

2022 Rocky Mountain Policy Agenda

Health Care

Lead

Collaborative Community Response

In the midst of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this multi-year, innovative project is developing a statewide human and technical infrastructure for collaboration between communities, primary care, behavioral and mental health, public health, and public services (SNAP, TANF, etc.). In addition to changing the way we think about and deliver healthcare in the state, this will increase access to vaccinations and COVID resources. The parts of the project are:

1. **Thriving Communities:** This policy will fund local grants to facilitate collaboration, develop regional supports, and transform community wellness. It will also fund wellness grants which fill the gaps for social determinants of health.
2. **State Activity Teams:** This policy will fund the state level support for the model including: measurement and evaluation, workforce development, long-term financing, and expansive model development. It will also fund a FTE who will identify all current state funding for care management in different state departments and organizations in order to better align and integrate the models.
3. **IT Infrastructure:** This policy will develop the shared IT infrastructure across communities, primary care, behavioral and mental health, public health, and public services. OeHI is taking the lead on this specific policy.

Support

Insurance Affordability and Accessibility

YI is supporting policy priorities to increase the affordability and the dependability of health insurance in Colorado.

Reproductive Health Equity Act

This bill will modernize Colorado statute to protect reproductive rights as fundamental rights. Having access to the full spectrum of reproductive health care including contraception and abortion helps ensure that people can control their own bodies, lives, and futures.

Expanding Dental/Oral Care

This bill will expand access to oral care in Colorado by creating a new license for dental therapists and allowing stackable credentials between dental hygienists and dental therapists, who often work with communities that have the highest needs. Increasing the number of dental therapists in Colorado will increase access to routine dental care for those who have historically lacked access, while maintaining safety and quality of care.

Prohibit Flavored Tobacco Regulate Synthetic Nicotine

This bill will end the sale of flavored tobacco products statewide in order to protect Colorado from the negative health impacts of vaping and tobacco addiction, especially among children and young adults.

Sales Tax Exemption Essential Hygiene Products

This bill creates a sales tax exemption for feminine hygiene products and diapers in Colorado, beginning in 2023.

Higher Education

Lead

Higher Education Access for Foster Youth

This policy will create a tuition waiver to higher education for 18+ foster youth (both community colleges and 4-year institutions). This tuition waiver will be accompanied by a budget request for a wrap around basic needs service support navigators for these students to help them succeed while in school.

Second Chance Pell

This policy will revive Colorado's Second Chance Scholarship Program that provided \$10K scholarships to previously justice involved youth. This DHE program was defunded during COVID-19 but one-time ARPA federal funds present a chance of revitalization.

Fifth Year High School Concurrent Enrollment (ASCENT)

Colorado students can jumpstart their college degree and save thousands in tuition dollars by taking college classes in high school. The ASCENT program is a fifth year high school program that allows students to attend college full-time for one year after high school for free. However, this program has limits on the number of program participants admitted. HB22-1002 not only removes this limit, allowing each qualified student to participate in the program, but it also reduces the number of postsecondary credits a qualified student must complete prior to participation.

Support

Prohibit Transcript Withholding

This policy will end the practice of withholding student transcripts as a debt collection tool. This practice often exacerbates financial pressures for students, making it more difficult to get a job and thereby, pay off their remaining balance to their former institution.

Community College Nursing Bachelor Degree Eligibility

Under current law, community colleges may offer a nursing bachelor's as a completion degree to students with (or pursuing) a nursing associates degree. This bill allows community colleges to extend the same offer to those with a certificate in nursing.

Federal/State Financial Aid Application Completion

This policy will require students to fill out the FAFSA or CAFSA in order to either graduate from highschool or be admitted into college in Colorado. Colorado has one of the lowest FAFSA completion rates in the country, leaving over \$30M of student aid on the table each year. This policy will include counselor training to assist students facing disproportionate barriers to completion (i.e. independent status), and disseminating consumer education to households/guardians.

Advancing Success for Students with Disabilities

This policy will combat disability service issues for postsecondary students by creating a task force of community experts and members with lived experience as students with disabilities, to provide equity recommendations to the Colorado Department of Higher Education. The bill also requires Colorado's universities to collect data on the number of students with disabilities (enrollment/retention), as well as the accessibility and utilization of on campus resources for these students.

Inclusive Higher Education Act

This policy will extend the pilot program for inclusive higher education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities that was created in 2016 from SB16a-196. The bill will continue to provide financial resources for Colorado Higher Education Institutions for them to work in collaboration with educational/non profit organizations that have experience working with students who have intellectual or developmental disabilities. The goal is to create and maintain high-quality inclusive undergraduate programs.

Workforce

Lead

Teacher Workforce Pipeline

This policy will help facilitate a more diverse and inclusive educator workforce. It will address financial barriers to earning a teaching credential by providing alternatives to high-stakes standardized exams, and help Pell-eligible students cover the cost of these exams. This policy will also provide stipends to Pell-eligible student teachers, and expand stackable credentials and prior learning experience to award students credit towards becoming teachers.

Support

Early Childhood Educator Tax Credit

This policy will create an Early Childhood Educator Tax Credit that will encourage improvements in providers' quality, improve compensation of the early childhood workforce, and increase access to child care providers for those facing the greatest barriers. Access to quality and affordable child care is an economic barrier for women, single parents, and underrepresented minorities.

Expansion of Consumer Protections from Debt

This bill will expand and modernize Colorado’s statutory exemptions from debt collection. It will increase protections for income and property from seizure by creditors by protecting a base amount of funds in a bank account, as well as protecting stimulus payments and income supports. This will ensure that debt collection practices in Colorado will not prevent consumers from being able to afford basic necessities.

Public Collective Bargaining Union Expansion

This policy will allow public employees throughout the state to have collective bargaining rights. Essentially, it will allow all working people, no matter their industry, the right to join a union and collectively bargain for improved services and better jobs.

Fair Workweek

This policy will regulate certain types of employers in how they determine and give notice of employee work schedules. In addition to pay for hours worked by the employee, the bill requires employers to pay employees additional wages for unpredictable scheduling when it is unavoidable. The bill will also prohibit employers from retaliating against an employee for exercising any of these rights.

Emergency Employment Support Services Renewal

This policy would offer emergency employment support services to individuals struggling to obtain or retain employment due to the pandemic. This bill will sustain the Emergency Employment Support Services Bill in the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment’s Division of Employment and Training, and will prioritize support for underrepresented minorities, rural, and individuals living in poverty.

Civic Engagement

Lead

Remote testimony rule change

This policy change will extend the availability of remote testimony past the emergency period.

Projects

Health Care

Understanding and Accessing Mental Health Care

This resource will address the top questions Colorado young adults have about how to access behavioral health care with and without insurance coverage. In addition to providing a basic understanding of mental health care literacy and outlining the importance of understanding your rights as a young adult consumer.

Colorado Option

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative and YI are continuing to advocate for equitable insurance access by providing input for the Colorado Option standardized plans as they are developed and implemented.

Prescription Drug Affordability Board

Colorado Consumer Health Initiative and YI are working on the implementation process of the Prescription Drug Affordability Board by building relationships with the newly appointed board members and the director in order to advocate for equitable drug prices in Colorado.

Higher Education

Transportation & Housing College Checklists

These checklists will mirror the work we've done in the Healthy Minds and Hunger Free checklists for Transportation and Housing Access for students at institutions of higher education.

Stackable Credentials

The Colorado Re-Engaged (or CORE) initiative makes it possible for students attending 4-year institutions to receive credentials throughout their educational journey, so if they have left college without graduating, they still can earn an associate degree or certifications. The state has set aside \$1M for communicating this new program's existence to eligible Coloradans, and YI will be critical to ensuring that communications plan centers students with the greatest need or debt burden from their unfinished program.