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Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



Colorado Lab Newsletter

September 2023

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Register Now for Next Week's Webinar



Next Tuesday, September 19th, the Colorado Lab will host *The Intersection of Evaluation and Implementation Practice*. This live webinar will explore opportunities for evaluators and implementation science practitioners to work together to create sustainable and equitable change.

September 19, 2023, from 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (MDT)

Registration is free! [Register here](#) by Friday, September 15. Please contact [Shannon Willis](#) with registration-related questions.

Statistician Partners Identified Through May's Open Call

The Colorado Lab periodically issues a call for statisticians to provide analytic support for various projects. Through our last open call in May 2023, we engaged:

- Dr. Stephen Billings, a Professor at CU-Boulder and an economist, to consult

- on the evaluation design for our [Cash for Coloradans](#) programs; and
- Dr. Philip Pendergast, of Western Washington University (formerly with CU-Boulder), to execute the analysis for a quasi-experimental design study for the [School Counselor Corps Grant](#) programs.

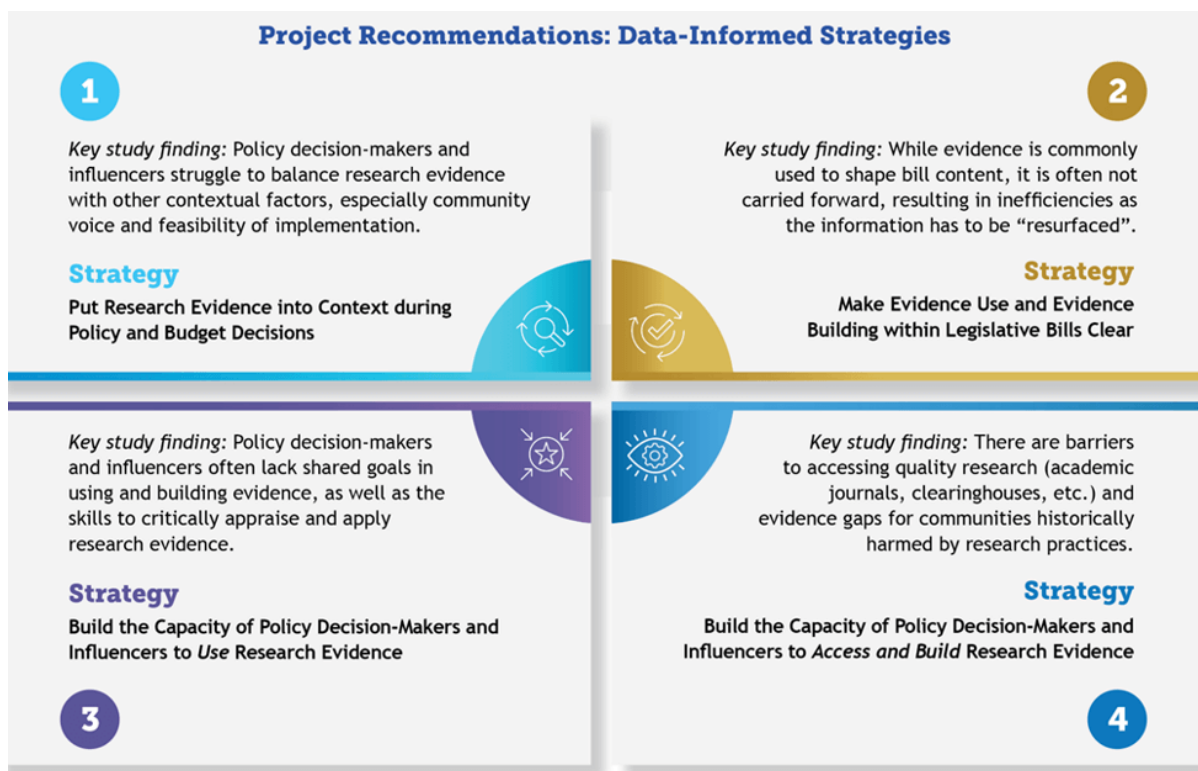
Our thanks to the robust pool of statisticians who responded to this call! We routinely reach out to individuals who have responded to previous calls when a new project aligns with their interests and skills.

If you are interested in collaborating with the Lab and have not yet responded to one of our calls, we encourage you to fill out our [open call for external researchers](#).

Use of Research Evidence to Improve Perinatal Health

The Colorado Lab partnered with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to study how research evidence can be best used in policymaking to drive equitable opportunities in perinatal health. Authorized by SB21-194 (Maternal Health Providers), the study used a mixed methods approach, including expert interviews with state government, policy, community, and family leaders (see related [blog post](#)).

Four strategies were identified to reduce barriers to using data and strengthen evidence-based decision-making (EBDM) in support of policies that shape the lives of people who are pregnant and parenting.



To implement these recommendations, cross-system partners are encouraged to review and map the strategies to their roles to identify their piece of the puzzle. For instance, state agency leaders may want to focus on building infrastructure that improves access to important sources for quality research, while private entities may want to explore how they can make data more transparent.

CDPHE has also invited Drs. Courtney Everson and Lauren Gase to speak with Colorado leaders, changemakers, and data champions at the statewide [Perinatal Data Summit](#) on September 14th, to facilitate action planning around the data-informed strategies and inspire evidence use in policy.

To learn more, read the two-page [top line policy summary](#) and the full policy brief, [Improving Perinatal Health for Colorado Families: Strategies to Advance Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Policymaking](#). For more information, please reach out to [Dr. Courtney Everson](#).

Early Childhood Stimulus Evaluation Hub

Between 2021 and 2022, the Colorado Department of Early Childhood received over \$700 million in stimulus funding to strengthen Colorado's early childhood sector. The Colorado Lab is coordinating the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub, contracting with multiple evaluation teams to conduct high-quality evaluations of more than a dozen prioritized stimulus-funded activities to ensure the goals of the activities are being met. We're highlighting these great partners over the next several newsletters.

Colorado Lab Hosts Learning Session for Hub Teams

In July, the Colorado Lab convened all of the evaluation teams participating in the Early Childhood Evaluation Hub. Each team shared information about the evaluations of the stimulus-funded activities they are conducting and collectively discussed cross-cutting themes.

"Having all of the evaluation teams together in person was invaluable. By harnessing the considerable knowledge and expertise of these seasoned evaluators, we were able to brainstorm approaches to move past challenges, bridge gaps, and streamline evidence-building efforts," said Dr. Kristin Klopfenstein, Director of the Colorado Lab. "While collaborative work can take some extra work up front, the synergy and alignment greatly boosts the potential to inform smart state investments to strengthen the full ecosystem."



Early Childhood Evaluation Hub Learning Session

Over two days, the teams also:

- outlined strategic messaging and actionable interim insights for the legislative session;
- deepened their understanding of theories of change and their application; and
- exchanged ideas on aligning data collection and analysis efforts.

The evaluation teams will create evidence briefs for the Colorado Department of Early Childhood that will be publicly available toward the end of 2023. For more information, please reach out to [Dr. Whitney LeBoeuf](#).

Spotlight on External Research Partner: Butler Institute for Families

The Colorado Lab selected Dr. Meg Franko, Early Childhood Director at the [Butler Institute for Families](#) at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work, to evaluate the targeted, stimulus-funded efforts to retain and grow Colorado's early childhood workforce. Dr. Franko has decades of experience studying early childhood workforce and systems issues.

"Workforce and compensation are at the core of what is needed to strengthen the early care and education system. Without the workforce, the whole system breaks down, and it isn't any secret that compensation in this field is horrible," said Dr. Franko. "By understanding effective pathways, we can help people who want to be in this field improve their chances of advancing and be in a position to earn higher wages."



Dr. Meg Franko

The activities being evaluated include an apprenticeship program, scholarship and financial assistance programs, and support for candidates for the Child Development Associate. All community colleges and four-year institutions in Colorado's higher education system are supporting some or all of these activities.

The evaluation will show how and to what extent each activity has been able to bring new people into the field and support people already in the field. The evidence on program participation and completion, along with workforce additions and retention, will help the state to better understand where to make modifications, shift emphasis, and invest existing dollars and future resources.

"Frankly, it's unusual to have this level of investment going into the early childhood field in general and focused on the workforce in particular. It's a really unique opportunity to test all our assumptions on what we think may be effective, but don't know for certain," Dr. Franko says. "As an evaluator, this is really exciting."

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