



Children's Hospital Colorado
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Lifting Children Up

2025 Advocacy Priorities:
The Year Ahead for Child Health





Since Children's Hospital Colorado's founding over a century ago, we have been unwavering in our dedication to building healthy futures for children and families in Colorado and around the country. We proudly see more, treat more and heal more kids than any hospital in our region. It's our mission to improve the health of children through the provision of high-quality, coordinated programs of patient care, education, research and advocacy. Advocacy is key to ensuring that our impact goes beyond the walls of our hospital, creating opportunities for a safer and healthier tomorrow for every child.

After every major election, there is an opportunity to reflect and reset on the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. The 2024 elections brought shifts in power at the federal level, with Donald Trump's reelection as president and Republicans gaining control of the U.S. Congress. In Colorado, Democrats maintained majorities in both the Senate and the House, and Governor Jared Polis enters his last two years in office.

As lawmakers here in Colorado and back in Washington, D.C., pivot to public policy priorities, the year ahead for child health in 2025 will again call us to push for protections for children

and their healthcare. Despite uncertainty in what lies ahead, what remains constant is our commitment to advance policies that improve the health of kids. We will advocate to meet the needs of children around the state including a focus on access to care, promoting children's mental health and well-being, and supporting health at every stage of a child's life. As ever, Children's Colorado will continue to be a voice for children in partnership with clinicians and other team members, and we invite you to come alongside us as we champion a strong and healthy future for all kids.

Strengthening Access to Care for All Kids

Access to care means that children across Colorado can receive the healthcare services that are right for them, in the right place and at the right time. To facilitate broad access to care, Children's Colorado will champion protecting and expanding existing investments in pediatric healthcare and supporting ongoing work to rebound from the pandemic.



Stabilizing health insurance coverage

Health insurance stability is crucial for a child's health because it ensures consistent access to medical care and preventive services that support their growth and development. Since the end of the public health emergency nearly two years ago, Colorado experienced one of the steepest declines in Medicaid enrollment in the country, with more than 200,000 children losing public insurance. In 2025, we will work toward solutions that ensure that Colorado kids regain coverage, whether public or private.



Protecting healthcare safety net programs

For nearly thirty years, the 340B Drug Pricing Program has helped nonprofit and other healthcare providers who serve a high number of low-income and uninsured patients to reduce the cost of outpatient drugs for patients. The savings generated from the discounted medications allow safety net providers like Children's Colorado to provide more comprehensive services and invest in whole child health. In 2025, we will work to protect the 340B Drug Pricing Program to ensure that safety net hospitals can continue to stretch resources for essential programs. We will also advocate for state and federal policy solutions to ensure access to lifesaving specialty treatments.



Preserving access to outpatient care

Children's Colorado has always been focused on providing advanced pediatric specialty care, close to home, for our patients. To maintain our commitment to offer high-quality, specialized pediatric care 24 hours a day, every day, facility fees are essential to supporting routine operations and filling gaps created by a fragmented payment system. Recent proposals at the state and federal level to eliminate facility fees would create barriers to community-based, integrated outpatient care, so Children's Colorado will work to keep these settings sustainably funded and accessible for the children who need it.



Inclusive care

Children's Colorado is committed to providing inclusive, compassionate care for all patients and families who need us. From adolescent health services to care for children who are immigrants or refugees, we will continue to advocate for the well-being and dignity of all our patients and families. In 2025, we and our partners will support and help implement the state's roll out of Cover All Coloradans, a new program that expands Medicaid eligibility for children and for patients during pregnancy, regardless of immigration status.



Budget prioritization

Because Children's Colorado is the largest provider of Medicaid services for children in Colorado, we always actively defend public investments in pediatric healthcare. Our role is especially urgent this year, at a time when the state is facing at least a \$672 million budget shortfall. Protecting state investments in healthcare will support providers' ability to continue to be able to offer high-quality, accessible care to all patients.

Maximizing federal resources: As part of our budget advocacy, we will also work with partners to advance a proposal to optimize Medicaid payments. For 15 years, the hospital provider fee program has ensured Medicaid coverage for hundreds of thousands of Coloradans by drawing down billions in federal funds, while also supporting and stabilizing hospitals statewide. Colorado now has an opportunity to strengthen this program, all within its current framework and guidelines, by drawing down at least an additional \$150 million to support Medicaid patients and hospitals across the state, without impacting the state budget.

Defending our ability to deliver high-quality care: Like all state Medicaid agencies, Colorado has an oversight program in place to ensure appropriate use of taxpayer dollars for healthcare services. However, by national standards, our state's approach has been burdensome and error-prone. We'll work with the legislature to reform this program so that, in the future, it can meet its important goals without adding extra bureaucracy to an already complex system.

Evolving the healthcare system toward value: As Medicaid advances alternative healthcare payment models, we will advocate for equitable design and reimbursement for Colorado pediatric providers. In 2025, there are a number of initiatives within Medicaid that will be transformative for children's health. Medicaid will launch a redesigned delivery system, the Accountable Care Collaborative 3.0, with goals of increased high-quality, accessible, equitable healthcare for Coloradans who rely on Medicaid.

Promoting Children's Mental Health and Well-being

At the heart of our mental health advocacy is the belief that every child and family deserves access to the mental health support and resources they need to thrive. The state has made important changes and investments in the past several years, and in 2025, Children's Colorado will continue to build on that progress to ensure a stronger, healthier future for all kids.

Removing barriers to care

Eliminating obstacles to children's mental health treatment means addressing unnecessary delays in care and promoting standardized criteria to ensure timely, equitable access to essential services. In 2025, Children's Colorado will engage with partners to remove insurance company barriers that can delay needed mental health treatment.

Social media reforms

In 2025, Children's Colorado will continue to speak up for policies that hold social media platforms accountable for creating a safer social media experience for youth. As social media use has dramatically increased over the past decade, the negative impacts on youth mental health have become more apparent. The teenage years are a pivotal time in brain development and research has shown that the rise in screen time and social media use have been linked to depression and anxiety, feelings of loneliness, disordered eating and poor sleep. After mixed results to find policy solutions last year, state and federal lawmakers will reconsider approaches to regulate social media companies.





Supporting Kids' Health at Every Age and Stage

At Children's Colorado, we know that kids are different from adults, requiring different types of care and support through every stage of development. Children's Colorado will work to ensure kids have what's needed to support growing bodies and developing minds from early childhood to early adulthood.

Giving every kid a healthy start

The first five years of a child's life are critical for their physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. Early childhood experiences have a long-term impact on a child's future, which makes it an important time to promote healthy habits and provide support and interventions. This year, Children's Colorado will work on several strategies to help build and support a strong early childhood health system in Colorado, including:

- Strengthening the state's Early Intervention system to ensure adequate support and resources for children under age two who have developmental delays.
- Joining with advocacy partners to formalize community-based pediatric primary care program, HealthySteps, that promote nurturing and healthy early development.
- Building the needed components of a strong Child Care Health Consultant system to help early childhood programs improve health, safety and quality of care.
- Supporting efforts to bolster maternal and early childhood mental health programs to support young families' mental health and well-being.

Healthier schools, healthier communities and healthier kids

Improving the conditions where children live, learn and play helps to promote whole child health. Whether it's at school, at home or in their communities, the places where children spend most of their time can help to establish lifelong healthy patterns and Children's Colorado will work to ensure these settings promote the health and safety of all children.

School meals: We know that kids who are hungry struggle to learn, and their health often suffers. Unfortunately, the state's new universal healthy school meals program faces a budget shortfall. Children's Colorado will watch for opportunities to support program changes that will help all kids get healthy, nutritious meals at school so they can focus on learning and growing.

Improving academic success and well-being in schools: In 2025, Children's Colorado will champion a policy to require school districts to create their own local policy on cell phone use during school hours, with flexibility to allow exceptions for medical reasons and disability accommodations. The goal is to reduce cell phone-related distractions in classroom settings, improve academic achievement and minimize the negative impacts of social media by promoting mental health and well-being.

Preparing for cardiac emergencies: Children's Colorado will be involved in school health policies that will focus on cardiac emergency preparedness. The policy will focus on middle school and high school athletic settings, ensuring they have a proper emergency plan in place for when a cardiac emergency occurs that includes elements such as proper automated external defibrillator (AED) placement, access and use to save lives.

Safe housing: Research has shown that children living in areas where housing is less affordable tend to have worse health, more behavioral problems and lower school performance. Children's Colorado will continue to advocate for legislation and monitor implementation of laws that ensure Colorado children have access to safe, stable and affordable housing options, while also advancing policies that can expand housing options for the healthcare workforce.



Promoting Whole Child Health at the Federal Level

Public policy and funding decisions made by lawmakers at the federal level will shape the future of health for children in our country, and Children's Colorado will continue to champion the unique needs of children with our federal delegation in 2025.



Preserving access to pediatric care

Medicaid is the largest health insurance program for children in the United States, covering more than 30 million children nationwide. The program serves a critical role in ensuring access to healthcare for children, particularly those from low-income families and those with medical complexity. Medicaid covers a wide range of services including doctor's visits, vaccinations, prescriptions and mental health services. In 2025, our attention in Washington, DC will remain focused on preserving robust access to Medicaid as a lifeline for children and families.



Helping children and families thrive

Children's Colorado will also continue to build a case for Congress to adopt legislation like the KIDS Health Act, which would promote whole child health by establishing innovative health insurance payment reforms to address a patient's social needs like food and housing. In 2025, Congress is also expected to reauthorize the Farm Bill, which impacts food and nutrition for children and families. We will advocate in partnership with a diverse coalition to sustain funding for the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) Program and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).







Pediatric research, workforce and public health priorities

Thanks to advances in care led and financed by children's hospitals across the country — including many developed at Children's Colorado — fewer children today die from complications and infections, more children survive a cancer diagnosis and babies still in the womb can receive lifesaving surgeries. As an academic medical center, advocating for pediatric medical research and the future pediatric healthcare workforce will remain a high priority in 2025. Additionally, with significant reforms to key agencies like the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) being potentially considered, Children's Colorado is committed to defending public health at the federal level by advocating for policies rooted in science and evidence. We will work to ensure that lawmakers and federal agencies prioritize the health and safety of children, addressing preventable diseases and emerging threats, while promoting long-term health solutions based on sound research.

Help Us Advance the Future of Child Health: Become A Child Health Champion!

At Children's Hospital Colorado, advocacy is a core pillar of our mission to improve child health in all the communities we serve. And we can't do it alone — we need advocates like you to come together and speak up for kids in public policy. Join our Child Health Champions advocacy network to be a part of building healthy futures for all kids.

-  childrenscolorado.org/Advocacy
-  advocacy@childrenscolorado.org
-  facebook.com/childhealthchampions
-  [@COChildChamps](https://twitter.com/COChildChamps)





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