



UNIVERSITY *of* DENVER

COLORADO EVALUATION AND ACTION LAB

Colorado Lab Newsletter

November 2021

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Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families

The [Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families](#) (Partnership) is made up of state and county human service, public health, health care, and early childhood systems that have the shared goal of significantly reducing child maltreatment and promoting family well-being in Colorado. Their work is critical with Colorado seeing a 12% increase in the number of children that were victims of first-time child maltreatment in the past 5 years.

IN COLORADO

54,000 Parents reported feeling aggravated from parenting usually or always in the past month	10,000+ Parents admitted they didn't think they were handling the day-to-day demands of raising children well	1 in 5 Parents stated they did not have anyone to turn to for day-to-day emotional support with raising children
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Source: [Colorado Partnership for Thriving Families](#)

The Partnership has three priorities with an initial focus on families with children prenatal to 1 year of age:

1. **Systems Alignment:** Achieving a united and comprehensive effort across multiple systems that places child and family well-being at the center of funding, policy, and practice decisions.
2. **Early Touchpoints:** Strengthening the array of family well-being services that are evidence-based, culturally responsive, and community grounded is vital to improve outcomes for parents and infants.
3. **Community Norms:** Increasing social capital so that families have helpful connections to the people, information, and opportunities they need to both give and receive support for healthy child development and family well-being.

[Illuminate Colorado](#) provides backbone support for the Partnership and the Colorado Lab serves as the strategic research and evaluation partner. Through a series of listening, learning, and action sessions they convened, partners identified approaches to collaborate across sectors and the data they need to make a collective impact. Drawing on these learnings and using an iterative approach, the Colorado Lab developed a [Toolkit for Actionable Data and Collective Impact Evaluation](#). Diverse stakeholders can use this set of tools, with ongoing support and guidance from the Lab, to collect local cross-systems data and work together with system, community, and family partners to achieve shared goals and measure success of mutually reinforcing activities.

From this shared foundation, demonstration projects are beginning in five pilot communities. In Boulder, Denver and Jefferson counties, the evidence-based Family Connects program will provide culturally responsive services to postpartum families that are at higher risk for child welfare involvement. In Adams and Prowers counties, Family Resource Centers will lead the way in bringing families together and strengthening their networks to decrease social isolation and improve community partnerships to better meet child and family needs. Nearly 15,000 families will be served and supported in these communities, with additional statewide efforts planned to increase social connections and supports that strengthen healthy child development and family well-being.

The Colorado Department of Human Services' [Office of Early Childhood](#) received a \$3.7 million grant to support these implementation efforts over the next five years from the Family Support through Primary Prevention (FSPP) program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.

To learn more, please reach out to [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

Relationship between SNAP and Medicaid Expenditures

A new study shows that medical costs decrease significantly when children in low-income families have improved access to food. [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\) Participation and Health Care Cost & Utilization for Health First Colorado Members](#), was issued by the Eugene S. Farley, Jr. Health Policy Center at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, and the study was undertaken in partnership with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab.

SNAP and Colorado's Medicaid program for adults, Health First Colorado, and children, CHP+, are critical safety-net programs that increase food and health

care security for low-income individuals. While there are differences in eligibility for these programs, there is substantial overlap in the income eligibility requirements. National research suggests that upwards of 75% of households receiving SNAP benefits also have at least one individual on Medicaid or the Children’s Health Insurance Program; this is especially true in Medicaid expansion states such as Colorado.

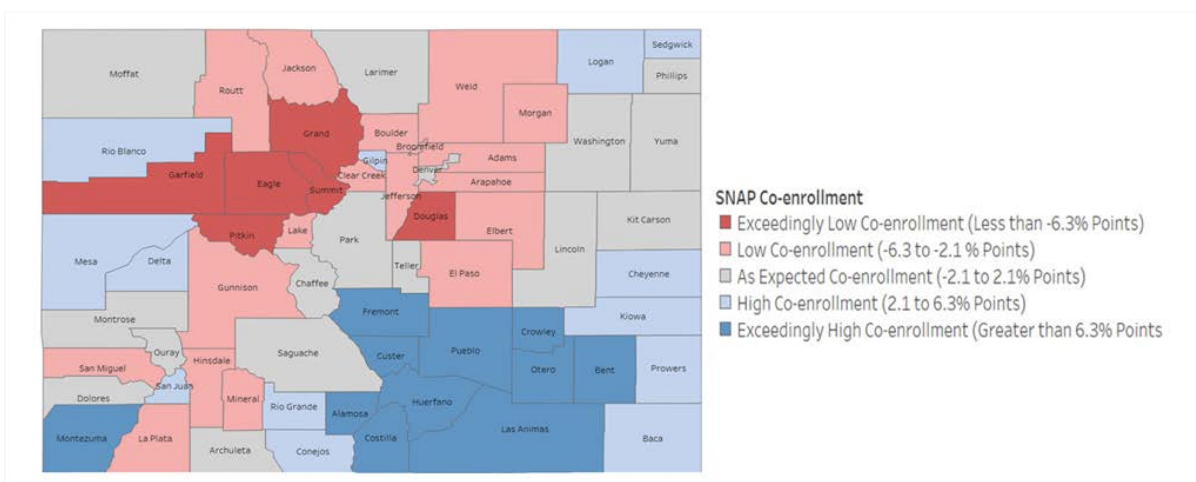
To learn whether participation in SNAP leads to lower Medicaid expenditures, the study linked SNAP administrative data with Health First Colorado/CHP+ administrative and claims data from 2014 to 2018. Monthly medical care costs for the utilization of primary care, emergency department, and pharmacy services were assessed for each member.

The findings show an increase in use of primary care services for children and youth under the age of 18 years participating in SNAP, but total health care costs decrease due to reduced reliance on specialty care and fewer hospital stays. The study similarly shows that younger adults (age 18-54) enrolled in Health First Colorado use more health services when they are on SNAP, but in this case, total health care costs increase. This is potentially because adults are more likely than children and youth to have chronic conditions that are less immediately responsive to changes in food security and nutrition.

“While further study is needed, it’s important to keep in mind that an initial increase in health care costs may be good news,” says Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein, the report’s co-author and Colorado Lab director. “An increase in medical costs for adult SNAP recipients could mean that improved access to food frees up the resources they need to invest in their care, like resuming taking medications.” As well, the findings suggest that long-term SNAP participation helps to offset these increased health care costs over time.

“This study shows compelling fiscal savings to bookend the already well-established health benefits and improved educational outcomes for children and youth participating in SNAP,” Dr. Klopfenstein said. “I hope these findings further fuel increased SNAP enrollment across Colorado, especially in the counties where enrollment lags the most.”

SNAP and Health First Colorado/CHP+ Co-Enrollment (2018) ([Read the one-pager](#))



To learn more about this study, contact [Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein](#).

Charter Schools Coalesce to Mitigate the Effects of COVID

A [survey](#) of school superintendents across Colorado at the end of 2020 showed a high level of concern about the loss of student reading and math skills due to the pandemic, as well as negative impacts on the mental health of both students and

teachers. National data confirm these worries; a [McKinsey study](#) shows the pandemic has set back learning for all students, but especially for students of color.

Six Denver-area charter schools are working together to reimagine approaches that support both learning and well-being in the wake of COVID-19. A grant from the Governor's [Response, Innovation, and Student Equity \(RISE\) fund](#) supports the collaborative work of AUL Denver, Colorado High School Charter, Academy 360, Girls Athletic Leadership Schools, RiseUp Community School, and Highline Academy.

Each of these charter schools is offering summer programs that center academic, social-emotional, and experiential learning to make up for learning losses and address opportunity gaps. Collectively, the schools have created a Learning Community, supported by the Colorado Lab, to share best practices and identify and test solutions to emerging challenges. While summer programming isn't a new concept, reconstructing the school year in order to mitigate the effects of a pandemic most certainly is, making the collaborative approach invaluable.

Following the first round of programs offered by the charter schools this summer, the Colorado Lab facilitated a review with the Learning Community. Members reflected on what worked well and challenges to be worked through, such as recruiting and retaining students, integrating academic and social emotional content, and meaningfully engaging families. Collectively, they began to identify approaches to strengthen offerings ahead of next summer's programming.

The Colorado Lab's continuing work supports identifying cross-site lessons learned and guidance and resources helpful to charter schools across Colorado in implementing summer programs that center both academic and social-emotional development.

To learn more about this and the work of a wide array of RISE grantees being supported by the Colorado Lab, contact [Dr. Lauren Gase](#).

Jo Beletic Joins Lab Staff



Please join us in welcoming the Colorado Lab's newest staff member, Jo Beletic! As a Staff Researcher, Jo will work together with project partners to implement data-informed prosecutorial practices to advance efficiency and fairness in Colorado. Prior to joining the Lab, Jo developed and oversaw the Compliance Department for The Center for Court Innovation's Brooklyn-based criminal courts programming in New York.

Through cross-departmental collaboration and administrative data analysis, she pushed operational efficiency, program sustainability, and internal evaluation to advance the alternatives to detention/incarceration programming. Outside of the criminal justice sphere, she has an array of research experience largely focused on international human rights and humanitarian interventions. Her prior experiences have grounded her current approach to each challenge in curiosity, creativity, and kindness.

Jo holds a Master of Arts in International Studies (Human Rights) from The University of Denver's Josef Korbel School and a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from The College of William and Mary.

New Colorado Lab Project: Early Childhood Data Partnership

Work is underway for a new Colorado Lab project with the Early Childhood Data Partnership. Our aim is to increase understanding about early childhood programs and pathways that promote kindergarten readiness so each child receives the early support they need to thrive. Through the Linked Information Network of Colorado (LINC), we will examine which children are attending early childhood programs, what programs children attended, kindergarten readiness skill levels and attendance rates, and how families access early childhood services.

The Colorado Lab has partnered with the Colorado Department of Human Services Office of Early Childhood on this project. The initial work will focus on the Denver area and include program partners: Colorado Child Care Assistance Program, Colorado Shines QRIS, Denver Head Start, Denver Preschool Program, Denver Public Schools, and Early Intervention Colorado. We anticipate inviting additional data partners in the future as long-term strategic goals and opportunities are identified by stakeholders. To learn more, contact [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#).

New LINC Projects

The [Linked Information Network of Colorado](#) (LINC) makes it possible to securely connect data from across multiple systems to see more clearly what situations might look like through the lens of a person's experience. Findings can be used to inform policy change and program decisions. See new LINC projects underway and stay tuned for learnings.

Estimating Homelessness Among Young People

Estimating homelessness among youth and young adults is a difficult endeavor because not all young people who experience homelessness engage in formal services. When they do, they may not provide their legal name, which is necessary to match them to child welfare records. With the understanding that we need to be able to accurately account for young people experiencing homelessness in order to effectively provide services that prevent and lessen the duration of their experience of homelessness, this project will examine cross-sector data to obtain a more accurate prevalence rate of youth homelessness.

LINC and the Colorado Lab are partnering with the Center for Policy Research to conduct this statewide research with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. To learn more, contact [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#).

Crossover Youth

Crossover youth are young people with two types of court cases: 1) dependency and neglect (D&N); and 2) juvenile justice. LINC data will connect child welfare and court system records to help inform policies and practices aimed at supporting the well-being of crossover youth, as described in [Colorado SB 18-154 Crossover Youth Plans](#) and the Family First Prevention Services Act.

This project will yield:

- Demographic and geographic descriptions of crossover youth (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, judicial district, county);
- Annual numbers of youth in congregate care with a D&N case, delinquency case, or both, along with clear information on type of court cases that are associated with out-of-home care at a given point in time; and
- Annual numbers of youth in family-like placements with a D&N case, delinquency case, or both.

This project is being conducted in partnership with the Colorado Department of Human Services and the Colorado Judicial Branch. To learn more, contact [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#).
