

# Colorado's Vision for Health

*A Colorado Health Institute Analysis*

MAY 6, 2013

*Governor John Hickenlooper today unveiled his plan for improving Colorado's health, promising to reinforce ambitious efforts to make Colorado the healthiest state in the nation.*

*"The State of Health" is the first overarching health-related vision statement issued by the governor since he took office in 2011. It elevates health to one of his top priorities and boosts the work underway by many groups across the state.*



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**Governor Hickenlooper** explains Colorado's commitment to become the healthiest state in the nation.

## The State of Health: An Overview

The report presents a strategic vision for a future in which health and well-being are a way of life, with a health care system that supports the efforts of each Coloradan to be as healthy as possible.

Governor Hickenlooper pointed to Colorado's unique strengths: a strong foundation of existing initiatives; a collaborative mindset; wide-ranging innovation; recreational opportunities; and a healthy lifestyle.

He noted the challenges as well, saying success will depend on achieving a combination of individual responsibility, public-private partnerships and a commitment to clearly measuring Colorado's progress.

The blueprint – which will guide the executive actions, budget requests and legislative priorities of the Hickenlooper administration in coming years - calls for Colorado to focus on four areas:

- **Promoting prevention and wellness**  
Encouraging physical activity and healthy food choices and expanding mental health and substance abuse efforts.
- **Improving health system integration and quality**  
Creating a health care system that works together to offer "whole person" health care for all Coloradans throughout their lives.

- **Expanding coverage, access and capacity**  
Increasing health insurance coverage and bolstering efforts to improve access to health care providers in rural and underserved communities.
- **Enhancing value and strengthening sustainability**  
Fostering public and private innovations to improve health care quality while lowering costs.

Within the four areas, there are 18 targeted goals, each of them measurable. For example, the governor wants 7,500 more Colorado children to visit a dentist before their first birthday by 2016. This falls under the prevention and wellness focus area.

"If we're going to do this, it's going to require all hands on deck," said the governor, who arrived by bicycle at Civic Center Plaza to unveil his plan. "Everybody has to invest themselves."

Coloradans, with this report, now have a clearer picture of how the governor wants to improve health and health care.

Read the full report at  
[colorado.gov/stateofhealth](http://colorado.gov/stateofhealth)



## The Plan: Colorado's Four Health Initiatives

### Promoting Prevention and Wellness; Helping individuals stay healthy or become healthier

- **Tackle Obesity Among Youth and Adults**  
*Prevent nearly 150,000 Coloradans from becoming obese, improve support for bicycling, and grow Pedal The Plains*
- **Support Improved Mental Health**  
*Improve behavioral health data collection*
- **Support Reductions in Substance Abuse**  
*Prevent 92,000 from misusing prescription drugs*
- **Improve Oral Health of Coloradans**  
*Ensure 7,500 Colorado children visit a dentist before age one and increase fluoridation*
- **Encourage Wellness Among State Employees**  
*Engage 50 percent of state employees in health risk assessments and encourage chronic prevention and management programs*

### Enhancing Value and Strengthening Sustainability; Redesigning financial incentives and infrastructure to focus on quality and value, not volume

- **Achieve Cost Containment in Medicaid**  
*Reduce Medicaid costs by \$280 million*
- **Advance Payment Reform in the Public and Private Sectors**  
*Develop payment reform pathways*
- **Invest in Health Information Technology**  
*Ensure most Coloradans are served by providers with Electronic Health Records*

### Expanding Coverage, Access and Capacity; Ensuring individuals can access care at the right time and the right place

- **Expand Public and Private Health Insurance Coverage**  
*Reduce uninsured by expanding public and private insurance coverage to 520,000*
- **Strengthen Colorado's Health Workforce** *Modernize our workforce and prepare for future needs*
- **Close Gaps in Access to Primary Care and Other Health Services**  
*Recruit and retain 148 additional providers and provide broadband network access to 400 rural and urban hospitals*

### Improving Health System Integration and Quality; Eliminating barriers to better care and improving our ability to work effectively within and across systems to ensure person-centered care

- **Expand Use of Patient-Centered Medical Homes**  
*Connect 555,000 to a patient-centered medical home*
- **Support Access to State Information and Services**  
*Facilitate data-sharing agreements between state agencies and nongovernmental partners*
- **Support Better Behavioral Health Through Integration**  
*Integrate physical and behavioral health systems*
- **Improve Access to Community-Based Long-Term Services and Supports**  
*Transition 500 individuals from long-term care institutions to community settings of their choice*



**Governor Hickenlooper** unveils his health plan at Civic Center Park. Behind him, left to right, are Chris Urbina, director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment; Sue Birch, director of the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing; Jim Riesberg, Commissioner of Insurance; Katherine Blair, Senior Policy Advisor for Health for Governor Hickenlooper; Jamie Van Leeuwen, Deputy Chief of Staff for Governor Hickenlooper; and Kevin Patterson, Deputy Chief of Staff for Governor Hickenlooper.

## Questions for Colorado

*The Colorado Health Institute has identified these five questions to address if Colorado is to achieve its goal of becoming the healthiest state.*



### ***How can Colorado make sure that the state's hardest-hit communities will get the needed attention – and resources?***

Colorado is only as healthy as its least healthy community. Colorado's reputation as the nation's leanest state and as a healthy place with unmatched recreational opportunities overshadow many deep health disparities.

Although Colorado ranks well on rates of adult obesity and physical activity,<sup>1</sup> obesity is more common among rural Coloradans, those with low incomes and among blacks and Hispanics. Colorado's children, especially its Hispanic children, are three times more likely to be obese than white children.<sup>2</sup> Lower income Coloradans are more likely to report poor or fair health.<sup>3</sup>

Initiatives outlined in the report set broad goals with statewide reach. A more focused effort, however, can target limited resources more efficiently. Ensuring that the strategies outlined in the governor's report are implemented toward the health and health care needs of Colorado's most vulnerable communities can create meaningful progress toward a healthier Colorado.



### ***How can these new goals best work with existing state and federal health reform efforts?***

Health care in Colorado is changing. Colorado is on the fast-track of health reform – expanding Medicaid to low-income adults and children, launching a health insurance marketplace and testing new payment models with public and private health insurers. Based on these changes, nearly 500,000 Coloradans will gain access to public or private insurance beginning in 2014.

Federal health reform and employer innovations are spurring health insurers to pay for evidence-based preventive services. New health care payment models that support medical homes and the integration of

physical, behavioral and oral health care aim to provide incentives for consumers and health providers to focus on wellness and prevention.

The health care system will be tested by these changes. Expanding health care's focus from disease to include – and give top priority to – prevention and wellness will require a broad attention span among providers, patients and policymakers.



### ***Will Colorado invest in what contributes to health?***

Health happens outside of health care. Beyond our genetics, what (and how much) we eat and how often we exercise shape health and wellness. Health is also influenced by educational achievement, economic and employment opportunities and community safety. Clean air and water also play important roles.

Colorado's fiscal health continues to improve but resources remain limited. The state constitutional and statutory framework require lawmakers to make difficult decisions each year when balancing the budget.

The governor's report recognizes that health care, and health insurance coverage, are among the many critical factors that impact health. Balancing Colorado's investments in the ingredients that create health takes political will and collaboration across these many sectors.



### ***Will we know if we are making progress?***

Governor Hickenlooper calls for "measuring our collective progress" and infuses data collection and benchmarks throughout the report. Government agencies and health care providers are asked to do a better job of collecting and sharing of data, with the

goal of becoming more efficient. The initiatives within the four focus areas have measurable state-level targets.

Monitoring the state's health barometer will be important if we are to understand our overall direction.

Still, progress may not look the same for all Coloradans. Equally important as measuring statewide improvement will be measuring progress in communities and within specific populations. Efforts that successfully reduce racial, ethnic, income, geographic and age-related health disparities may require different measures or targets.



## How can Colorado share what works locally?

We are still learning what works to help people make healthy choices. Many promising interventions address characteristics that are unique to specific communities or populations. Sharing these learnings with other communities can be an efficient way to move forward.

But health is impacted by multiple factors, meaning that one intervention or activity in isolation may not be enough to yield meaningful results. Scaling up programs statewide may require changes in the state policy landscape.



## Conclusion

Governor Hickenlooper's vision for Colorado outlines multiple strategies intended to improve health. Colorado's track record of achievement on some aspects of health and health care creates a promising base. But it will not be without challenges. Competing priorities within the state's health care system, and competing needs among state agencies and policymakers, may create roadblocks along the way to the goal of becoming the healthiest state.

With this vision, the governor has outlined his administration's role and planned contributions for working with all Coloradans to improve health. The conversation – and the work – continues.

**Governor Hickenlooper** pedals away after delivering his remarks on Colorado's plan to become the healthiest state in the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Survey of Children's Health, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> The Colorado Health Access Survey, 2011, The Colorado Trust.

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