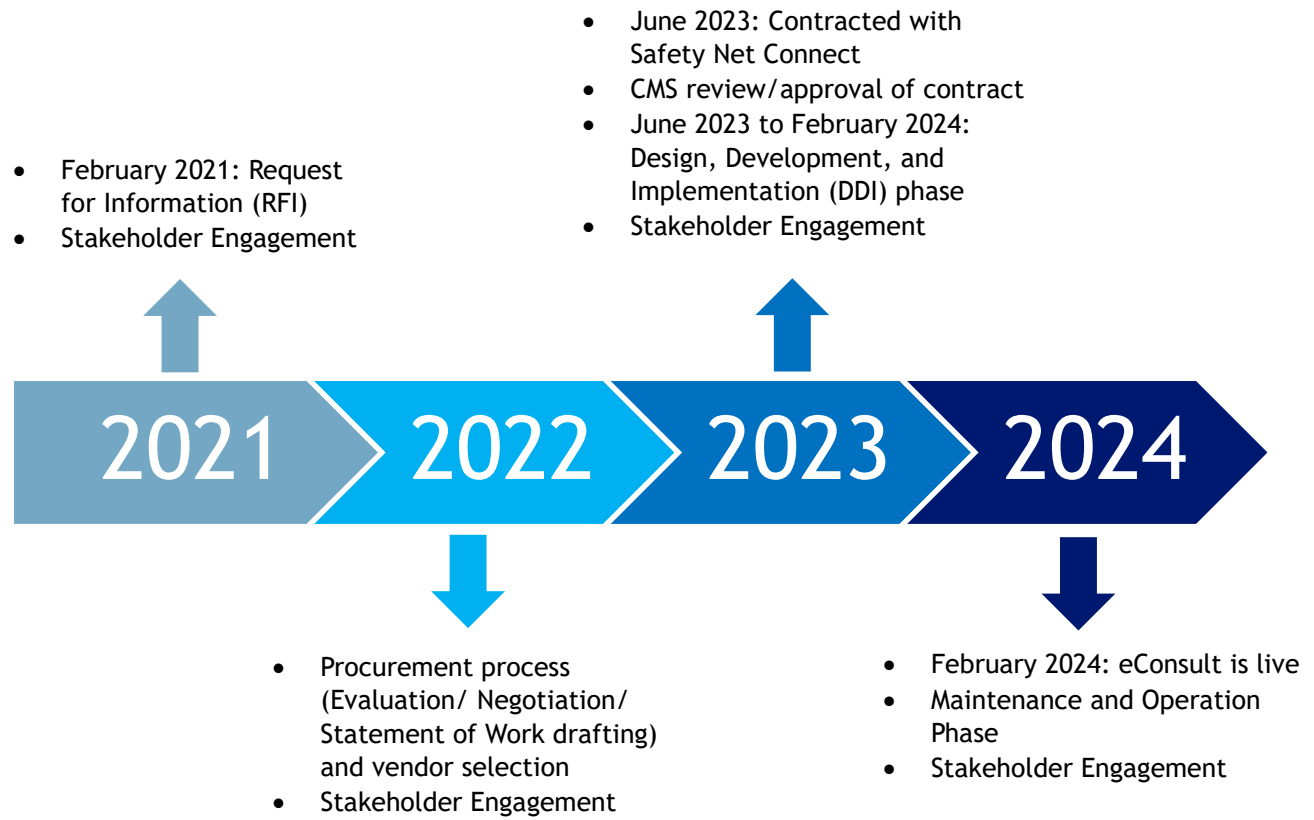
SNC's outreach involves understanding the specific specialty care needs of each RAE, identifying practices that are early adopters, and ensuring the platform is effectively integrated and utilized. Collaboration with RAEs includes meetings with community stakeholders, webinars targeting relevant PCMPs, and email correspondence facilitated by RAE practice transformation coaches, all aimed at ensuring the effective integration and utilization of the eConsult platform to enhance specialty care access for Medicaid Members.

RAE 1, Rocky Mountain Health Plans, has established its own eConsult program (Colorado Specialty CareConnect - CSCC) for all eligible PRIME Members (Rocky's Medicaid managed care plan) in its region. As a result, RAE 1 is not participating in Colorado Medicaid eConsult platform.

³ Colorado Department of Health Care Policy & Financing eConsult Platform. (2024). <https://hcpf.colorado.gov/eConsult-Platform>

⁴ Colorado Medicaid eConsult Program. (2024). <https://www.econsultco.info>

Timeline of eConsult



III. Contractor’s Performance

Since the platform’s launch, SNC has been continuously monitoring the platform’s activities to ensure that all program performance standards outlined in the contract are achieved. These performance standards are designed to ensure timely and efficient use of the eConsult platform, promote adoption among participating providers, and enhance access to specialty care for Members. Table 1 contains the outcomes of the seven performance standards in the contract for Fiscal Year 2023-2024:

Table 1. Outcomes of Contractor’s Performance

<i>Performance Standards Descriptions</i>	<i>FY 24 Outcomes</i>
1. At least 95% of eConsults are signed off by a PCMP within 30 days after the date on which the eConsult is closed.	The goal of timely sign-off for eConsults has been achieved at 100%.

<i>Performance Standards Descriptions</i>	<i>FY 24 Outcomes</i>
2. 100% of eConsults are either signed off by the PCMP or closed via an administrative closure within 30 days after the date on which the eConsult is closed.	The goal has been achieved 100%.
3. PCMP enrollment in the eConsult Platform equals a total of 20% of all PCMPs in each RAE region no later than six months after go-live.	SNC has achieved HCPF’s revised performance standard of reaching 12% of enrollment for the reporting period of 2/1/2024 through 6/30/2024.
4. PCMP enrollment in the eConsult Platform equals a total of 20% of all remaining non-enrolled PCMPs in each RAE region between six months and after the go-live.	SNC has achieved HCPF’s revised performance standard of reaching 12% of enrollment for the reporting period of 2/1/2024 through 6/30/2024.
5. 95% of eConsults must be responded to by a specialty provider within three business days.	Timely responses have been achieved at a 100% rate.
6. 100% of eConsults must be responded to by a specialty provider within seven business days.	The goal has been achieved 100%.
7. 100% of eConsults routed to Colorado-based specialty provider network providers in the appropriate specialty field who are available.	The goal has been achieved 100%.

IV. Providers’ eConsult Experience

HCPF is collaborating with SNC to create two types of surveys: Satisfaction Survey and Annual Experience Survey, both intended to collect feedback and insights from participating providers.

Satisfaction Survey

The Satisfaction Survey is an optional survey for providers to complete within the eConsult platform, upon completion of each eConsult. It includes up to three optional questions rated on a scale of one to five. There are two versions of the survey: one is designed specifically for PCMPs, and another is designed for specialists. Each survey aims to collect overall satisfaction levels regarding the use of the eConsult platform for that specific eConsult experience.

Table 2. Satisfaction Survey Results

<i>PCMP Questions</i>	<i>Average Scores</i>
1. How easy is it to use the eConsult platform?	4.7
2. How did the eConsult response meet your clinical needs?	4.5
3. How likely would you recommend eConsult to other Providers?	4.6
<i>Specialist Questions</i>	<i>Average Scores</i>
1. How easy is it to use the eConsult platform?	4.2
2. How appropriate was the eConsult you received?	4.6
3. Did you receive the necessary information?	73.1% Yes (19 out of 26)

A total of 26 PCMP Satisfaction Surveys were collected, and the results demonstrate favorable feedback. All three PCMP questions had average scores of 4.5 or above. Overall, PCMPs found the eConsult platform easy to use, felt that the responses met their clinical needs, and indicated that they would recommend eConsult to other providers.

A total of 26 Specialist Satisfaction Surveys were collected, and the results were positive, with both survey questions averaging scores of 4.2 or higher. Specialty providers found the platform easy to use and felt that the eConsults they received were appropriate. 73.1% of the surveys (19 out of 26) indicated that they received the necessary information to provide an informed response. The remaining 7 surveys responded with “No” to this question, and specialists provided additional feedback on why they felt they didn't receive the necessary information. One specialist mentioned, "While I was able to perform the consult with the labs provided, in general please ensure that consults have not only labs but also recent clinical notes." Another stated, "Although I did not receive any clinic notes, labs, vitals, or medications, I was able to answer the provider's question." This feedback shows areas for improvement in providing comprehensive information to specialists to ensure they can deliver the appropriate guidance for the patient’s care.

Annual Experience Survey

SNC sends out the Annual Experience Survey to gather insights and perspectives on different facets of the eConsult experience. There are two versions of the survey: one is for PCMPs, and another is for specialists. This survey is distributed to all enrolled PCMPs and specialty providers, regardless of whether they have submitted or responded to an eConsult or not.

The Annual Experience Survey for PCMPs contains five sections: training, technical support, the eConsult platform, job satisfaction, and open-ended questions. A total of 12 PCMPs participated in the survey. Over 90% of PCMPs indicated satisfaction with SNC's communication during onboarding and training. Two providers had not activated their profiles—one due to being busy and another due to a lack of eConsult needs.

Of the 10 PCMPs who activated their profiles, five had not submitted any eConsults, citing reasons such as "I have not seen a Member who needs specialty advice," "I prefer to send a referral to a specialist versus eConsult," and "the patient's need is not appropriate for eConsult." The remaining five PCMPs who submitted eConsults completed the rest of the survey questions. None reported technical issues, and many found the platform easy to use, and were satisfied with the training videos and the platform's efficiency. They also reported high job satisfaction with using the platform.

In the open-ended section, PCMPs commended the platform for its ease of use, fast response times, improved treatment plans, and help in managing Member care. They suggested that integrating the platform with EHR and linking it directly to Members' charts would be beneficial.

The Annual Experience Survey for specialists also contains five sections: training, technical support, the eConsult platform, job satisfaction, and open-ended questions. Seven specialists completed the survey. ConferMED, SNC's subcontractor responsible for recruiting and training specialists, received over 90% satisfaction for their communication with specialists during onboarding and training. Three specialists had reached out for technical support and were satisfied with the assistance received.

The specialists reported high job satisfaction and praised the platform for its user-friendly interface and high-quality clinical questions and relevant information. However, some specialists noted that unclear documentation or poor-quality photos made certain consults difficult to address. One specialist mentioned that receiving an overdue response during the weekend is stressful, especially for an eConsult received

on Friday evening. Another specialist suggested implementing a notification system to alert them of pending eConsults.

The complete results of the Annual Experience Surveys are available in the Appendix.

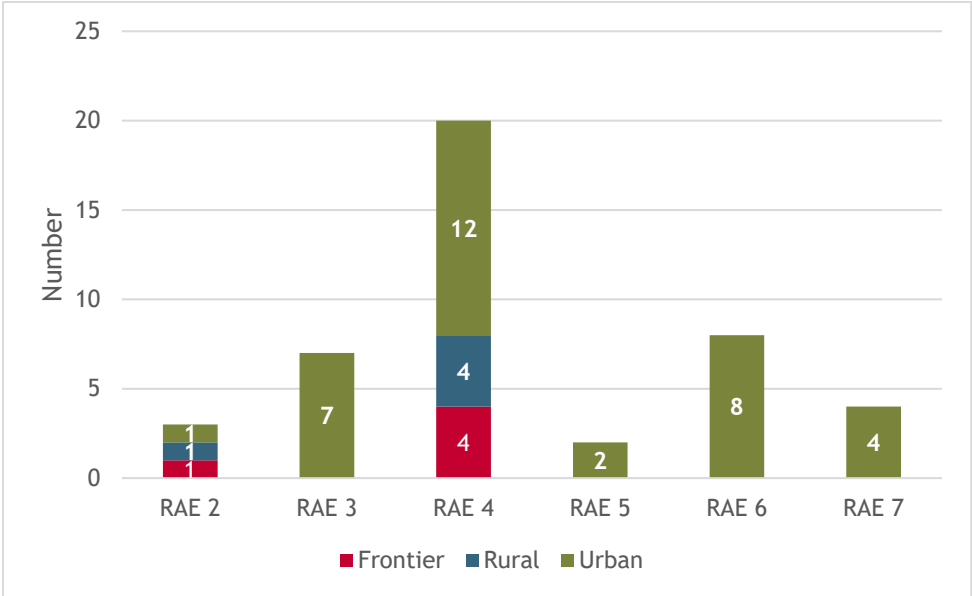
V. Medical Providers' Participation

The platform aims to offer a variety of specialty fields, including 22 for adults and 17 for pediatric cases. During the Fiscal Year 2023-2024, 44 PCMP sites have been trained providing access to 21 adult specialties and 14 pediatric specialties.

Primary Care Medical Providers

RAE 4 has the highest number of trained PCMP sites, totaling 20, which represents 45.5% of the total. Additionally, the majority of these PCMP sites are located in urban areas, with 34 sites or 77.3%, highlighted in dark green in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Participating PCMP Sites by RAE by County Designation



Specialty Providers

As presented in Table 3, the platform has successfully recruited and made available 21 adult specialties and 14 pediatric specialties. The recruitment process is ongoing, with a geriatric medicine specialist currently in the licensing process. Additionally, three pediatric specialties – nephrology, ophthalmology, and rheumatology – are still in the recruitment phase.

Table 3. Specialty Providers Recruitment Statuses

<i>Type</i>	<i>Required</i>	<i>Contracted</i>	<i>Percent Achieved</i>
Adult Specialties	22	21	95%
Pediatric Specialties	17	14	82%

Table 4 details the distribution of specialty providers between Colorado-based providers and providers in the national network. An asterisk (*) indicates that specialty providers are both part of the Colorado-based network and the national network. All providers, regardless of location, must be licensed to practice in the state of Colorado, and enrolled as a Medicaid provider. The program is designed to enhance access to care for our Members by leveraging a larger network.

Table 4. Specialty Providers by Colorado Based versus National Network

<i>Adult Specialties (21)</i>	
Colorado Based and National Network*	National Network Only
Addiction Medicine	Gastroenterology
Allergy and Immunology	Hepatology
Cardiology*	Pulmonology/Sleep Medicine
Dermatology*	Urology
Endocrinology	
OB/Gynecology	
Hematology/Medical Oncology*	
Infectious Disease*	
Nephrology*	
Neurology*	
Ophthalmology	
Orthopedics	
Otolaryngology (ENT)*	
Pain Medicine	
Physical Med/Rehab	
Psychiatry*	
Rheumatology*	

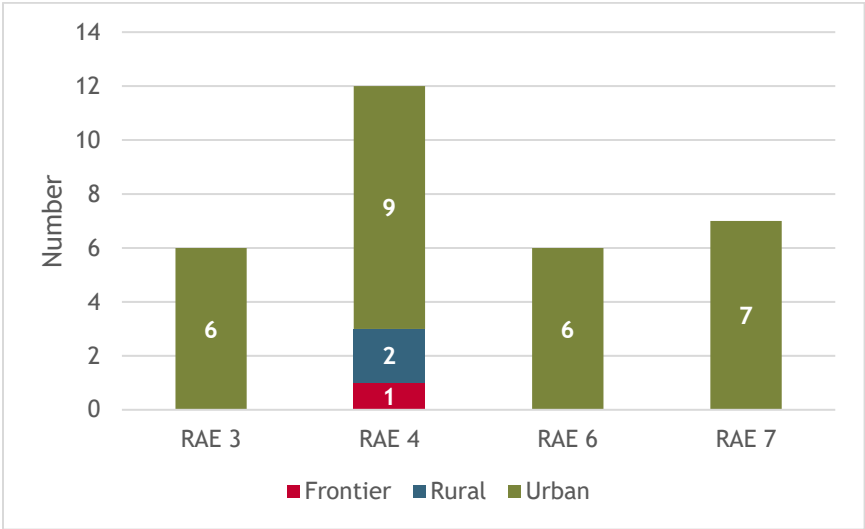
<i>Pediatric Specialties (14)</i>	
Colorado Based and National Network*	National Network Only
Allergy and Immunology	Cardiology
Dermatology*	Gastroenterology

Pediatric Specialties (14)	
Colorado Based and National Network*	National Network Only
Developmental Pediatrics	Hematology/Oncology
Endocrinology	Infectious Disease
Orthopedics	Neurology
Otolaryngology (ENT)*	Psychiatry
	Pulmonology
	Urology

Submitted eConsults

In Fiscal Year 2023-2024, RAEs 3, 4, 6, and 7 have submitted eConsults through the Colorado eConsult platform. The number of submitted eConsults by each RAE is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Total Submitted eConsults



RAE 4 has the most eConsults submitted, a total of 12 (38.7%). Most of the eConsults submitted are in urban areas, a total of 28 (90.3%), as shown in dark green Figure 2.

VI. eConsult Outcomes

According to performance standard #5, outlined in Table 1 above, specialists must respond to eConsult submissions within three business days. There are four possible outcomes for an eConsult:

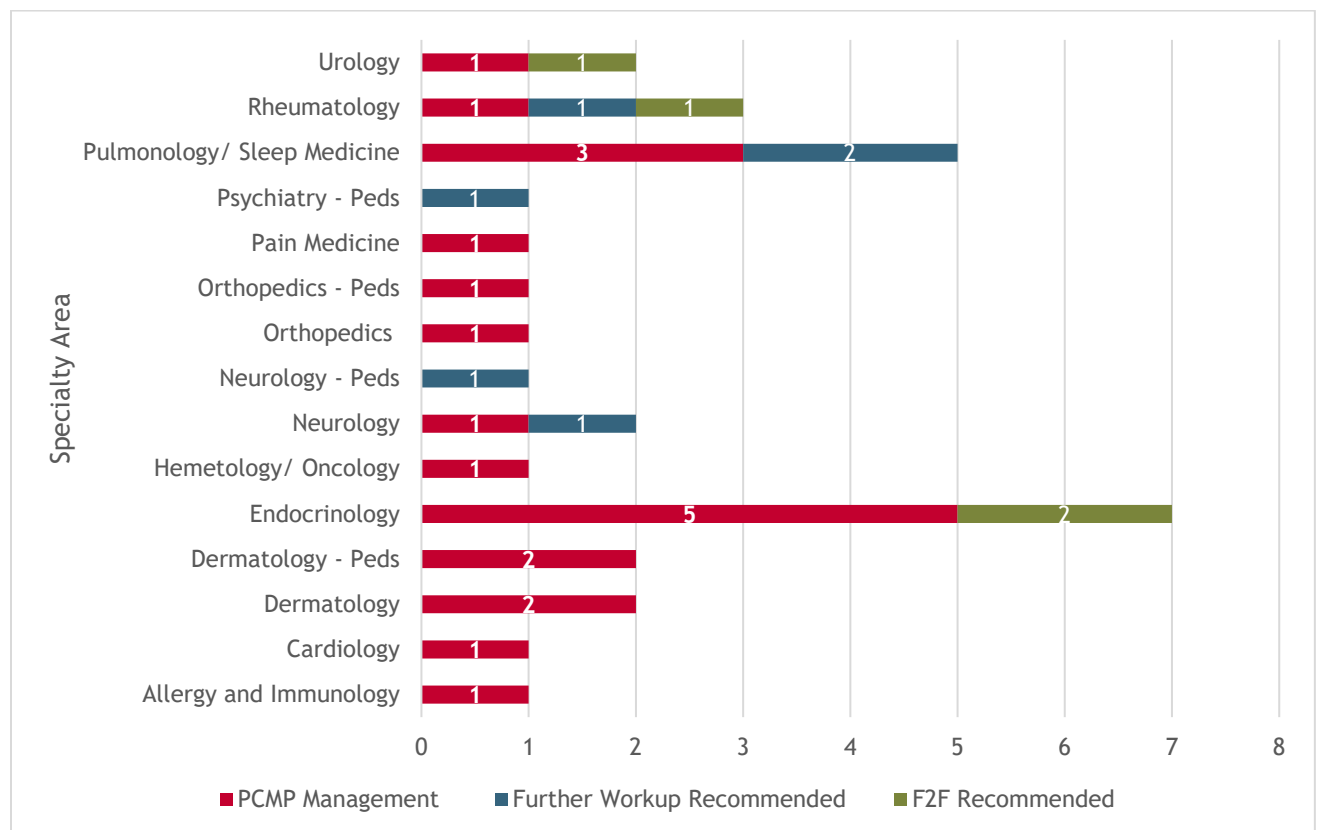
- 1. PCMP Management:** The specialist completes the eConsult and provides clinical guidance for the PCMP to manage the Member’s care with no other additional action needed.

2. **Further Workup Recommended:** The specialist suggests additional steps, such as lab tests or clinical assessments, to obtain more information.
3. **Face to Face Recommended:** A direct appointment with a specialist is necessary.
4. **Specialty Change Recommended:** The specialist determines that the issue should be addressed by a different specialty, requiring the PCMP to submit a new eConsult.

During Fiscal Year 2023-2024, 31 eConsults were submitted, with 26 for adults and 5 for pediatric cases. Figure 3 below illustrates the outcomes of these eConsults by specialty area.

Of the 31 eConsults, 67.7% (21 out of 31) were resolved as *PCMP Management*. 19.4% (6 out of 31) were closed as *Further Workup Recommended*, indicating the need for additional tests or assessments, with cases pertaining to neurology, pediatric neurology, pediatric psychiatry, pulmonology/sleep medicine, and rheumatology, as shown in teal in Figure 3. The remaining 12.9% (4 out of 31) were resolved as *Face to Face Recommended*.

Figure 3. eConsult Outcomes



VII. Conclusion

Since the platform's launch in February 2024, SNC has continuously monitored the eConsult platform's activities to ensure that all performance standards outlined in the contract are achieved. These performance standards are designed to ensure timely and efficient use of the eConsult platform, promote adoption among participating providers, and enhance access to specialty care for Members.

The outcomes for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 have been positive and are meeting expectations. All eConsults were signed off within 30 days, and specialists responded within three business days. The results for both Satisfaction Surveys and Annual Experience Surveys indicated high levels of satisfaction with the platform's ease of use and clinical utility from both PCMPs and specialists. PCMPs provided feedback suggesting EHR integration and direct linking to patient charts. Specialists shared the need for more comprehensive information in eConsults to ensure appropriate guidance.

A total of 44 PCMP sites have been trained and 135 trained PCMPs, with the majority located in urban areas. The platform offers 21 adult specialties and 14 pediatric specialties, with ongoing recruitment for additional specialties. Most eConsults were managed without further action required, with 67.7% (21 out of 31) closed as *PCMP Management*. The platform's performance in the first year indicates its potential to enhance collaboration among providers, improve access to specialty care, and promote healthcare equity for Medicaid Members. Ongoing monitoring, feedback collection, and stakeholder engagement will continue to improve the platform operations.

VIII. Lessons Learned

In the first five months of implementing and operating the platform, several key insights have been identified.

- SNC has encountered resistance with recruiting, due to competing priorities of other HCPF initiatives (i.e. Administrative Payment Model 2, and the pharmacy tool), and has found engagement with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC), Rural Health Clinics (RHC), and Community Health Centers (CHC) challenging because of misconceptions about reimbursement.
- Providers and practices need education regarding billing workflows for eConsult.

- Having an eConsult advocate, either a physician or leadership figure, to represent the project and address questions and concerns, would greatly support the promotion of the project.
- There is confusion across the state regarding existing third-party eConsult platforms compared to the Colorado eConsult platform.
- The Annual Provider Experience Survey was administered only four months after the platform went live, leading to an incomplete and potentially unrepresentative evaluation due to the limited timeframe.

IX. Moving Forward

Looking ahead, HCPF is committed to building on the achievements and addressing the challenges identified during the initial implementation of the eConsult platform. HCPF plans to expand provider engagement, enhance training and support, and refine the platform based on user feedback through three-party collaboration meetings with HCPF, RAEs, and SNC.

SNC will continue to work with interested PCMP sites on EHR integration to enhance utilization. Additionally, SNC is collaborating with the Peer Mentored Care Collaborative (PMCC), which oversees ECHO (Extension for Community Health Outcomes) Colorado, a provider education platform, to promote eConsult.

By continuing to collaborate with stakeholders and partner with local agencies, HCPF anticipates that the eConsult platform will enhance access to specialty care and improve health outcomes for Members in the coming years.

X. Appendix

Results of Annual Experience Surveys

<i>Annual Experience Survey for PCMPs</i>	
<i>Training (n=12)</i>	<i>Results</i>
1. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the communication you had with Safety Net Connect (SNC) during onboarding and training.	4.4 out of 5-point scale
2. How would you rate the level of depth and clarity of the training provided by SNC, considering factors such as thoroughness, complexity, ease of understanding and relevance to your role as a PCMP?	3.9 out of 5-point scale
3. Since completing training, have you activated your profile in the eConsult Platform?	83.3% Yes

Annual Experience Survey for PCMPs

4. What has prevented you from activating your profile?	Just busy No patient need
Utilization (n=10)	
5. Have you submitted at least 1 eConsult?	50% Yes
6. Why not?	I have not seen a Health First Colorado Member who needs specialty advice I prefer to send a referral to a specialist versus utilizing eConsult Patient's need was not appropriate for eConsult
Technical Support (n=5)	
7. Have you had to contact customer support for any technical issues?	0%
8. How satisfied are you with the customer support you received?	NA
eConsult Platform (n=5)	
9. Do you find the eConsult Platform easy to use?	100% Yes
10. Are the user guides and training videos helpful for refresher on system functions?	60% Yes 40% NA
11. Do you think the availability of templates is useful?	60% Yes 40% NA
12. How satisfied are you with the efficiency of the eConsult Platform in facilitating communication with specialty providers?	4.4 out of 5-point scale
13. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the use of the eConsult Platform.	4.0 out of 5-point scale
Job Satisfaction (n=10)	
14. Does the eConsult Platform increase your knowledge in treating medical conditions that would otherwise require assessment from a specialist?	100% Yes
15. Does the eConsult Platform improve your confidence in treating medical conditions that require specialty advice?	100% Yes
16. Does the eConsult Platform help you improve the quality of care for your patient?	100% Yes
17. Do you agree that the eConsult Platform has a positive impact in treating a patient's health condition?	4.2 out of 5-point scale

<i>Annual Experience Survey for PCMPs</i>	
18. Do you agree that the eConsult Platform has improved your ability to provide timely and comprehensive care to your patients?	4.4 out of 5-point scale
Open-Ended Question	Summary of Responses
19. What has gone well with your experience participating in eConsults?	“Ease of use and timely response”
20. What has not gone well with your experience participating in eConsults?	“The eConsult does not help me manage the patient while they wait 6 months for an in person visit.”
21. What thoughts do you have about how to improve eConsult implementation and use within your clinic setting?	“EHR integration and directly link to patient chart”
22. How has eConsult implementation impacted your ability to provide care within your clinic setting?	“Timely and improve treatment plan”

<i>Annual Experience Survey for Specialists</i>	
Training (n=7)	Results
1. Please rate your overall satisfaction with the communication you had with ConferMED during onboarding and training.	4.4 out of 5-point scale
2. How would you rate the level of depth and clarity of the training provided by ConferMED, considering factors such as thoroughness, complexity, ease of understanding and relevance to your role as a specialist?	4.3 out of 5-point scale
Technical Support (n=7)	
3. Have you had to contact customer support for any technical issues?	57% Yes
4. How satisfied are you with the customer support you received? (n=4)	4.8 of out 5-point scale
Job Satisfaction (n=7)	
5. Have you received at least 1 eConsult from a Primary Care Provider?	100% Yes
6. How satisfied are you with the clarity and completeness of the information provided by PCMPs when seeking clinical guidance through the eConsult Platform?	4.0 out of 5-point scale
7. Do you agree that providing guidance to Primary Care Providers using the eConsult Platform has had a positive impact on your workload as a specialist?	4.0 out of 5-point scale
8. Do you agree that the eConsult Platform has improved your ability to support and assist Primary Care Providers in the management of their patients’ plan of care?	4.6 out of 5-point scale

<i>Annual Experience Survey for Specialists</i>	
9. If back and forth dialogue occurred during the eConsult, how satisfied are you with the extra clinical information provided in helping you develop a care plan for the patient? (n=3)	4.3 out of 5-point scale
<i>Open-Ended Question</i>	<i>Summary of Responses</i>
10. What has gone well with your experience participating in eConsults?	“Easy to use, good clinical questions and information from PCMPs”
11. What has not gone well with your experience participating in eConsults?	“A few consults where the documentation or clinical question was unclear. It would be nice to receive notification for pending eConsult. It was stressful to receive an overdue response on weekend for a consult that I received on Friday evening.”
12. What thoughts do you have about how to improve eConsult implementation and use within your clinic setting?	“More promotion and more PCMPs understand the value of eConsult.”
13. How has eConsult implementation affected your ability to provide specialty care within your clinic setting?	“It allowed assistance for PCMPs to help patients with issues when specialists in my field are hard to come by.”