

# 2022 HEALTH AGENDA



COLORADO **HEALTH** INSTITUTE

Informing Strategy. Advancing Health.



# COLORADO HEALTH INSTITUTE

**Informing Strategy. Advancing Health.**

*The world has changed. And as we enter our third decade, the Colorado Health Institute (CHI) is changing too.*

*Coloradans are navigating growing challenges brought about by fragmented systems of care, a changing climate, and myriad adversities that test our mental health.*

*CHI is committed to leading in these three areas, which will define the future of health in Colorado.*

***For the past 20 years, CHI has worked to make Colorado a healthier place. Our first decade largely focused on improving access to care. Our second focused on broadening our work to include social and economic drivers of health. Over time, we expanded our view of both health and policy and broadened our portfolio and the impact of our work. Health equity, always a value in our work, is paramount in all that we do.***

As we enter our third decade, we are using what we have learned in our first 20 years to address the three major problems most urgently in need of solving if we are to achieve our mission of improving health for all Coloradans:

- **Integrating Systems of Care.**

Social, human, and health services that are integrated can improve people's health outcomes far more than one element alone. Yet our systems continue to be antiquated and fragmented. CHI will play a significant role in integrating community-based services with medical care.

- **Behavioral Health, especially the needs of our youngest community members.**

We will advance policies and practices that improve mental health outcomes for our state's future generations.

- **Climate and Health.**

We need look no further than the devastating fires of December 2021 to recognize the need to adapt to a changing climate. Our goal is to equip every community in Colorado with essential tools, insight, and analysis to drive sound adaptation policies that center health equity.

CHI is committed to improving health for all Coloradans through evidence, research, and analysis. For two decades, we have shaped health policy and practice. We have advised state legislators, collaborated with policymakers, convened and led decision-makers as they grappled with complex problems, incubated initiatives to improve health, and partnered with numerous state agencies and community-based organizations.

We will continue to provide vital research and analysis on emerging trends and opportunities. And we will continue to produce analytical reports and resources to improve health, inform the state's pandemic response, and examine legislative news and urgent issues of the day.

As Colorado's challenges have grown, we believe focusing on these three pillars offers the best opportunity to improve health in Colorado. We look forward to building on 20 years of expertise and trusted partnership with Colorado's health community.

***“The Colorado Health Institute has played an essential role in shaping important health policy discussions and advancing the health of all Coloradans. ... Key health policy decisions have been influenced by CHI's research, analysis, and insight.”***

Donna Lynne,  
former Lieutenant Governor  
of Colorado

# INTEGRATING SYSTEMS OF CARE

---

***Public health, social service, and health care systems must redefine how they work – and how they work together.***

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of creating and maintaining a robust network of systems and community-based organizations to support people's health, social, and economic needs. Right now, these organizations and systems are often disconnected, making it difficult for people to access important care or services.

Colorado has a chance to change this for the better. Significant federal and state funding and the collaborative efforts of Coloradans have the potential to create a system that is prepared for the next pandemic as well as for our everyday needs. Remaking established ways of doing things and building new connections will require bold thinking and strong relationships. But it is an essential step to advance equity in our state.



## In 2022

**CHI will support the creation of integrated systems of care that work for all Coloradans, now and in the decades to come.**

We are bringing our skills in convening, shared governance, and community engagement to help Colorado develop integrated health and social care systems. This includes establishing shared governance for social health information exchange in the metro Denver region that will allow partners to identify and meet their diverse priorities. We are collaborating with community organizations and government partners to ensure that new federal and state funds create lasting change. And we are working with community members, social service agencies, health systems, community-based organizations, and local public health agencies, including the Metro Denver Partnership for Health, to identify priority health issues and find solutions that cross sectors and political boundaries.

## Our Foundational Work

CHI convenes and facilitates the work of the **Metro Denver Partnership for Health**. We helped develop and manage the **Colorado Health Observation Regional Data Service (CHORDS)**, an innovative regional network that uses medical data to support public health. And we are leading efforts to develop transformative **social health information exchange** to connect the systems that support people's health in Colorado.

*“CHI is galvanizing the movement to connect and coordinate the systems that serve Coloradans. The clarity and structure that CHI provides allow partners in public health, health systems, human services, and community-based organizations to do their important work – together and based in evidence.”*

Jonathan Samet, MD, MS,  
Dean & Professor,  
Colorado School of Public Health



# BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

---

*One in four Coloradans say they are experiencing poor mental health, and many of us are not getting the help we need. Colorado needs an equitable, person-centered behavioral health system that meets the needs of all Coloradans — regardless of income, insurance, or geography.*

Despite overwhelming consensus about the importance of this issue and passionate providers and advocates committed to improving the system, Colorado is not equipped to comprehensively respond to the mental health and substance use challenges affecting its residents, especially children and teens. Many behavioral health providers are overtaxed, and Coloradans most in need of care often have trouble accessing it.

Changing these dynamics requires the transformation of the behavioral health safety net through the state's new Behavioral Health Administration, which provides an extraordinary opportunity for collaboration and streamlining services. It requires strengthening our data infrastructure to identify, monitor, and end racial disparities in behavioral health outcomes. And it requires a keen focus on populations that most need support — including children and adolescents, people in the perinatal period, and people who are justice-involved.



## In 2022

**CHI will work to advance the creation of a behavioral health system that truly serves all Coloradans.**

At CHI, we are training our focus on Colorado's continued behavioral health transformation efforts. We are supporting the Behavioral Health Administration as it launches. We are leading state and community leaders as they develop plans to better serve people who are involved in the criminal justice and behavioral health systems by advancing crisis supports, co-responder programs, community policing, jail-based services, and diversion practices. We are working with public health and health systems to build capacity to promote perinatal mental health. We are building power among youth and community leaders to prevent and treat behavioral health crises among Colorado's young people. And we are equipping local and state changemakers with evidence, data, and community-led solutions to create a more equitable, accessible, intuitive, and high-quality behavioral health system.

## Our Foundational Work

CHI **conducted a needs assessment and developed a strategic plan** for preventing substance use among Colorado's young people. We **developed a blueprint** for how Colorado could distribute funds from settlements with opioid manufacturers to address the state's substance use challenges. And we **developed a statewide strategic plan for promoting recovery** that incorporated the input of hundreds of community members, including people in recovery and recovery experts.



*“For 20 years, CHI has provided data and support to Colorado’s health care community, helping to shape the vision and strategy for addressing complex behavioral health issues in Colorado. This team plays a vital role in behavioral health plans and programs, both at the policy level and in the grassroots of our communities, and our administration looks forward to ongoing collaboration with CHI in 2022 and beyond.”*

Dianne Primavera, Lieutenant Governor of Colorado

# CLIMATE AND HEALTH

---

***The link between a changing climate and negative health impacts is clear. As our environment is changing, so are our mental and physical health needs.***

Rising temperatures, declining air quality, persistent drought, and destructive wildfires create new health challenges. These impacts have never been more apparent or more urgent. While doing our part to cut global carbon emissions is critical, local and state action must also focus on helping Coloradans adapt. The stakes for health equity and environmental justice could not be higher: Many Coloradans whose health is likely to be affected the most by a changing climate — including children and Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic and Latino Coloradans — are already likely to experience multiple barriers to health and well-being, and have often contributed the least to our changing climate.

Climate-related crises create opportunities for Colorado's decision-makers and health policy and systems community to acknowledge and address the connection between climate and health. Adapting to a changing climate will require new relationships and approaches, and there is no time to waste.



## In 2022

***CHI will provide communities across the state with the resources and insights they need to create climate adaptation plans. We also will develop a statewide policy agenda that addresses the health impacts of a changing climate and brings together health and climate stakeholders to promote effective adaptation practices.***

CHI is leading research to create momentum and political will for an evidence-based climate adaptation policy agenda. We are identifying promising policy approaches in areas including infrastructure, air quality, mental health, and access to nature. We are collaborating with local leaders to illuminate and find solutions for local problems and populations. And we are ensuring that people who are likely to be most affected by climate change are at the center of conversations about and plans for the future.



*“Climate change is a critical health equity challenge facing Coloradans. CHI is playing a crucial role in connecting the dots between health and climate and focusing on helping our communities adapt.”*

Carlos Fernández, State Director, Colorado, The Nature Conservancy

## Our Foundational Work

CHI **developed a first-of-its-kind health and climate index** that illuminates Colorado communities' climate exposures, sensitive populations, and readiness and published research outlining the impacts of climate change on human health. We **partnered with a Colorado county to train employees and older adults in adaptation strategies** relevant to their region. And we **convened experts from climate, health, energy, and environmental policy** to discuss how to collaborate to address the impacts of a changing climate.





***CHI's three initiatives — integrating systems of care, behavioral health, and climate change — each target an area where addressing inequities is vitally important, and where there are opportunities to think and work differently to improve health and social factors for all Coloradans.***

Our expertise in health data, evidence-based research, and analysis gives us useful tools to advance this work. We identify challenges and quantify disparities so that we can, collectively, address them. We recognize the value of lived experience, and we are dedicated to partnering with and listening to the communities most affected by inequities.

Policies have played — and still play — a key role in driving health inequities in Colorado. Systemic racism and the impact of discriminatory policies affect where people live, work, and play. Policies can also address injustices and oppressive dynamics that limit people's ability to thrive.

Achieving health equity requires the involvement of all of us. CHI is committed to working to make sure that this value is at the center of our work together.



## SUPPORT OUR WORK

This is an ambitious agenda — and we need supporters and collaborators to advance behavioral health, integrate systems of care, and prepare for a changing climate. We believe taking on these bold initiatives with an evidence-based, nonpartisan lens will lead to a healthier, more equitable Colorado. To learn more and to support this work, visit

[coloradohealthinstitute.org](https://coloradohealthinstitute.org)

Or contact CEO Michele Lueck at  
[lueckm@coloradohealthinstitute.org](mailto:lueckm@coloradohealthinstitute.org)



1999 Broadway, Suite 600 • Denver, CO 80202 • 303.831.4200  
[coloradohealthinstitute.org](http://coloradohealthinstitute.org)



The Colorado Health Institute believes that good health policy leads to a healthier Colorado. Every day we bring research, insight, and expertise to leaders across the state because informed decisions lead to better health for all.