

# Improving Perinatal Health for Colorado Families:

## Strategies to Advance Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Policymaking



This project is rooted in how policies shape the lives of people who are pregnant and parenting. The goal is to develop and activate cross-system strategies that support evidence-based decision-making and drive equitable opportunities in perinatal health for all families.



### At the Intersection of Data, Policy, and Maternal Health

Colorado has made significant progress in using data to inform investments in maternal health; however, there remain missed opportunities at the policy level. In 2021, Senate Bill 21-194 (Maternal Health Providers) authorized an innovative project to explore how research evidence is being used in Colorado policies that impact pregnancy, birth, and one year postpartum. The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) partnered with the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab (Colorado Lab) to fulfill this legislative opportunity.

The project used a mixed methods approach to identify barriers and facilitators that policy decision-makers and policy influencers face in building and using research evidence. The project was a collaboration between governmental and non-governmental partners, researchers, community organizations, and childbearing people and their families. Equity in health outcomes, policy, and data was a central focus throughout to catalyze systems change that closes the gap in maternal health disparities. The result is a set of strategies that Colorado can adopt to advance [evidence-based decision-making in policymaking](#) for perinatal health.

### Why a Focus on the Perinatal Period?

In this project, “perinatal” refers to the pregnancy, birth, and one year postpartum. Investing in families in the perinatal period is an upstream lever to providing infants and their caregivers the resources they need to thrive, together.



### Data-Informed Strategies to Advance Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Perinatal Policies

Evidence-based decision-making in perinatal policies requires an “all hands” commitment from partners across systems and communities. Four data-informed strategies emerged from this project. Strategies were prioritized with an eye toward maximizing: a) **actionability** across systems and issues; b) **sustainability** across time, space, and actors; c) **equity** in how data are used and who benefits from policy solutions; and d) **feasibility** in activating the strategy for systems change.

The strategies are grounded in **shared values** around how data and policy shape the lives of people who are pregnant and parenting.

#### Value 1:

Building and using evidence requires partnerships between state government, private agencies, researchers, community organizations, and families.

#### Value 2:

Data should be used for improvement and learning, not for punishment, and not solely for compliance.

#### Value 3:

Research evidence should include both numbers and narratives to more fully uncover the *what*, *why*, and *how*.

# Project Recommendations: Data-Informed Strategies

## Strategy 1:

Put Research Evidence into Context during Policy and Budget Decisions



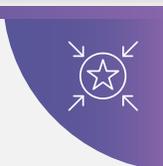
## Strategy 2:

Make Evidence Use and Evidence Building within Legislative Bills Clear



## Strategy 3:

Build the Capacity of Policy Decision-Makers and Influencers to Use Research Evidence



## Strategy 4:

Build the Capacity of Policy Decision-Makers and Influencers to Access and Build Research Evidence



## Strategy 1:

Put Research Evidence into Context during Policy and Budget Decisions



**The problem:** Policy decision-makers and influencers struggle to balance research evidence with other contextual factors, especially community voice and feasibility of implementation. During policymaking, when one factor dominates, it reduces the opportunity for balanced evidence-based decision-making.

**The opportunity:** Promote use of Colorado's 5-year vision for [Evidence-Based Decision-Making](#) to systematically integrate best available research evidence, professional expertise, and community needs and implementation context. Key components include:

- Mechanisms for **community and professional partners** to inform data collection approaches and co-shape policy priorities.
- Opportunities to **make data transparent** and engage communities and experts in meaning-making around evidence findings.
- Consistent use of **tools and processes** that support the evidence-based decision-making approach, as aligned with roles and responsibilities.
- Structures to **align evidence-based decision-making at major points in the policy and budget cycle**, from state agencies developing concept proposals to the Governor's Office budgeting process to evidence use by General Assembly members and staff.



## Strategy 2:

Make Evidence Use and Evidence Building within Legislative Bills Clear



**The problem:** There is a breakdown in translating research evidence used in policy vision to policy creation (bill passed) to policy implementation (fulfilling provisions). While evidence is commonly used to shape bill content, it is often not made transparent and carried forward, which results in inefficiency and redundancy, as the information has to be “resurfaced” each time and evidence priorities become lost in translation.

**The opportunity:** Leverage the legislative process to better articulate how evidence is being used and what evidence needs to be gathered to support transparency and continuity in evidence use throughout the policy life cycle. Key components include:

- Use of **legislative declarations** to make explicit the research evidence behind the bill, including drivers of change and expected outcomes, and how the research evidence fits with community needs and implementation context.
- Tools that **systematically provide a synthesis** of what data, community needs, and implementation factors were considered in bill development, to support translation of evidence across the policy life cycle and make clear any disparities being addressed.
- Templates that provide a starting place when **drafting bill language** around data collection, data sharing, evaluations, and other evidence-building activities, including how research evidence generated will be applied.

### Strategy 3:

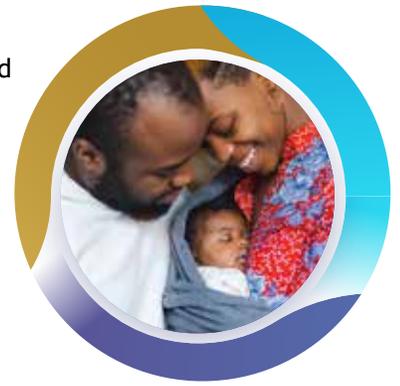
Build the Capacity of Policy Decision-Makers and Influencers to Use Research Evidence



**The problem:** Policy decision-makers and influencers lack shared goals in using and building evidence, common language, and the skills to critically appraise and apply research evidence. Without these foundations, research evidence may be a shared value, but there are breakdowns in evidence-based decision-making.

**The opportunity:** Support the development of shared goals, common language, and skills around how to understand and apply research evidence and align policy actions and investments. Key components include:

- Clarity in how research evidence will be used and aligned within an agency's **strategic planning, budgeting, and performance management** work.
- A **glossary of common terms** (such as research evidence, impact evaluation, and best available evidence) with consistent use across partners.
- **Training** that builds capacity for evidence-based decision-making for diverse audiences.
- Tools that equip policy actors with **data fluency skills** (such as critically assessing research quality), consistent with their role and responsibilities.
- Mechanisms to **onboard and incentivize evidence-based decision-making** across branches of government.



### Strategy 4:

Build the Capacity of Policy Decision-Makers and Influencers to Access and Build Research Evidence



**The problem:** There are structural barriers to policy decision-makers and influencers accessing and building quality research evidence, including access to academic journals and clearinghouses, and processes to support data sharing. There are also persistent evidence gaps for communities that have been historically harmed by research practices.

**The opportunity:** Increase access to sources of high-quality research evidence and invest in collective solutions to address evidence gaps for historically underserved communities. Key components include:

- **Access to academic journals and databases** for Colorado state agencies.
- A comprehensive list of evidence-based policy and practice **clearinghouses** that can be shared by government and non-governmental partners.
- Structures that support **data linkages and data sharing** across systems.
- Opportunities for **community-driven and community-partnered research**.
- Shared tenants and best practice strategies for **centering equity** in data, research, and policy.



Learn More About How to Activate Recommendations and the Research Behind these Strategies

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Discover CDPHE's Work in Maternal Health and Equity

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment acknowledges that generations-long social, economic and environmental inequities result in adverse health outcomes. They affect communities differently and have a greater influence on health outcomes than either individual choices or one's ability to access health care. Reducing health disparities through policies, practices and organizational systems can help improve opportunities for all Coloradans.

CLICK HERE

This project was a partnership between



COLORADO  
Department of Public  
Health & Environment



Colorado Evaluation & Action Lab  
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

To learn more and get involved, contact: The Maternal Mortality Prevention Program at [preventmaternalmortality@state.co.us](mailto:preventmaternalmortality@state.co.us)