

# Lifting Children Up

## 2019 Policy and Advocacy Priorities Recap



Every year, the Children's Hospital Colorado Government Affairs team works with healthcare providers, parents and other healthcare advocates to support laws that would improve kids' health—and defend against those that would not. During the 2019 Colorado legislative session, we advanced a number of policy and advocacy goals that have the potential to lift the trajectory of a child's life.

### We filled gaps in our behavioral health system for Colorado's kids



Colorado is in a state of crisis for child and youth behavioral health, with suicide as the leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24. An estimated one out of every six teens has a diagnosable mental health condition. That's why we helped form a coalition to champion Senate Bill 195, a bipartisan measure that has the potential to transform our state's mental health system to better serve Colorado children, youth and families and to reduce costly, unnecessary interventions.

**Senate Bill 195** will move forward a set of programs including high quality, standardized screening and assessment to identify behavioral health needs early, comprehensive "wraparound" care coordination services to get kids the right care at the right time, and blended funding strategies across agencies to better integrate behavioral health services and supports for children. Taken together, these approaches are a major step toward improving our state's behavioral health system for kids.

### We protected and expanded healthcare coverage and access for all children



This year, we fought to defend and improve children's access to care, while working with partners as the legislature debated numerous ways to address the rising cost of health insurance in Colorado.

We advocated in favor of grants to support more behavioral health professionals in K-12 schools with **Senate Bill 10**, and we fought hard for **House Bill 1269**, which advances parity between behavioral health and physical health services across both public and private health insurance coverage. We supported **House Bill 1233** to invest more in primary care and reduce healthcare costs, and we backed **House Bill 1077**, a measure making it easier for

patients to get emergency access to chronic disease medications. We also stood with partners to develop a statewide network, via **House Bill 1133**, that will help to standardize and coordinate a medical response in cases of suspected child abuse and neglect.

Child health advocates also secured a big win for families with the passage of **House Bill 1038**. This law will ensure that pregnant women who rely on Child Health Plan *Plus*—Colorado's version of the Children's Health Insurance Program—can access oral healthcare services, improving dental health and general wellness for both new moms and their babies.

### We took on the teen vaping epidemic



In 2006, Colorado passed the Clean Indoor Air Act to prohibit the smoking of cigarettes and other tobacco products in enclosed public places like restaurants, libraries, hospitals, offices, grocery stores, child care facilities and public transportation. This year, we partnered with medical providers, businesses, and public health advocates to successfully advance **House Bill 1076**, an update to the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act that adds the use of electronic cigarettes (also known as "e-cigarettes" or "vaping") as a prohibited activity in certain public indoor spaces and workplaces.

Twenty seven percent of Colorado teens report current use of electronic cigarettes—the highest rate in the nation and fully twice the national average. The nicotine in these products is highly addictive, toxic and harmful to the developing brain. In addition, the aerosols in e-cigarettes can trigger asthma attacks and expose young people to carcinogens and heavy metals like lead and arsenic, both directly and through secondhand smoke. A key strategy to address youth use of these products is to eliminate them in public places, as youth can be highly sensitive to normalization and perceptions of harm based on what they see in their environment.

Additionally, this year we joined with Governor Polis and lawmakers to propose **House Bill 1333**, which would have asked Colorado voters in November 2019 to consider raising the existing taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products like cigars and chewing tobacco, and applying an equivalent tax on the liquid nicotine in e-cigarettes. Colorado's tax rate on cigarettes ranks 39th in the nation and we currently do not impose any excise tax at all on the liquid nicotine used in e-cigarettes.

Research has shown that teens who begin smoking by using e-cigarettes are more likely to become cigarette smokers, leading to a lifetime of addiction. Teens are highly price-sensitive, and pricing policies like taxes can help teens quit or discourage them from getting hooked. The revenue raised would have been reinvested in preventing smoking and vaping, especially among youth, as well as in mental health, preschool and other health and education programs. Unfortunately, the bill was narrowly defeated in the eleventh hour. While we are disappointed that the bill did not advance, there is an urgent need to address the teen vaping epidemic and the broader devastating impacts of tobacco use, and we will continue to advocate for policies that do just that.

### We promoted healthy eating and active living



We joined a coalition of anti-hunger organizations to support **House Bill 1171**, a measure that will reduce the cost of school lunches for low-income high school students. When students have access to proper nutrition, their health and ability to focus in school improves. We also worked with coalition partners to advance **House Bill 1161**,

legislation that encourages children to be active by boosting access to comprehensive physical education in schools across Colorado. Colorado kids stand to benefit from the passage of this bill through stronger bones and muscles, better mental health, lower risk of chronic health conditions like Type 2 diabetes and obesity, and more.

### We grew the ranks of advocates who speak up for kids



Influencing public policy takes the diverse efforts of dedicated, passionate individuals and organizations coming together to make a difference. Our grassroots advocacy network, *Child Health Champions*, harnesses the power of its members to advocate for better child health through public policy. This legislative session, we added 1,321 new members to the network, increasing our total number of advocates to over 9,200. Over 2,100 of these advocates wrote more than 6,000 emails to their lawmakers on policy issues that impact kids and families. We grew our following on Facebook by over 116% and on

Twitter by almost 20%, reaching more advocates across the state than ever before.

We also hosted the eighth annual Speak Up for Kids Day at the Capitol, training 180 new advocates from across the state at an intensive, inspiring and hands-on event that connects them with their local legislators to have conversations about pending kids' health legislation. Finally, in partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics, Colorado Chapter, we regularly activated more than 20 community pediatricians to reach out to their legislators at key points throughout the session.

### We actively worked on many other initiatives that advanced health policy for kids



**Keeping young athletes safe from harm:** We were disappointed to see the passage of **House Bill 1208**, which allows licensed physical therapists to clear concussed young athletes to return-to-play. But as the bill moved forward, we successfully championed an amendment to ensure that physical therapists who are returning youth to organized sports have training in pediatric neurology or concussion evaluation and management. We believe that physical therapists are an integral part of the care team for concussed youth, and these additional guardrails can help kids recover fully and safely.

**A strong start for little ones:** We were thrilled to support successful efforts to pass early childhood legislation, **House Bill 1194** and **House Bill 1122**. **House Bill 1194** will limit the use of suspensions and expulsions as a disciplinary measure for young children and give every child a chance to thrive during their earliest and most formative years. **House Bill 1122** will strengthen the state's maternal mortality review committee, improving the review process that looks at the causes of maternal mortality and developing policy recommendations and best practices to support the health and safety of pregnant and postpartum women across Colorado.

**Fostering healthy families:** We strongly supported a bill to modernize the process of opting out of an immunization, while still preserving the right of parents to do so. While **House Bill 1312** ultimately failed to make it over the finish line, we will continue fighting to make sure that children can go to school in a safe environment and are not exposed to vaccine-preventable diseases.

**Improving healthcare transparency:** We worked with advocates at the Capitol on a range of bills that will make hospital finances and community benefit reporting more open to the public (**House Bill 1001**, **House Bill 1320**), lower the cost of health insurance (**House Bill 1169**), and limit "surprise" medical bills (**House Bill 1174**).

**Supporting nutrition programs in Washington, D.C.:** We continue to stay vigilant to make sure the wins achieved in the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill are not undone through administrative or regulatory action. We will also shift our focus to a timely and robust Child Nutrition Reauthorization that allows kids to excel within and beyond the classroom.

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:



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