

# Lifting Children Up

## 2022 State Policy and Advocacy Priorities Recap



At Children's Hospital Colorado, advocating for public policy that strengthens kids' wellbeing is an integral part of our mission to improve the health of children. During the 2022 state legislative session, we partnered with our team members, community partners and lawmakers to achieve significant steps forward in COVID-19 pandemic recovery, advancing a range of policies that will improve the lives of Colorado kids and their families.

### During the 2022 Colorado state legislative session, we:



Actively tracked **176** state bills



Successfully championed over **100** critical amendments on **14** bills



Coordinated testimony from experts at **32** committee hearings



Submitted **15** letters of support on pending legislation



Empowered constituents to send **566** emails to state lawmakers



Trained **154** advocates at our 11th annual Speak Up for Kids Advocacy Day



Gathered **80** organizations and individuals through the Children, Youth and Families Mental Health Coalition



Educated **20** pediatric medical residents on how to get involved in the legislative process



Convened and activated **11** pediatric primary care and mental health providers in target legislative districts across the state

### We advocated to get kids the mental health services they need



Children's Hospital Colorado declared a state of emergency for youth mental health last year. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, children and youth faced a mental health crisis, but the pandemic accelerated these challenges due to the unprecedented isolation and loss of the last two years. In response, Governor Polis and the state

legislature committed to spend \$450 million in 2022 one-time, federal pandemic relief funding to address Colorado's mental health crisis. Children's Hospital Colorado successfully advocated for at least one-third of this funding to support the unique needs of children and youth, who make up one-third of Colorado's population.

### Better funding for services



Over \$150 million in mental health investments for kids will expand services and supports across the care continuum. These one-time investments will build a strong foundation for ongoing reforms to Colorado's mental health system. Since last summer, Children's Colorado worked with lawmakers, stakeholders and the Governor's Office to shape the package and ensure dollars were

being spent in the areas of greatest need. During the legislative session, our team negotiated amendments to strengthen the focus on kids, built legislative and coalition support for the package of bills and made sure that committee testimony highlighted the grave needs and how the legislature could continue to tackle the problem.

### House Bill 1283

- \$6 million for respite services
- \$8 million to expand the capacity of residential treatment facilities and treatment and therapeutic foster care providers who provide services to kids with higher needs
- \$5 million for substance use residential treatment for children and youth
- \$2.5 million to support in-home crisis services and supports for families
- \$35 million to build a facility to serve kids with complex neuro-psychiatric needs

### Senate Bill 147

- \$4.6 million to the Colorado Pediatric Psychiatry Access & Consultation Program (CoPPCAP)
- \$5 million to expand access to behavioral health professionals in schools
- \$1.5 million to support school-based health centers

### House Bill 1281

- \$90 million in community grants, including \$40 million specifically for children, youth and families to fund regional gaps in behavioral health services and to fund services along the care continuum including prevention, crisis and treatment programs

### House Bill 1369

- \$2 million for a prevention and early intervention mental health program for families with children from prenatal to six years of age

### Senate Bill 177

- \$12.2 million to create a statewide care coordination structure within the state's new Behavioral Health Administration

### Senate Bill 181

- \$72 million for Colorado's behavioral health workforce to support for behavioral health provider loan repayment and scholarships, collaboration with higher education partners and expansions in peer support professionals

## Toward a more coordinated system of mental health programs



In collaboration with our community partners, Children's Hospital Colorado also advocated to strengthen the accountability, transparency and coordination of Colorado's mental

health system. **House Bill 1278** establishes the new Behavioral Health Administration, which will serve as the single state agency to lead, promote and administer Colorado's state-funded mental health programs. Throughout this process, we advocated for the unique needs of children and youth, securing dozens of amendments to ensure the Behavioral Health Administration will include strong coordination of services for children and youth,

including services for the nearly half of Colorado kids who are covered by Medicaid. The work to build the Behavioral Health Administration is just beginning, and the agency will not be fully operational for years, so we also worked to strengthen Colorado's existing system of care. Through **House Bill 1214**, we sought to strengthen Colorado's crisis system by ensuring that every crisis facility provides services to all Coloradans, regardless of age or the presence of a disability. We also supported **Senate Bill 106**, which addresses conflicts of interest in Colorado's community mental health and substance use system.

## We expanded kids' healthcare coverage and access



Alongside partners, we expanded kids' access to care as the legislature debated ways to improve equity, reduce costs and align the state and federal health reforms that have taken place over the last several

years. Covering all children and helping them to get the routine and preventive care they need is fundamental to achieving health equity in Colorado. That's why we worked with patient and child advocacy groups from across Colorado to support **House Bill 1289**, which will

provide access to Colorado Medicaid and the Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+) during pregnancy and for kids, regardless of their immigration status. We also supported **House Bill 1302** to fund grants that will enable greater integration of behavioral health services within primary care practices, and **House Bill 1325**, legislation that will advance value-based care in primary care. Together, these bills will strengthen pediatric primary care in Colorado.

## We championed the healthcare workforce



Healthcare providers have faced tremendous challenges over the past two years, and the strain on the workforce is apparent. Bipartisan state lawmakers successfully passed **Senate Bill 226** to invest \$61 million in one-time federal funding to address healthcare worker recruitment and retention efforts. The bill will create healthcare professional resiliency and retention programs, expand clinical training slots, provide tuition assistance, fund more school nurses

and develop career pathway programs in community colleges to address workforce shortages for in-demand professions. **House Bill 1401** builds on the existing shared governance framework for nurse staffing within hospitals by elevating the voices of frontline nurses, preserving nurses' ability to make clinical decisions and maintaining flexibility for hospitals to continue to meet the diverse needs of patients.

## We promoted a healthy and strong start in early childhood



Early childhood development and education are key determinants of future health and well-being. We supported several bills to strengthen early childhood programming for children and families who face significant barriers to access, as these programs are critical for providing kids with the strong foundation they need to thrive. **House Bill 1295** establishes the new Colorado Department of Early Childhood, implementing the universal preschool program and transitioning existing home visiting and early childhood mental health programs into one unified agency. This bill takes several steps to address the existing challenges faced by families and providers,

including strengthening Colorado's early childhood infrastructure, developing a single application for families to access all publicly funded early education services and strengthening the state's early childhood workforce, including early childhood mental health providers.

**Senate Bill 213** invests federal pandemic relief dollars into scalable efforts to promote school readiness. **House Bill 1006** enhances access to more affordable childcare for families by exempting child care centers from property tax in Colorado.

## We made progress in achieving health equity



As part of Children's Hospital Colorado's diversity, health equity and inclusion strategy, we took our work in health equity policy to new heights this session by supporting several bills to address health disparities.

### Bolstering economic security

Growing up in extreme poverty often has lifelong impacts on a person's well-being, so improving economic security for families with children can pay generational dividends. **House Bill 1259** bolsters family economic security by increasing the basic cash assistance through the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program—known as Colorado Works—and improves Colorado's engagement and outreach to families that need the most support. **House Bill 1380** utilizes federal pandemic relief dollars to address hunger and food insecurity. The bill also boosts the efficiency of vital public benefit programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Low-Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP), Medicaid, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

### Supporting culturally-relevant healthcare

We also supported **House Bill 1267**, which creates a grant program to fund the development of voluntary, culturally-relevant training programs for healthcare providers. Training programs will focus on providing care to priority populations, including people who are LGBTQ, people of color and people with disabilities. Healthcare professionals will be notified of available training each time they apply for or renew their license in Colorado. To be able to increase access to quality care and improve health outcomes for children and youth in Colorado, it is important for healthcare professionals to be equipped with the tools and training to care for the unique needs of their patients.



## Alleviating the affordable housing crisis



We supported several bills that aim to alleviate Colorado's affordable housing crisis because access to stable, affordable and safe housing has an impact on kids' and families' ability to live a healthy life.

- **House Bill 1051** increases the annual allocation to the Colorado Affordable Housing Tax Credit, which supports the development of affordable rental units across the state.
- **House Bill 1082** establishes the Fair Housing Unit in the state's Department of Law, which will allow for enforcement of crucial housing laws that can help protect Coloradans on a systemic level.

- **House Bill 1083** enhances the Colorado Homeless Contribution Tax Credit for taxpayers who make contributions to support organizations that provide services across the spectrum of homelessness, including prevention and supportive housing services for Coloradans experiencing housing instability.
- **Senate Bill 159** and **House Bill 1304** utilize federal pandemic relief dollars to fund local investments in transformational affordable housing.

## Stopping Big Tobacco from hooking kids



This session we supported **House Bill 1064** to end the sale of flavored tobacco and nicotine products. Our goal was to prevent a new generation of youth from getting hooked on these products. We also

hoped to reverse the disparate health impacts across race, ethnicity, education and socioeconomic status that exist because of the tobacco industry's decades-long practice of

targeting advertising and sales toward communities of color. While state lawmakers did not ultimately pass this bill, the coalition made progress on the issue by educating lawmakers and the community about the dangers of youth tobacco use and the role of flavors in initiating and sustaining the use of tobacco products. We will continue to work to end the sale of flavored tobacco and nicotine products in the future.

## Raise your voice for kids! To sign up to be a member of the Child Health Champions network or learn more about Children's Colorado's policy and advocacy efforts:



[childrenscolorado.org/Advocacy](https://childrenscolorado.org/Advocacy)



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