



# UNIVERSITY *of* DENVER

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## COLORADO EVALUATION AND ACTION LAB

### Colorado Lab Newsletter

August 2020

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## Recidivism and Traumatic Brain Injury: A Vicious Cycle



# 54%

The average prevalence of Traumatic Brain Injury history among adults in Colorado jails and problem-solving courts.

Calls for criminal justice reform ring loud in Colorado. Overburdening of the corrections system is a part of the problem, driven in large part by the state's rate of recidivism. Half of people convicted of crimes in Colorado return to the criminal justice system within three years.

Seeking a deeper understanding of the issue, researchers at the University of Denver partnered with the Colorado Division of Probation Services, with funding

from the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab). Their study examined the significant link between recidivism and traumatic brain injury (TBI). In a [report](#) released this week, they describe that link and identify four strategies that criminal justice professionals can use to help those with TBI to re-enter the community effectively, avoiding re-offense.

Researchers conducted one of the most extensive such studies to date of probationers. Using data from Colorado jails and problem-solving courts, the study found that 54% of adults in these systems have experienced TBI, compared to less than 2% of the general population. Probationers with TBI have higher rates of felony conviction, lower rates of successful probation completion, and significantly higher rates of re-offense than their peers. Women in jail and on probation, who tend to have a history of multiple TBIs from violent circumstances, are especially likely to be at higher risk.

“This research creates clarity for probation officers, especially those working with women, about how life-long trauma affects behavior today,” says Kristin Klopfenstein, Director of the Colorado Lab. “Now, impulsivity and forgetfulness can be understood as brain injury-related, rather than simply antisocial behaviors.”

Though the study focused on probationers, it is reasonable to expect that inmates and parolees experience similar or even higher rates of TBI and the associated consequences.

Given the epidemic proportions of this challenge, it is critical that probation officers and other professionals in the criminal justice system understand how to support people with TBI. Research suggests four key steps can help:

- Train criminal justice staff about TBI and its effects
- Screen everyone in the system for TBI, and then screen those identified for impairment
- Tailor supervision approaches to boost effectiveness
- Educate those who suffer from the effects of TBI to strengthen self care.

[MINDSOURCE - Brain Injury Network](#) has created the **Colorado TBI Model**, a best practice screening, support, and referral model that provides tools to help professionals with the above steps. One such tool is a cognitive screening of each individual with special attention to that person’s strengths and weaknesses. A probationer might need brief, more frequent supervision appointments with their probation officer, electronic reminders, and repetition of key points during supervision meetings. MINDSOURCE has also created a seven-module curriculum called A.H.E.A.D. (Achieving Healing through Education, Accountability, and Determination) that has shown positive results, helping people with TBI to compensate for their injuries and find ways to build productive lives outside of the criminal justice system.

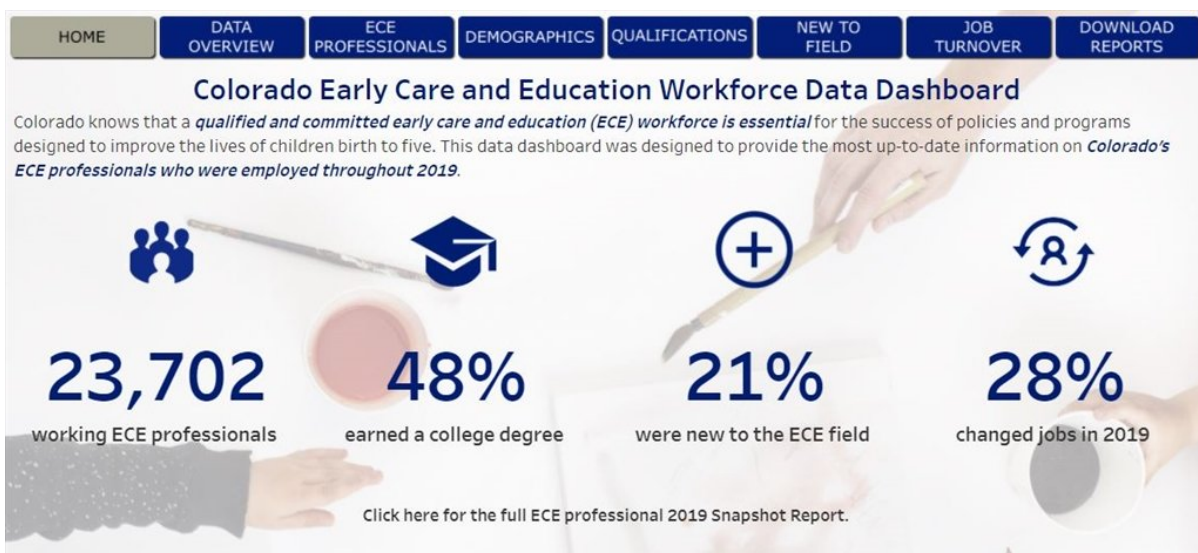
These findings are likely to boost adoption of the Colorado TBI Model, which has already been implemented in several other states. The [National Society of State](#)

[Head Injury Administrators](#) will be disseminating the results nationwide.

Read the Report

## LINC-Driven Dashboard on Early Care and Education Workforce Launches

The Colorado Lab announces the launch of the [Colorado Early Care and Education Workforce Data Dashboard](#). This interactive portal provides access to data such as the counts and characteristics of the ECE workforce and customizable data briefs by geography of interest. The dashboard was developed to allow state leadership and early childhood stakeholders in the community to better understand the conditions of the ECE workforce and dissect the information more interactively at the county, early childhood council, and state region levels.



The Dashboard can help identify local educator shortages, disproportionate shortages by certain professions, areas with high turnover, and areas that are demonstrating successful growth. Relationships built through the [Linked Information Network of Colorado \(LINC\)](#) in service of a [study of the early care and education workforce](#) funded by the [Piton Foundation](#) and the [Temple Hoyne Buell Foundation](#) drove the project.

## Colorado Lab, LINC Noted in Results for America Blueprint

In July, [Results for America](#) released its [Blueprint for Delivering Better Results in State Government](#). The State of Colorado is featured for its excellence in investing in results. The Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab and its partnership with the state's leadership to create the [Linked Information Network of Colorado \(LINC\)](#), are recognized as key to Colorado's success.

To describe how the state's work impacts the lives of Colorado residents, Results for America zeroed in on a project in which the Colorado Lab has been

instrumental: [expanding concurrent enrollment that allows high school students to earn college credits](#). In partnership with the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado Boulder, the Colorado Lab helped create a causal study to understand if the state's approaches are working, using data from the Colorado Departments of Education and Higher Education. The findings point to the importance of ensuring families and high school counselors know how beneficial concurrent enrollment can be in achieving the goal of college graduation and can help students navigate the process.

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## AISP Highlights Colorado Lab Efforts

In its July 2020 newsletter, [Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#) at the University of Pennsylvania recognized a number of the Colorado Lab's projects, including its study of the early childhood education workforce and the development of the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC). They also reported on an online presentation from LINC staff and [Senzing](#), a provider of artificial intelligence to facilitate data integration.

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University of Denver  
Frank H. Ricketson Law Building  
2255 E. Evans Ave  
Denver, CO 80208

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