



2021 Health Agenda

Supporting the health of our Colorado communities has never been more important than in 2021.

A pandemic, an economic downturn, and longstanding disparities in access to health care and other vital services have converged to create profound challenges. These challenges also present opportunities to build a Colorado where all people can flourish.

At the Colorado Health Institute (CHI), we are committed to improving the health of all Coloradans by supporting evidence-based policies and providing rigorous information, analysis, and insight.

In 2021, we are focused on a research agenda that advances the conversation about the most pressing issues and identifies promising opportunities to improve health and health policy. In all our activities, our goal is to create a state where health equity is a reality.

Our work focuses on the diverse factors that affect Coloradans' health, from insurance and costs to access to child care and a healthy environment. Each year, we publish dozens of research briefs, online tools, and blogs. We are also part of the state's health ecosystem, responding to information requests, serving on work groups and advisory committees, consulting with elected officials, offering presentations, town halls, webinars, and more, always making sure that sound data and evidence-based analysis are part of the discussion.

Our 2021 research agenda is organized into the following priority areas:

- *Politics and Policy (Legislative Services);*
- *Cost, Affordability, and Payment Systems;*
- *Healthy Communities;*
- *Behavioral Health;*
- *Access to Care and the Safety Net;*
- *Public Health; and*
- *Connecting Systems (Technology for Health).*

CHI's work is made possible by funders who support our mission of advancing health and health equity. CHI serves as a resource for nonprofits, policymakers, advocates, health care providers, and anyone interested in health and health policy.

As a Colorado nonprofit public health institute, we value our deep relationships with people and organizations across the state. Our work connects us to communities from Denver to Durango and from San Miguel to Sedgwick counties.

We listen to residents and local leaders to inform our research and our understanding of what is important to Coloradans. And we partner with communities to identify barriers and create opportunities for change.



Lessons From 2020

In 2020, Colorado faced unprecedented upheavals and challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent economic downturn changed the way Coloradans live, work, play, and access health care. The impacts were not spread equally: Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and American Indian/Alaska Native Coloradans were more vulnerable to the disease, as were the state's older adults and essential workers. Many of the same people were disproportionately affected by the state's shut-down and faced new barriers to financial stability, housing security, food, education, and child care – all of which affect health and overall well-being.

CHI's team spent 2020 working at the intersection of these challenges. We published independent research on topics ranging from telehealth and how it affected access to care to social distancing and equity to the implications of COVID-19 for health coverage and air quality. We provided responsive commentary and analysis on the pandemic and policy.

At the same time, CHI collaborated with Colorado's public health leaders, government agencies, community organizations, health systems, news outlets, and funders to provide insight and support on everything from school re-openings to immunizations.

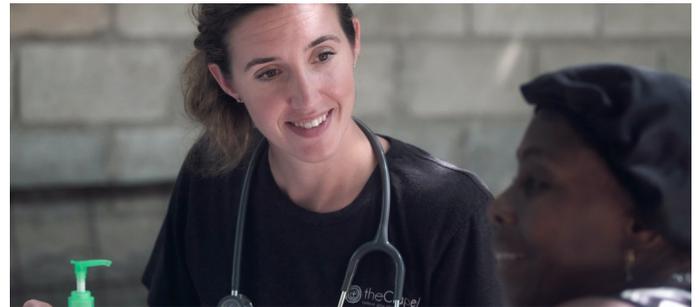
In 2021, we continue to see inequities not only in prevalence but in access to care, testing, and vaccines. The challenges of 2020 did not create these inequities; they revealed them. But there are opportunities to change the trajectory. CHI's team is prepared for another year focused on working with Coloradans to understand and address the issues that matter most for people's health.

Politics and Policy (Legislative Services)

Our founding mission is to improve health for the people of Colorado by offering evidence and objective analysis to inform effective policies. This mission is as important as ever in 2021, as partisan tensions run high, a new federal administration takes over, and the state legislature plans to tackle significant health issues ranging from the pandemic to the cost of prescription medication.



FOCUS AREAS: Tracking the Affordable Care Act through new challenges; understanding the Biden administration's priorities; state health policy amid new political dynamics and priorities



Cost, Affordability, and Payment Systems

What should providers, payers, and patients expect from each other when it's time to pay the bills? This question remains unanswered — and relevant — for everyday Coloradans and for policymakers in 2021: Data show that nearly one in five Coloradans has recently had trouble paying a medical bill and nearly one in three has received a surprise bill. CHI has deep experience in identifying costs at the systems level, analyzing regional variations in prices, and evaluating alternative payment models.



FOCUS AREAS: New attempts to address cost and affordability; the impact of cost/affordability on health and access to care; potential new systems in Colorado, including a public option; policies focused on price transparency; the impact of telehealth on access and costs

Healthy Communities

Health is affected by so much more than what happens in the doctor’s office. A complex web of factors — including economic status, environmental conditions, and access to food, housing, employment, child care, and education — shapes the well-being of individuals and communities. We bring our analytic, place-based approach to examining the policies, practices, and trends affecting these social factors.



FOCUS AREAS: Housing and hunger in post-pandemic Colorado; early childhood education and child care; health equity in a changing climate

Behavioral Health

We can’t talk seriously about health without considering mental health and substance use disorders. Our work examines and supports the behavioral health system, including access to and quality of care.



FOCUS AREAS: COVID-19’s impact on substance use and social isolation; disparities in behavioral health access and outcomes; supporting Coloradans through the economic downturn

Access to Care and the Safety Net

Being able to access health care when and where it is needed is key to our physical and behavioral health. Through the Colorado Health Access Survey and other tools, CHI is able to explore the nuances of access to specialty, preventive, primary, oral, and behavioral health care. Our team studies who is and isn’t able to access care and works with partners to tackle gaps in state- and system- level policies.



FOCUS AREAS: COVID-19’s impact on the safety net and public programs; tracking the evolving safety net; forgone care during the pandemic and its implications; shifting trends in who is uninsured in Colorado and why

Five guiding principles inform our work:

- 1 **Openness and Collaboration:** We enlist and recognize the experiences and strengths that community partners and individuals bring to the work.
- 2 **Community Engagement:** We develop a community-driven process that meets people where they are, asks what’s in it for those most impacted, and values the time they provide.
- 3 **Communication and Accountability:** We are explicit in what we are trying to accomplish and transparent in monitoring and communicating progress.
- 4 **Recognizing Expertise:** Those with lived experience are experts in their own lives and the systems in which they live. And we recognize and apply our expertise in policy and systems when the work calls for it.
- 5 **Focus on “What would it take to...?”:** We pay attention to the strategies and activities needed to ensure that all Coloradans have access to what they need to live healthy lives, addressing the specific needs of different groups.



Public Health

Last year was a reminder of the critical role played by public health agencies across the state and country, even when these professionals are overworked and underfunded. Understanding, communicating, and implementing complex health initiatives is vital to supporting the health of all Coloradans. CHI supports the state's public health community through data, analysis, and facilitation.



FOCUS AREAS: Public health infrastructure for a post-pandemic Colorado; distributing vaccines; making the case for public health funding; policies to reduce chronic disease burden in Colorado

The Colorado Health Access Survey (CHAS)

The CHAS is a biennial survey of 10,000 Coloradans that gauges health, insurance, and access to care in the state. CHI conducts the CHAS and analyzes its results, which are used to inform the work of communities, organizations, and policymakers. In 2021, CHI will field and analyze the seventh CHAS.



Connecting Systems (Technology for Health)

Data and technology play an essential role in connecting us to services and in helping us understand what's working — and what's not — in our health care system. CHI advances policies and practices that support a connected, secure system of health care and community providers focused on improving quality and outcomes.



FOCUS AREAS: Using technology to track COVID-19 spread at the local level; building and implementing social health information exchange (S-HIE) in Colorado; how technology and infrastructure can support value-based care

Support Our Work

Through the Health Agenda and our community-focused work, the Colorado Health Institute continues to make concrete contributions to Colorado's health, enabling local organizations to best serve their communities, supporting smart policy choices, and improving health for all Coloradans.

But we cannot do this work without help. To learn more about our commitment to working for the public good or to discuss how you can support the research and activities outlined above, which depend on philanthropic partnership, **visit www.coloradohealthinstitute.org or contact us at 303.831.4200 or info@coloradohealthinstitute.org.**