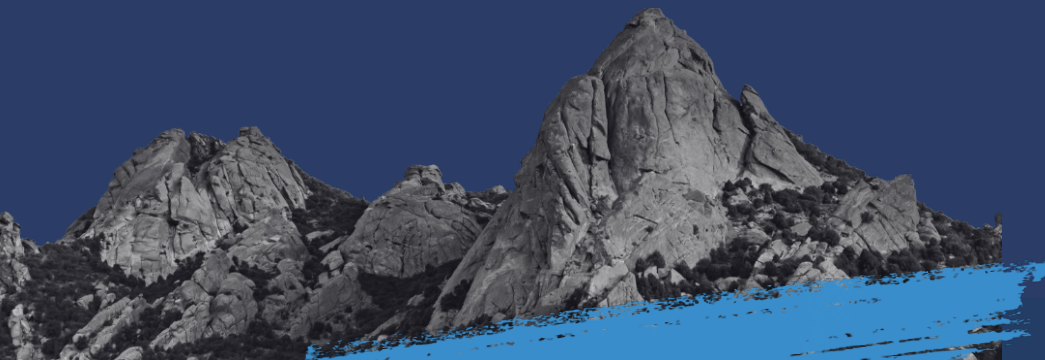


Rocky Mountain Policy Agenda



2025 Rocky Mountain Policy Agenda

The Rocky Mountain Young Invincibles (YI) office is committed to advancing policy that benefits young adults, ages 18-34, in higher education, health care, workforce development, and civic engagement. YI values the leadership of our young adults, and our policy agenda is shaped and guided directly by young adults in Colorado.



Healthcare Access And Equity for Colorado's Young Adults

Young adults in Colorado, especially those of color and in rural and underserved communities, face substantial barriers to accessing comprehensive, affordable, and culturally responsive health care. These alarming disparities reflect a broader lack of support around social determinants of health, including economic insecurity, mental health care access, and social support systems, which are critical for overall well-being.

Census data from the past decade reveals a steady increase in the Hispanic population within rural Colorado, marking a significant demographic shift that calls for a responsive state policy approach. As this population grows, so does the need for healthcare services that are accessible, culturally competent, and tailored to the specific needs of young adults in rural Hispanic communities. Without addressing these persistent health inequities and broadening access to quality and affordable care, young people across Colorado will continue to face significant, preventable health challenges, stifling their potential and exacerbating socioeconomic disparities.

Through our 2025 state policy agenda, YI is committed to advocating for solutions that expand healthcare access, affordability, and equity for Colorado's young adults. We aim to amplify the voices of youth most impacted by these disparities, partnering with them to push for a healthcare system that supports all young Coloradans—especially those in rural areas—to thrive physically, mentally, and economically.

Policy Priorities:

Supporting: Abortion Access

YI will continue to work to address gaps in reproductive, maternal care, and family planning care that disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and Rural young adults in Colorado. We will seek to eliminate barriers that prevent young adults from receiving or affording abortion services. This includes the implementation of the recently passed Amendment 79, which guarantees access to abortion services under Colorado's constitution.

Supporting: Gender Affirming and Culturally Competent Care

In recent listening sessions, young adults have continually identified a need for increased access to culturally competent care from healthcare providers. YI will work to codify culturally competent and gender-affirming care across Colorado.

Supporting: Mental Healthcare

According to the 2022 Snapshot of Rural Health in Colorado report, Colorado ranks 20th in untreated youth depression and 33rd in inconsistent treatment for severe depression, with rural youth twice as likely to die by suicide as their urban counterparts. The top barrier young adults in CO felt they faced when accessing mental health care was financial (46%), followed by access to appointments (17%), and stigma and bias in receiving mental health care (14%). YI will promote legislation that increases mental and behavioral health access for young adults in Colorado while advocating for mental health parity to ensure equitable treatment for all individuals and providing accessible mental health resources on every campus in Colorado. Understanding that mental healthcare is preventive healthcare, we will work with young adults to address financial barriers, increase access to appointments, and advocate for equitable services to mental health resources across the state.

Access, Affordability, and Equity in Higher Education For Colorado's Young Adults

According to Colorado's Talent Pipeline Report in 2022, 91.4% of jobs that pay a wage sufficient to sustain a family require some postsecondary education past a high school diploma. However, 60-70% of Colorado high school graduates never complete a postsecondary credential. Colorado's higher education system remains out of reach for many young adults, especially those from low-income backgrounds, rural areas, and communities of color. The top barriers young adult respondents in CO faced when accessing higher education were financial and cost. Fifty-one percent of respondents felt that financial barriers were the main reason for limited access to higher education. Fifteen percent of respondents selected transportation as a barrier, followed by a lack of knowledge of the application process (11%).

Additionally, as census data from the last decade shows, rural Colorado is experiencing a demographic shift, with a growing Hispanic population facing unique challenges in accessing higher education. Language barriers, lack of tailored outreach, and a shortage of culturally relevant resources contribute to an environment where Hispanic youth and other marginalized groups are left without the necessary support to thrive academically and professionally. These barriers ultimately perpetuate disparities in education, job access, and economic mobility, limiting the potential of young Coloradans to drive innovation and growth within their communities.

To address these challenges, YI is advocating for a higher education system and funding formula in 2025 that is accessible, affordable, and equitable for all. By focusing on financial aid reform, expanding access to in-demand degree programs and stackable credentials, and fostering culturally competent resources and support, we seek to create pathways for young Coloradans to achieve academic success and economic stability. Through this agenda, YI will work to amplify student voices and eliminate structural barriers, ensuring that Colorado's higher education system empowers the next generation to reach their fullest potential.



Policy Priorities:

- Leading: Higher Ed Funding Formula** In Polis' 2025-2026 budget proposal: A \$12.1 million increase in college and university budgets and student financial aid. The money would increase state funding slightly above the \$1.6 billion this year. His administration also has proposed a 2.3% increase for in-state tuition. YI will work with our Student Voice Coalition to address affordability for Colorado students.
- Supporting: Stackable Credentials**
YI will work to increase awareness and expand access to flexible and nontraditional postsecondary education pathways to ensure that learners can advance in their chosen career pathways. Stackable credentials are credentials that purposefully stack into other credentials, forming a credentialing path. These credentials can be non-credit, certificates, skills badges, licenses, certifications, degrees, and other types.
- Supporting: Rural Young Adults**
YI will work to increase access to postsecondary education for rural students and students furthest from privilege who need external support services, like transportation, childcare, or financial assistance, to succeed in higher education.
- Supporting: Increasing Learner Transparency**
Increasing transparency for learners would require post-secondary programs to list a realistic return on investment, including the cost of tuition and expected salary for careers in said field. YI works to ensure that it will increase transparency for young adults and aid in their selection process throughout their academic careers.

Equitable Workforce Development For Colorado's Young Adults

Colorado's young adults, particularly those from marginalized and rural communities, face significant barriers to securing stable, well-paying jobs that provide a pathway to economic security. Despite Colorado's diverse economy and growing demand for skilled workers, opportunities for quality employment remain limited and often inaccessible to young people from low-income backgrounds, communities of color, and rural areas. Many young adults lack access to high-quality training programs, internships, and apprenticeships due to structural inequities and a lack of local resources. These barriers prevent them from gaining the skills and experience necessary to succeed in a competitive job market.

The challenges are even more pronounced for Hispanic and rural populations, who continue to face language barriers, limited access to digital tools and broadband, and cultural disconnects in workforce training programs that often overlook their unique needs. Without equitable access to workforce development resources, these young adults are disproportionately likely to remain in low-wage, unstable employment, unable to fully participate in Colorado's economic growth or achieve financial independence. In 2025, YI aims to advocate for a workforce development agenda that bridges these gaps by expanding access to apprenticeships, job training programs, and career pathways tailored to young adults' needs. YI will promote equitable policies that create inclusive, culturally relevant workforce development opportunities across Colorado.

»»» Policy Priorities:

■ **Leading: Equitable Employment Pathways for Undocumented Graduates (EPSA)**

This policy was written and researched by four of our young advocates for the Policy Shark Tank competition! Colorado's undocumented graduates, despite earning degrees in critical fields, often face significant barriers to employment due to their immigration status. The Colorado Employment Pathways Support Act, which was researched and created by a group of our young advocates, focuses on investing back into these individuals and providing them with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed. This policy will help graduates to fully contribute their talents through personalized case management, financial assistance for employment-related costs, and partnerships with employers in high-need industries. By addressing these barriers, the EPSA strengthens Colorado's economy and ensures equity and opportunity for those who need it most.

■ **Fair Work Week**

Fair Work Week policies help young adults by providing predictable schedules, guaranteed rest between shifts, and compensation for last-minute changes, reducing stress and ensuring financial stability. These policies also prioritize offering additional hours to existing workers, protect against exploitative practices like on-call scheduling, and support young adults in balancing work with education or other responsibilities. A fair workweek policy will empower workers to build healthier lives and careers by fostering stability and fairness in industries where young people often work.

■ **Supporting: Creating and Supporting Career Pathways**

Increasing access to stackable credential programs, career pathways, and partnerships with industries in the workforce is an innovative and promising way to provide students with the education they need for advancement within an industry. This work will allow YI to ensure that we are working to help young adults thrive in Colorado. Additionally, blue-collar work and trades are often stigmatized despite being a viable career path for many students. We will work to provide more access to trade schools and apprenticeships.

■ **Supporting: Updating the Labor Peace Act**

The Labor Peace Act (LPA) is a unique labor law in Colorado that governs unionization and collective bargaining in the state. Enacted in 1943, it establishes a middle ground between strict "right-to-work" laws and pro-union policies seen in other states. The LPA balances workers' rights to organize and employers' interests in maintaining operational stability. YI will support updates to this policy to support more unions forming in Colorado and support young workers.