



Children's Hospital Colorado
Here, it's different.™

Lifting Children Up

2024 Advocacy Priorities:
Making a Difference



For over 115 years, Children's Hospital Colorado has proudly been a leader in making a difference for children and families. Our mission is to improve the health of children through the provision of high-quality coordinated programs of patient care, education, research and advocacy. With more than 3,000 pediatric specialists and over 8,000 team members, advocacy is a core component of our mission and everyday work to heal, problem solve and strive for a better future for children.

As we prepare for public policy efforts in 2024, many factors will influence child health policy outcomes. At the national level, a presidential campaign will dominate the political landscape this year, cascading down to congressional, state and local elections. In Colorado, child health advocates will continue to navigate funding challenges with the state budget and the end of federal pandemic relief resources.

Despite external headwinds this year, we are optimistic about opportunities to advocate for children at the local, state and federal levels. In partnership with our clinicians and other team members, we will seek to understand the experiences faced by our patient-families and the broader community to inform our initiatives within our current policy priorities of mental health, access to care and strengthening health outcomes by improving the conditions where children live, learn and play, in addition to investing in our current and future pediatric workforce.

Join us in the year ahead as we work together to spark ideas that can make a difference in the lives of children.

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Elevating Children's Mental Health Solutions



Building a System of Care for Children and Youth

In 2018, Children's Colorado convened conversations with state and county partners, healthcare organizations, advocates and families to encourage the state to adopt a cohesive System of Care to improve the mental health of children and youth in Colorado. These conversations culminated in the passage of Senate Bill 19-195, which kickstarted a multi-year, cross-agency process to improve youth mental health. Unfortunately, some of the critical components of this legislation, including the high-fidelity wraparound benefit, have not been implemented by the state. Moreover, while Colorado has adopted some elements of a System of Care, the state continues to struggle with the centralized coordination that is needed to ensure that all children, across the state and at all levels of care, have the services and supports they need. This year, we will work closely with legislators to advance System of Care implementation. We'll further expand the elements and coordination necessary to fortify the efforts of the Behavioral Health Administration, and we will continue to fight to truly transform mental health outcomes for all children and youth in Colorado.



Improving Outcomes for Children with Complex Mental Health Needs

Children's Colorado continues to push for solutions that can serve children with complex mental health needs in Colorado. Last year, in collaboration with counties, state agencies, community treatment providers and statewide advocacy organizations, Children's Colorado advocated to increase access to community-based mental health treatment services and strengthen accountability for children who end up boarding or having extended stays in the hospital due to complex mental health needs and a lack of safe discharge options. We will continue to support these efforts by working closely with lawmakers on sustainable funding for residential treatment providers in the community who serve children and youth with complex needs and expanding access to therapeutic and treatment foster care and intensive in-home services. Legislative efforts will also include intensive care coordination for this population and implementation of quality standards for residential treatment providers to ensure that children and youth have access to high-quality, evidence-based treatment that reduces future hospitalizations and improves outcomes.



Protect Youth from Negative Impacts of Social Media Use

National and state research shows that overuse of social media can have negative impacts on youth mental health, including higher rates of anxiety, depression and disordered eating. Due to these impacts, we are seeing more state and federal lawmakers act to restrict social media access for children and youth. Recently, Colorado's Attorney General joined 42 other states in suing Meta, the social media company that owns Facebook and Instagram, alleging consumer protection violations and harmful impacts on youth mental health. In 2024, health advocates plan to pursue state policy solutions; despite the complexity of these concepts, Children's Colorado will serve as a partner to policymakers and advocates and aim to provide research-based and youth-informed recommendations to best support youth, parents and caregivers.

Defending Access to Care

As the region's largest healthcare provider for children who rely on Medicaid for health insurance coverage, we will maintain our efforts in 2024 to advocate for access to stable insurance for children. Since the end of the federal public health emergency declaration last year, more than 110,000 children in Colorado have lost their Medicaid coverage. In 2023, we supported bipartisan legislation to expand continuous Medicaid eligibility for the state's youngest kids to minimize gaps in coverage and ensure children and families keep their medical appointments, especially in their early years when frequent screenings, vaccinations and check-ups are critical to their development and school readiness. As implementation efforts continue, Children's Colorado will continue to advocate for keeping kids connected to care when they need it most. We will also continue to be deeply engaged with Colorado Medicaid's delivery system redesign, known as the Accountable Care Collaborative 3.0 process. Over the next year, we will champion stronger integration of physical and mental health, better funding for pediatric primary care clinics and a deliberate focus on the health-related social needs of kids and families in these major Medicaid reforms.



Improving the Conditions Where Children Live, Learn and Play

As a Level I pediatric trauma center, Children's Colorado advocates for systemic changes that can keep children healthy and safe. Children's Colorado will lead state legislation in 2024 that modernizes and aligns best practice car seat safety requirements while also promoting prevention and education methods for parents and caregivers. According to hospital utilization data from the Colorado Hospital Association, from 2018-2022 there were 3,578 emergency department visits for motor vehicle occupant injuries for children ages 0-14. Additionally, the Colorado Department of Transportation reported that in 2022, the state had the highest number of traffic deaths on state roads since the early 1980s. Colorado's child passenger safety laws related to car seat and seat belt requirements have not been updated in over a decade and have fallen behind in terms of ensuring our children are as safe as possible in the event of a motor vehicle crash.

Food security and housing stability are two of the leading needs identified by patients and families screened in Children's Colorado clinical settings, so we will continue to support and advocate for legislation that supports the health-related social needs of children and families. Significant policy implementation efforts are underway to address childhood hunger. We will continue to monitor the state's new universal healthy school meals program as well as policy efforts to close the childhood hunger gap during the summer months. At the federal level in 2024, Congress is expected to reauthorize the Farm Bill, which impacts access to food for children and families. We will advocate in partnership with a diverse coalition to sustain adequate funding for the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Research has shown that children in areas with higher rates of unaffordable housing tend to have worse health, more behavioral problems and lower school performance. Building on recent investments in local affordable housing efforts through the passage of a statewide ballot measure in 2022, Children's Colorado will continue to advocate for legislation that ensures Colorado children have access to safe, stable and affordable housing options, while also advancing policies that can expand housing options for the healthcare workforce.





Investing in the Next Generation of Pediatric Providers

Our country's ability to meet the health needs of children—now and into the future—requires innovative approaches to recruit, retain and bolster the pediatric healthcare workforce, from pediatric subspecialists to advanced practice providers, nurses, social workers and non-licensed pediatric caregivers. In 2024, we will advocate in Washington, D.C. for national workforce policy solutions, including support for the vital Children's Hospital Graduate Medical Education program (CHGME). We will work to boost the number of pediatricians and pediatric specialists, and advocate for an expansion of the eligibility criteria for existing pediatric workforce loan repayment and scholarship programs.

Thanks to advances in care led by pediatric medical researchers, fewer children today die from complications and infections, more children survive a cancer diagnosis and babies still in the womb can receive lifesaving surgeries. Children's Colorado will continue to partner with members of Congress and child

health advocates to address recruitment and retention of pediatric medical researchers, particularly those researchers from historically under-represented communities. Inadequate pediatric researchers will limit our country's ability to achieve future research breakthroughs that have critical impacts on child health outcomes. Children's Colorado will continue to support bipartisan federal legislation known as the Pediatricians Accelerate Childhood Therapies (PACT) Act to establish a National Institute of Health (NIH) training award for early-career pediatric researchers and support for minority serving institutions or collaborations with academic research institutions focused on talent development of diverse researchers.

Making a Difference as a Child Health Champion

Here, it's different. Advocacy is part of our mission to make a difference and improve the health of children across the communities that we serve and beyond. But we can't do it alone. Join our Child Health Champions advocacy network to speak up for kids when key public policy decisions are being made.

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You can also file a civil rights complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, electronically through the Office for Civil Rights Complaint Portal, available at <https://ocrportal.hhs.gov/ocr/portal/lobby.jsf>, or by mail or phone at: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 200 Independence Avenue, SW Room 509F, HHH Building Washington, D.C. 20201 1-800-368-1019, 800-537-7697 (TDD) Complaint forms are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/office/file/index.html>.

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