Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER
5 YEARS

Colorado Lab Newsletter
January 2023

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Early Childhood Evaluation Hub: Contract Evaluation Opportunity

The Early Childhood Evaluation Hub is looking for an evaluation partner to study CDEC's Family Child Care Home Navigator and Substitute Pool Fund Programs. Please review this **Call for Letters of Interest** for more information.

If interested, please complete the **Call for External Research Partners questionnaire** and submit your Letter of Interest to Ellen Witt at **ellen@coloradolab.org** by **Tuesday, January 31**.

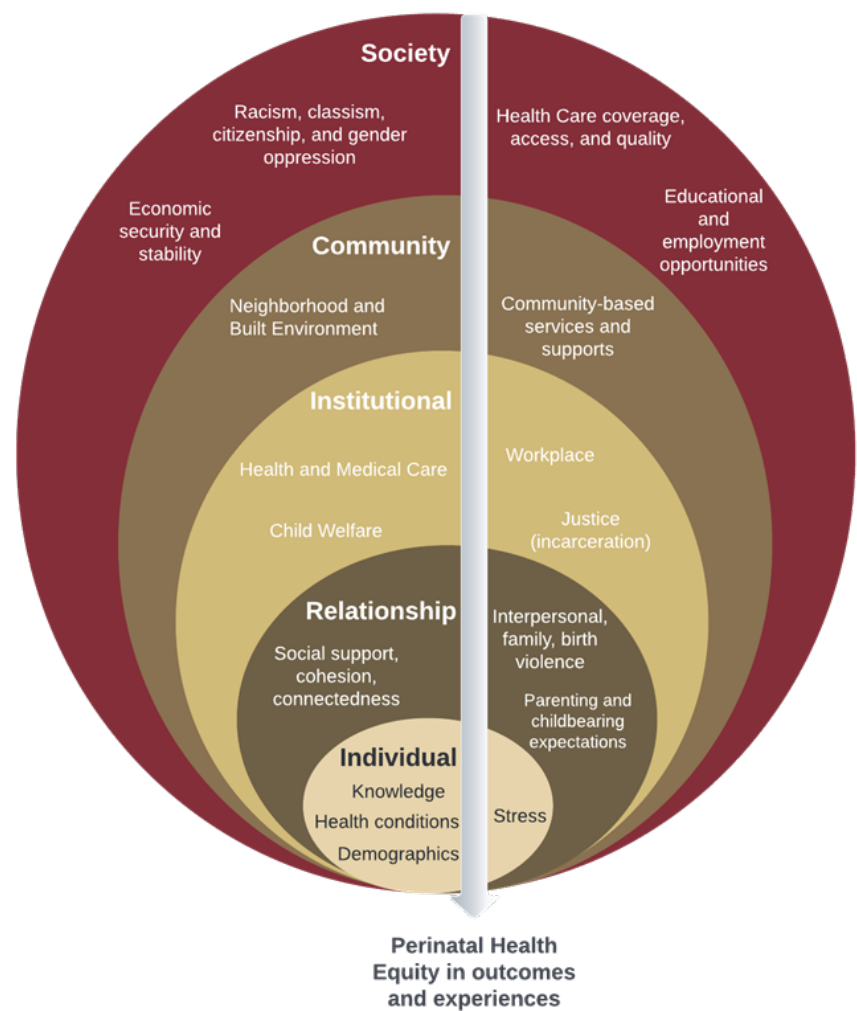## Promoting Data-Informed Policy Solutions for Perinatal Health

Following the passage of **Senate Bill 21-194**, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) partnered with the Colorado Lab to better understand barriers and facilitators to using research evidence during policy decision-making. The goal is to improve perinatal health and decrease disparities by ensuring Colorado decision-makers have the tools and support they need to efficiently and effectively use data. Working together with state agencies, health organizations, and community groups, the project aims to generate data-informed guidance on how Colorado can better integrate research evidence into policies that shape the lives of pregnant and parenting people.

Perinatal
From pregnancy to birth through the first year of life.

Creating a Collaborative Vision

The Colorado Lab developed a tool (below) to visualize the complex layers that go into unlocking data-informed solutions to perinatal health. This "ecology" of perinatal health helps communicate the need for policy solutions to consider a broad base of research evidence that reflects the many real factors faced by childbearing families. Project priorities were then identified through interviews and listening sessions with state agency representatives, community leaders, and family partners. **We explored the pressing priorities** in Colorado maternal health, opportunities to leverage data, and ways to put learnings to use in support of Colorado decision-makers and the families they serve.

From Collaborative Vision to Project Execution

Grounded in this collaborative visioning, the project is now underway with an analysis of perinatal health bills that have passed in recent legislative sessions. We're looking to identify success cases where research evidence was used to help drive evidence-based decision-making so we can learn from the commonalities and strengthen key processes. We are also using an assessment tool to explore how Colorado decision-makers are using research evidence as one factor in their thought process, recognizing that other factors like resource availability and community voice are equally important. Lessons learned from the study will be used to help shape a facilitated stakeholder convening in the spring. The convening will include agency partners, health care organizations, community groups, and families as we collaboratively answer the question: "How can meaningful evidence use in policy creation and implementation be promoted?" While the strategies developed will be tied to the perinatal period, we expect that lessons learned will be relevant to a wide variety of stakeholders and systems.
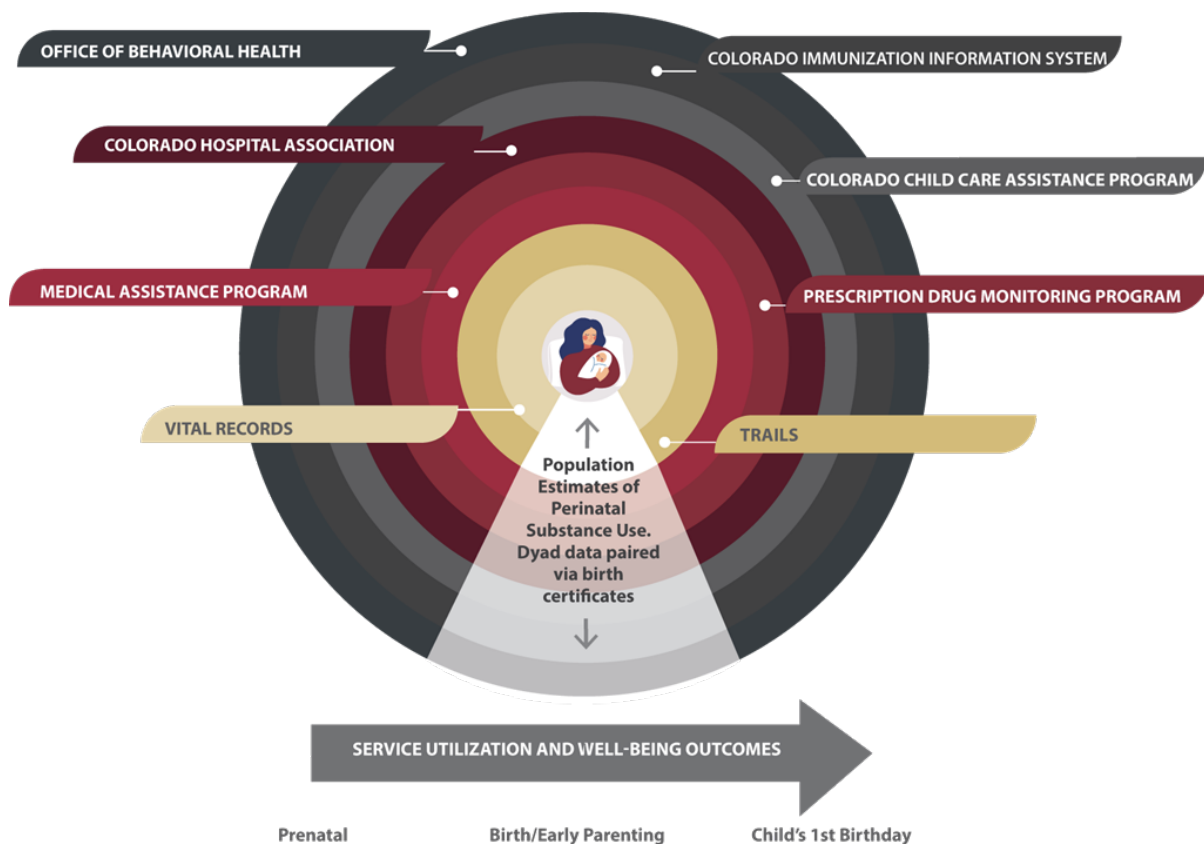
Learn more about the **Colorado Lab and CDPHE partnership** to activate SB21-194 evidence-building priorities, and reach out to **Dr. Courtney Everson** for more information on this use of research evidence project.

Perinatal Substance Use and Improving Family Health

Update on the Colorado SB21-137 Data Linkage Project
The Colorado Lab is working with the Center for Prescription Drug Abuse Prevention to better understand and address the growing issue of perinatal substance use. The vision for this project is to routinely track incident rates of perinatal substance use in Colorado and inform state investments, programs, and policies aimed at strengthening families affected by substance use during a pregnancy.

This vision is informed by experts from Colorado state agencies, universities, medical providers, the SuPPoRT Colorado Steering Committee of the Attorney General's Substance Abuse Trend and Response Task Force, advocacy groups, and families. The figure below illustrates the data sources recommended by these experts to accomplish project goals and progress on linking data as described in our legislative brief.

Initial research leveraging this data linkage focused on risk of infant removal by child welfare due to maternal substance use during pregnancy, as well as documented baseline data on mortality and morbidity outcomes for these maternal-infant dyads. The studies focused on modifiable risk and protective factors, which led to the Colorado Department of Human Services issuing an RFP for a pilot program to strengthen Colorado's use of Plans of Safe Care (POSC) outside of hospital settings and child welfare involvement.

> **Plan of Safe Care**
> A written or electronic document intended to ensure the safety and well-being of an infant and caregiver affected by prenatal substance use following release from a health care provider.

Research to Action: Pilot Underway for Plans of Safe Care
With the SB21-137 data linkage studies pointing to POSC as an important means to improve care coordination and health outcomes for families affected by perinatal substance use, a 4-year pilot program has begun. The goal of the pilot is to create a data-informed strategic framework for coordinated POSC service delivery and tracking across Colorado.

Together with our partners, Illuminate Colorado and the Kempe Center, the Colorado Lab is studying how to use POSC to begin wrapping supports around families during pregnancy and continue support through the first year of life. Collectively, these elements will inform the development of a comprehensive POSC framework that can:

1. Guide cross-system policy and practice investments that improve outcomes for families,
2. Support Colorado state agencies in meeting state and federal responsibilities around caring for infants and caregivers impacted by perinatal substance use disorders, and
3. Cultivate a culture of collaborative responsibility for ensuring these Colorado families have every opportunity to thrive.

The study will move from the planning phase into implementation and continue over a 4-year period. To learn more, please contact Dr. Courtney Everson.

External Research Partner Spotlight: Dr. Susan Hwang

Susan Hwang, MD has partnered with the Colorado Lab on the Substance Exposed Newborns project since its inception. Dr. Hwang is a neonatologist, health services researcher, and perinatal quality improvement expert at Children's Hospital Colorado and the University of Colorado School of Medicine. She leads the Colorado Hospitals Substance Exposed Newborn (CHoSEN) Quality Improvement Collaborative (QIC) and the Data-driven Engagement of Families to Improve the NICU Experience (DEFINE) QIC. Dr. Hwang founded CHoSEN in 2017, recognizing the need to access and analyze data across systems to improve the identification and response to newborns prenatally exposed to substances.

"Addressing the many needs of children and families affected by perinatal substance use requires a multi-disciplinary effort with data shared across several systems, and no other organization has the research capabilities and legislative authority to access current data from across multiple systems," Dr. Hwang said. "I particularly appreciate the Colorado Lab's openness to hearing our perspectives as clinical experts, creating the space for us to work together, and their focus on quickly translating findings into practice and policy change." The information learned from connecting birth and child welfare data, says Dr. Hwang, "has already helped us identify the over-representation of substance-exposed newborns in our NICUs across Colorado and highlighted an area of opportunity to focus efforts on family engagement for those with longer than anticipated birth hospitalizations."

Susan Hwang, MD

Dr. Tate Steidley Joins the Colorado Lab

We welcome Trent "Tate" Steidley as a Senior Researcher to the Colorado Lab!

A sociologist by training, Tate has significant experience using quantitative social science methods to find actionable insights to improve social outcomes. In his new role, he will continue to support rigorous empirical research and analysis to improve governmental processes and services for Coloradans. Tate was previously a faculty member at the University of Denver where he published over 15 peer-reviewed articles on firearm policy and related criminal justice issues while also teaching research methods and criminology. He also worked as a performance analyst for the former Office of Behavioral Health at the Colorado Department of Human Services, supporting strategic planning and data analyses as well as a position with the Colorado Behavioral Health Administration supporting the launch of the 988 Lifeline. Tate holds a PhD in sociology from The Ohio State University where he established a research agenda on firearm policy in the United States. We welcome Trent "Tate" Steidley as a Senior Researcher to the Colorado Lab!