



Community Health Center News

CHC Board Members Critical to Advocacy Efforts in D.C

Everybody has a different story about why they advocate for Community Health Centers (CHCs), but a common thread is right there in the name: “Community.” CHC advocates stand up for funding and federal recognition on behalf of themselves, their neighbors, and the shared understanding that affordable access to high-quality health care is a right, not a privilege.

In March, over 2,000 CHC staff, board members, advocates, and Primary Care Association (think CCHN) staff from across the country descended upon Washington D.C. to advocate for Community Health Centers and their communities. The National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) hosted their annual Policy and Issues Forum for the first time in person since the onset of COVID-19, and the energy in the air was palpable. All gathered to hear legislative updates and plan meetings at the Capitol, and the next day, fanned out on Capitol Hill to meet with their respective Members of Congress to explain not only *what* is needed to support Community Health Centers, but *why*.

This is where the magic of the board members came in. Community Health Centers are majority patient-led boards, meaning at least 51 percent of the board members at each CHC are also patients and members of the community – critical voices to speak up for themselves and their peers. Colorado CHC Board Members Carolina Flores Manross, Clinica Family Health; and Eddie Sierra, Denver Community Health Services, shared about their experience advocating in D.C, and the importance of doing so.

Of her time in D.C, Ms. Flores said “It made me realize that, when I was telling my story, I had power to influence... to see CHCs across the U.S. getting ready to tell their story – I could feel their hearts, even though I didn’t know them – we were all there together. It inspired me to keep telling my story – knowing there are so many of us doing the same thing for others.”

IN THIS ISSUE

Community Health Center News	1-9
Policy Update	10-11
CKF Update	12
CHPA Staff Update	12-13



Carolina Flores Manross with Senator Michael Bennet.

Mr. Sierra noted: "I always thought it was Red and Blue. But getting to D.C., I realized it is bipartisan... you just have different stories to tell based on who you are talking to...the stories connect all of the good things that we do."

The first Community Health Centers were started in the 1960s to provide affordable, high quality primary health care in communities that did not previously have access. CHCs continue to serve that purpose, constantly innovating and updating their care. The people cared for by CHCs are why CHCs exist, why staff show up for work each day, and why we keep advocating for access to affordable, quality care. . . Ms. Flores' final message to other advocates? "Be present and show up – no matter where: in Washington, at your local clinic, at a networking event. We need to be the walking billboards of what we believe."



Eddie Sierra, second from left, stands in front of Rep. Dianna DeGette's Washington D.C. office with other Denver Health Community Health Services Board members and staff, and Vacheria Keys, Director of Policy and Public Affairs at NACHC.

CCHN's 2023 César Chávez Day Video

Every year, Colorado Community Health Network celebrates the innovative, hard-fought, and lasting contributions of César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and all the leaders and advocates involved in the Farmworker's Rights Movement.

The Farmworker's Rights Movement sought to establish basic worker benefits, then to address other needs such as housing and health care, especially for people and communities previously left out of the system. Our CHC roots are tied to the Farmworker's Rights Movement, and we work every day to carry on that legacy.

View [CCHN's 2023 video](#) in celebration of César Chávez Day.

PCHC Clinic is First in North America to be Verified Zero Energy

The newest Pueblo Community Health Center (PCHC) clinic – the East Side Clinic, was recently updated from "emerging" zero energy to "verified" by the New Buildings Institute (NBI). This makes PCHC the first zero energy outpatient health care facility in North America, according to NBI.

The pursuit of zero energy for the East Side Clinic began in the early stages of design with a fully integrated process and the development of a zero energy road map with RTA Architects, MEP engineering consultant Farnsworth Group, and PCHC leadership. In addition, the city of Pueblo adopted a resolution that set a vision to use 100 percent renewable energy by 2035. As a leading health care provider in the community and a non-profit, PCHC wanted to align its organizational sustainability goals with the community's goals.

Zero energy is accomplished when the total site energy use is offset by total site energy production. "Energy the building uses is provided entirely by the building itself," Donald Moore, PCHC CEO stated. "Through a solar panel system, geothermal underground well system, and state-of-the-art insulation and lighting controls." The project achieved greater than a 50 percent reduction in energy use and 66 percent cost savings compared to PCHC's next best operating building.

Through innovative ideas and action, like this zero energy building, we can prevent further climate change and protect our health at the same time. Unsurprisingly, the patients served by CHCs are also among the populations most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Efforts like this to stop pollution from fossil fuels perfectly align with the root of our work – healthier Coloradans.

The East Side Clinic opened its doors to patients on Jan. 10, 2022. The new clinic includes a pharmacy, lab, and dental services, in addition to medical and behavioral health care. The clinic will allow PCHC to serve an additional 5,000 patients over the next 10 years.

Colorado Advocates Recognized at a National Level

Colorado staff have continued the legacy as national leaders in advocacy. Maureen Maxwell, CCHN's Senior Manager for Federal Policy and Communications, and Donald Moore, CEO of PCHC, were recognized at the NACHC Policy and Issues Forum (P&I) for their outstanding dedication and skill in advocating for Community Health Centers.

Ms. Maxwell, who has been committed to the Community Health Center Movement for almost two decades, was presented with the Jose E. Camacho Grassroots Hall of Fame award. As a self-described "History Geek," Ms. Maxwell's commitment to the mission of CHCs is unparalleled. Her ability to understand and translate the importance of federal policy has resulted in strong commitment from CHC CEOs and key contacts to advocate when called upon.

Ms. Maxwell's work in connecting communications and advocacy also plays a critical role in CCHN's ability to advocate at the state level – ensuring that opportunities to showcase the important work of CHCs in the media are well-advertised and shared via various channels. Ms. Maxwell always goes above and beyond to connect staff, media, legislators, (friends, neighbors, baristas) to the mission of CHCs.

She is an expert and a leader, and could not be more deserving of this prestigious recognition.

Mr. Moore, who is also a tenured legend among Colorado's Community Health Centers, was selected for the Elizabeth K. Cooke Advocacy MVP Award. Mr. Moore leads by example, and his example is always heart-centered. If you ever get a chance to walk around PCHC with him, make sure you plan extra time: he greets all as though they are old friends – and his energy is contagious.

Mr. Moore also maintains great personal/professional relationships with his state representatives and senators, always going out of the way to invite them to PCHC, reaching out to share messages of congratulations on important legislative victories, nominating them for awards, and making sure they feel comfortable asking him for help with their top priorities. All of Mr. Moore's state representatives have his personal cell phone number (and he theirs), and he has created an environment where PCHC is at the forefront of their thoughts when discussing legislation that will impact primary health care.

Mr. Moore shows exceptional advocacy activism and leadership as chair of CCHN's Public Affairs Committee; as the key contact for Rep. Lauren Boebert (CD3), encompassing most of the western half of the state; and as advocacy leader for his CHC and Board. Colorado Community Health Centers, our patients, and our communities, are so lucky Mr. Moore chose to put his exceptional passion, knowledge, and leadership skills into this work.

Congratulations and thank you, Maureen and Donald!



Donald Moore and Maureen Maxwell holding their awards at the NACHC reception in Washington D.C.

Tepeyac Doctor Recognized as the 2023 Family Physician of the Year

Tepeyac Community Health Center's Chief Health Officer, Dr. Pamela Valenza, was awarded the 2023 Family Physician of the Year award from the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians (CAFP). This award recognizes an outstanding family physician who provides exceptional care, enhances their community, is a role model professionally and personally, and is an exemplary representative of the profession.

Dr. Valenza checks all of those boxes. Since joining the Tepeyac team in 2018, Dr. Valenza has led efforts to achieve Patient Centered Medical Home recognition, implement a 340B pharmacy program, make Tepeyac an adolescent champion clinic, and help design the new Elyria-Swansea clinic. All the while, her clinical and leadership guidance led to expanded services, quality, and access to care.



Dr. Pamela Valenza.

Dr. Valenza is also passionate about teaching and community engagement. In an [interview with CAFPP](#) (p. 14), Dr. Valenza shared: "My goal is to bring students into the community here and they will continue that interest serving similar communities wherever they go in their careers." The article continues: "Tepeyac encourages its students to really understand barriers to care for underserved populations and learn about the resources available to our patients in order to understand their own impact beyond just the day-to-day clinical work."

Congratulations, Dr. Valenza, on this well-deserved recognition.

Colorado CHCs Leading the Way in Medical Dental Integration for Chronic Disease

Several Colorado Community Health Centers are working to advance medical-dental integration to improve oral health and chronic disease outcomes. Did you know that worsening periodontal disease and poor oral health are clearly linked to diabetes and hypertension?

Through the Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, Oral Health Integration (DCVDOHI) project, funded by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment with the support of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, five CHCs are identifying patients who may be at risk for (pre)diabetes and/or hypertension, screening for these conditions, and facilitating bidirectional referrals between medical and dental clinics to address oral health and chronic disease needs. The five CHCs are Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, STRIDE Community Health Center, Summit Community Care Clinic, Valley-Wide Health System, and Uncompahgre Medical Center.

CCHN staff provide practice facilitation and quality improvement support for their efforts. This work was recently featured in the [California Dental Association Journal's December 2022 issue](#) (see p. 25). The article describes Colorado's history of leadership in integrated care, featuring efforts in which CHCs were involved, highlights collaborations that contributed to the DCVDOHI project, outlines implementation steps, and illustrates successes and challenges in integrating oral health and chronic disease work.

PCHC offers Low-Cost Sports Physicals in School-Based Wellness Centers

Pueblo Community Health Center (PCHC) is again offering affordable sports physicals for athletes in both middle and high school enrolled in either Pueblo School Districts 60 or 70, as well as Chavez/Huerta K-12 Preparatory Academy.

The cost for physicals at all locations is \$30. Insurance can be billed if it has been at least one year since the students' last well child check.

Dental Integration Through the Rocky Mountain Network of Oral Health

Denver Health is the Rocky Mountain Network of Oral Health (RoMoNOH) project lead, facilitating the integration of oral health services into primary care settings for young children.

RoMoNOH is a five-year Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-funded project to develop a regional Network of Oral Health Integration in CHCs across Arizona, Colorado, Montana, and Wyoming.

Deirdre Kane, RDH, Denver Health, shared the following in a RoMoNOH [newsletter](#) in March: “While each medical clinic is still growing their medical-dental integration models and do not yet have full time dental integration, I see more utilization by patients and support from providers every month, which is very gratifying. One of the things I’m most proud of is the ability to link patients and families, during their medical visits, to a variety of oral health services. Because dental and medical are co-located in the same buildings I can facilitate a warm handoff to ensure patients with more urgent needs can get scheduled and seen for follow up care quickly.”

CCHN is contracted with Denver Health to provide practice facilitation and program management for the RoMoNOH project in Colorado CHCs. During this remaining project period, participating CHCs will work on increasing the percentage of high-risk children ages zero-40 months who have received at least three fluoride varnish applications, operationalizing the integration process, and ensuring project sustainability.

RoMoNOH has several project goals, including integrating oral health and primary health care for those most at risk for oral diseases, preventing disease, and eliminating disparities.

2023 Inspiration Award Winners

Staff members from three CHCs across the state won the 2023 annual Inspiration Awards from Youth Healthcare Alliance, formerly called the Colorado Association for School-Based Health Care (CASBHC). Youth Healthcare Alliance is an important partner for CCHN and Colorado CHCs to ensuring access to quality health care for youth in schools. Below are comments from colleagues written in each awardee’s nomination statement.

Sonja O’Leary, MD, medical director for SBHCs, Denver Community Health Services: “A true leader inspires. Dr. O’Leary does not simply inspire us, she empowers us. Empowers us to be a successful team. Empowers us to fight relentlessly for our patients ... and to give our entire heart to the students we serve.”

Karen Augustyn, program manager, Summit Community Care Clinic: “Karen is passionate about decreasing barriers for patients and being a resource for parents and the school. While being short-staffed in multiple positions, she has never taken a step back from the mission.”

Steven Martinez, LCSW, LAC, behavioral health provider, MarillacHealth: “He has become a trusted adult in the lives of many of our students that are lacking good adult mentors or have not found an adult they can connect with at the school. Steven is providing services in such a way that accessing mental health care is becoming destigmatized in our school, and it’s amazing to watch!”

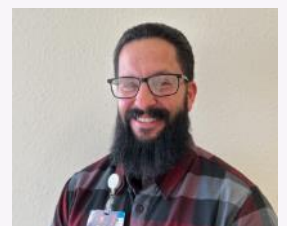
Nancy Ortega, Kids First Health Care, and Amanda Singh, Pediatric Partners of the Southwest, also won awards this year. Congratulations and thank you to all winners.



Sonja O’Leary, MD.



Karen Augustyn.



Steven Martinez, LCSW, LAC.

Northwest Colorado Health Offering Kids Dental Care Through Mobile Unit

From February through May, Northwest Colorado Health offered dental appointments to children through their School-Based Health mobile unit at the Boys and Girls Club in Craig. The mobile unit decreased one of the main barriers to care: parents having to take off work or pull their kids out of school for an appointment.

As Stephanie Einfeld, CEO of Northwest Colorado Health, stated in a [Craig Daily Press article](#), “We began offering school-based health dental services to address an unmet need for oral health care services for children in our area. This new model of care breaks down access barriers for many children and community members in need of dental care. Long term, our vision is to use this mobile unit to serve multiple schools and other locations in the region and potentially add medical and behavioral health care as needs are identified by the community.”

The mobile unit offered dental screenings, exams, cleanings, sealants, fluoride treatments and x-rays. Access like this to preventative oral health care can have many benefits on a child’s quality of life. Learning good oral health habits at a young age can also help avoid bigger issues into adulthood.



Northwest Colorado Health's School-Based Health mobile unit.

CCHN's Grow Your Own Project

CCHN staff is working with the National Institute of Medical Assistant Advancement (NIMAA) on a “Grow Your Own” project. This project focuses on individuals from the age 18-to- 24, and aims to introduce them to careers in health care through medical assistant (MA) training. Through this project, two Community Health Centers and two safety net clinics have created new partnerships with local education entities, and three individuals graduated in April to start their career as MAs.

This project has highlighted the different skills and resources each clinic needs to operate an in-house MA training program. With this learning opportunity, CCHN staff have helped CHCs adapt to new learning modalities that best fit their clinic with NIMAA or local community colleges. NIMAA has also shared [UpSkill](#) opportunities to help already established MAs advance in their career and continue to learn and grow.

Sarah Macrander, Senior Health Center Operations Manager at CCHN noted: “Medical Assistants are vital to the delivery of high-quality primary care and an important entry point to health care careers. Though it is a rewarding career option, it is also important that staff have access to avenues by which to continue to grow and develop as professionals. These unique partnerships help reduce barriers to that growth while keeping staff in their communities. We hope to see employers leverage these partnerships as a tool for staff development and retention.”

CCHN partnered with Envisions Strategy Group to help establish learning agreements with three higher education entities. These agreements allow students completing their MA training through NIMAA to earn around 30 credit hours towards an associate’s degree from those institutions. Higher education partners include Community College of Denver, Colorado Mountain College, and Colorado Mesa University. This project is set to be completed in December 2023 with continued effort to support CHCs train and grow MAs.

River Valley Celebrates Grand Opening of New Delta Clinic

River Valley Family Health Centers has moved the Delta clinic and Convenient Care Center, which serves as Delta's only urgent care facility, to an expansive new 18,000 square foot building that opened May 15. The increase in medical, dental, and mental health rooms will allow staff to better serve patients and see more of them at once.

The Convenient Care Center, which is open six days a week for walk-in visits, had four patients waiting on opening day – before 7:30 a.m. The demand is high and now the staff has better space to take care of the immediate needs of the patients.

After sharing a space in Delta with the former Center for Mental Health (CMH), and then Axis Health for five years, the staff welcomes space to spread out, grow, and increase services. The new facility houses 20 exam rooms, seven dental operatories, and four therapy rooms. In June, a drive-through pharmacy will open at the facility. In addition, the call center moved from a cramped room in Olathe to a new open space with windows in the Delta building, as have several administrative offices, formerly housed in Olathe and Montrose.

After being under construction for 14 months, River Valley will celebrate the new facility with an open house and tour on June 13 from 4:00 - 6:00p.m. MST at 1250 Valley View Dr., Delta, Colo. This event is open to the public.



Ribbon Cutting at the River Valley Delta Clinic's Grand Opening.

Tortillas for Tepeyac Annual Fundraiser – Another Grand Success

On Friday, May 12, community leaders and local celebrities rolled up their sleeves, grabbed a rolling pin, and showcased their tortilla-making talents in support of Tepeyac Community Health Center. This annual event, which has been happening for over two decades, is a unique and exciting fundraiser for Tepeyac. This year, the CHC raised more than \$10,000 to support operations at the new Elyria-Swansea clinic.

Read the [Denverite article](#) for more details, pictures, and laughs from the event.

Colorado CHCs Welcome Members of Congress to Their Clinics

There is nothing like an in-person visit to a Community Health Center to understand their mission and the commitment to their patients and communities. Colorado CHC staff appreciate visits by local, state, and federal officials to their sites.

Colorado Members of Congress included CHC visits in their schedules during district and state work periods. On Feb. 21, U.S. Senator John Hickenlooper toured Tepeyac Community Health Center in the Elyria-Swansea neighborhood in Denver. On May 4, U.S. Representative Lauren Boebert (CD3) toured the Pueblo Community Health Center East Side clinic. In February, she toured Mountain Family Health Centers' Rifle location. Also on May 4, U.S. Rep. Ken Buck visited Sunrise Community Health in Loveland.

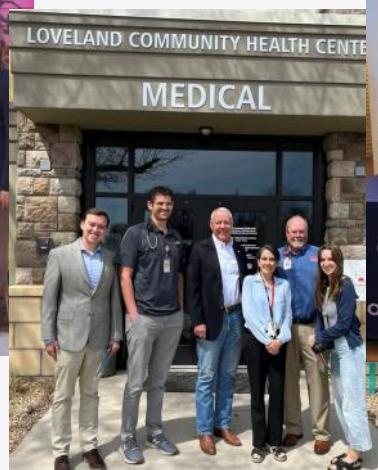
On May 10, Governor Jared Polis visited Clinica Family Health's Thorton site to sign two bills passed by the Colorado General Assembly. Gov. Polis signed a bill authorizing the Department of Health Care Policy & Financing (HCPF) to seek federal authorization to allow community health workers to be reimbursable under Medicaid and another bill that limits charges the pharmacy benefit managers can put on patients.

The Colorado Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) is touring the state to understand better the behavioral health needs of people in Colorado. Interim BHA Commissioner, Michelle Barnes, and other BHA staff members toured Clinica Family Health Center Pecos Clinic on May 17. During the visit, BHA staff saw Clinica's pod model in action, and learned about how Clinica integrates behavioral health providers into medical visits. Interim Director Barnes commented that the integrated care model she saw at Clinica is the direction we want to be going as a state.



Donald Moore, CEO of PCHC, welcomes Rep. Boebert at PCHC East Side, May 4.

Clinical and administrative staff from Tepeyac Community Health Center with Sen. Hickenlooper, center, Feb. 21.



Staff from Sunrise Community Health with Rep. Ken Buck, center, May 4.



Gov. Polis reaches for a pen to sign bills, flanked by Kim Bimestefer, HCPF Executive Director left, and State Sen. Kyle Mullica, (SD 24), right, May 17.

CCHN Policy and Issues Forum

In late February, Community Health Center staff and board members gathered in Denver to attend the annual CCHN Policy and Issues (P&I) forum. It was the first in-person P&I in three years, and the energy was high as snow fell across the city. On the first day of the event, folks from across the state met to learn and prepare for advocating at the state capitol the following day. For many, this was the first chance to see colleagues (and oftentimes, friends) from other CHCs in years. Amid focused learning, and an important Q&A with state partners, there was laughter, elbow bumps, and even a few hugs.

In the evening, CCHN hosted a legislator reception and awards ceremony to honor some of Colorado's finest CHC advocates. The Legislator Community Health Champion Awards were given to Rep. Mary Young (HD 50) and Senator Sonya Jacquez-Lewis (SD 17). The Media Community Health Champion award was presented to Eric Galatas, Public News Service, for elevating important health care stories.

CCHN also honored two CHC staff, Fátima Groom, Policy and Public Affairs Manager, and Mitzi Moran, CEO, both from Sunrise Community Health. Mrs. Groom received the Community Health Advocate Award. She has

helped to elevate Sunrise's advocacy program and ensure that Sunrise is a trusted voice in the communities they serve. She is a passionate leader and is dedicated to Sunrise's mission, patients, and communities.

When one of CCHN's legislative priorities was in trouble during the last session, staff were able to call on Mrs. Groom to get in touch with key legislators. Her quick and thoughtful action truly made the difference in the vote. She is always willing to go above and beyond for the mission.

Mrs. Moran was honored with the Stanley J. Brasher Community Health Gratitude Award. She has been a life-long advocate for our most vulnerable populations. Under her leadership, Sunrise has more than tripled in size and today is a recognized state and national leader in health information technology adoption, integrated health care services, safety net collaborations, and professional health education.

As an example of Mrs. Moran's extraordinary ability to build deep relationships, hospital CEOs have reached out to her when CHCs have faced federal funding cliffs to see what they could do to ensure funding was maintained. As Sunrise CEO, she asks that all of her staff and board members register as CHC advocates, and fosters a sense of advocacy in her employees through creative competitions and learning experiences for staff.

Congratulations to all awardees – keep up the good work!



Staff from Clinica Family Health, Salud Family Health, and CCHN's state government affairs representative, Jennifer Miles, present the Legislator Community Health Champion Award to Sen. Sonya Jacquez-Lewis, center-right, holding the award.



Simon Hambidge, CEO of Denver Community Health Services, left, presents the Media Community Health Champion award to Eric Galatas, right.



Rep. Mary Young accepts the Legislator Community Health Champion Award.



Fátima Groom, left, and Mitzi Moran, right, hold their awards at the CCHN P&I.

Policy Update

Wins for Community Health Centers at the State Legislature

This year's state legislative session wrapped up on May 8, 2023, and resulted in several important wins for Colorado's Community Health Centers.

The biggest win is a new allocation to the state's Primary Care Fund. This allocation, which is for the upcoming state fiscal year, will benefit Community Health Centers and other primary care clinics that care for a high number of patients who are enrolled in Medicaid or uninsured. The Joint Budget Committee (JBC) heard the concerns raised by Community Health Centers about the financial strain they are already experiencing with workforce challenges, and the anticipated increases in uninsured patients as the Public Health Emergency winds down. The Primary Care Fund receives a portion of the state's Tobacco Tax revenue and is then federally matched. With this new allocation from the JBC and with federal matching funds, \$14 million more will be available through the Primary Care Fund this year to help CHCs care for uninsured patients.



Shoshi Preuss, Policy Manager, CCHN, just after testifying to the JBC in favor of CHC funding in the state budget.

CHCs will also benefit from changes to state Medicaid policies for their patients. The state will remove Medicaid co-pays for most Medicaid-covered services and will remove the \$1,500 cap on dental services for adults with Medicaid coverage. Both of these changes take effect July 1, 2023, and will help expand the ability of patients with Medicaid coverage to get the care they need. Through another bill, HB23-1300, the state will study the impact of lengthening Medicaid continuous eligibility for certain populations and will apply for a waiver to expand continuous eligibility for kids aged zero to three, and adults leaving Department of Corrections facilities. CCHN looks forward to the results of the study, which may help inform future coverage expansions which may help more people with Medicaid stay enrolled.

The state legislature passed two bills that will help with ongoing workforce shortages in the state. HB23-083 will allow CHCs to have more flexibility in supervision requirements for experienced Physician Assistants. This

change will allow CHCs to build more efficient care teams and further meet patient needs. Also, CHCs that employ Community Health Workers will soon be able to receive some reimbursement through Medicaid, thanks to SB23-002. These members of the care team help patients navigate the health system and connect to social supports. Both bills will help implement innovative workforce opportunities.

CCHN extends our gratitude to all of the CHC staff who spent time testifying on bills and to the state legislators who continue to stand up for CHCs.

"We need to be the walking billboards of what we believe"

- Carolina Flores Manross

[Sign up](#) to Advocate for CHCs

Colorado Joins National Advocacy Push at Annual NACHC Conference

At the annual spring NACHC conference in Washington, D.C., the Colorado crowd visited all 10 Colorado Congressional offices, meeting with most representatives and both senators, and with Congressional staff when representatives were unable to attend.

In each office, Colorado CHCs described their comprehensive and integrated primary health care services, the ways they adjusted care during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and changing health care landscape it produced, and how CHCs are taking the lessons learned and their 50-plus years of experience in health care to move on beyond the pandemic. Top legislative issues discussed included the deep funding shortfall that the combined impact of inflation; expiring federal funding for the American Rescue Plan Act, COVID-19 testing and treatment, and federal funding of the CHC program that needs periodic renewal by Congress; increased workforce costs and shortages; and end of special Medicaid eligibility that was enacted to help people who lost their jobs during the pandemic maintain access to health care.

CCHN's analysis of these combined forces shows that Colorado CHCs are facing a \$100 million funding shortfall, if Congress and the state legislature do not act to help. CHC Board members explained to their representatives and senators the value and accessibility of health care at CHCs, and staff members explained the need for Congressional investment in the future of CHCs to assure continuation of CHC services. Board and staff members also highlighted the savings to the health care system that the CHC model of care provides, including providing \$1.2 billion in cost savings to the state's health care system and \$1.7 billion that CHCs contribute to Colorado's economy.



Rep. Yadira Caraveo, (CD8), center in light blue dress, meets with staff and board members of Sunrise Community Health, Clinica Family Health, and Salud Family Health, at her Washington, D.C. office.



Left to right: Ethan Kerns, Salud Chief Dental Director; John Santistevan, Salud, holding Rep. Crow's 2023 Distinguished Health Champion Award; Representative Jason Crow, holding his 2020 Community Health Defender Award; Laura Schwartz, Salud COO. Due to pandemic travel concerns, Colorado CHCs were not able to present Rep. Crow with his 2020 award until this year.



Rep. Joe Neguse, (CD2), center, holding his Distinguished Community Health Advocate Award, with staff and board members of Clinica Family Health, Salud Family Health, Northwest Colorado Health, and CCHN, at his Washington, D.C. office.



Rep. Brittney Pettersen (CD7), left, listens as Emily Ptaszek, President and CEO, Peak Vista Community Health Centers, explains priority legislative issues for Colo. CHCs. Adam Finkel, standing, is Rep. Pettersen's Deputy Chief of Staff.

CKF Update

Enrollment Staff Take on the End of the Public Health Emergency

Multiple Tools in Use to Ease the Year-Long “Unwinding” Process

The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency (PHE) ended on May 11, but the year-long process of unwinding, or checking eligibility for each Health First Colorado (Colorado’s Medicaid program) and Child Health Plan *Plus* (CHP+) member has just begun. During the PHE, Health First Colorado and CHP+ members were locked-in to coverage. This meant that during the last three years, members stayed enrolled in coverage regardless of changes that would otherwise disqualify them, like an increase in income.

Now that the PHE has ended, the state is reviewing eligibility for the 1.78 million members, one in four Coloradans, and will send renewal paperwork to those who cannot be re-enrolled automatically. This process is referred to as the “unwind,” and will take 12 months in Colorado.

Some members can be renewed automatically. This happens when the state has enough information in their eligibility system and can verify members' information electronically. When a member is renewed this way, they will get a letter in the mail letting them know they are still enrolled. If a member cannot be renewed electronically, the state will send them renewal paperwork to complete and return.

Individuals who receive renewal paperwork should respond right away by providing any requested information, signing, and returning the paperwork. Members will receive their renewal paperwork during their regular renewal month – the month during which they initially enrolled. Paperwork can be returned to a member’s county human or social services department, or can be completed online through Colorado.gov/PEAK or by using the PEAKhealth app.

Enrollment teams at CHCs have been preparing for the unwind for the past several years, understanding the likelihood of confusion and stress that it will put on their patients and communities. Enrollment staff are communicating to patients, conducting direct calling and texting campaigns, hanging posters in waiting rooms, handing out flyers at the front desk, running social media campaigns, working with partners on in-person events, and training other CHC staff to understand and communicate the situation to patients, or at least know who to ask for help.

The persistence in asking, advocating, and understanding the minute details of this confusing process make enrollment staff the heroes of this story. It’s game time, and they’re ready to go. If you have questions about the end of the PHE, ask enrollment staff at your CHC, or email Liz Tansey, CCHN’s in-house expert, at ltansey@cchn.org.

CHPA Staff Update

Brandi Gordon

Brandi Gorgon is the Health Care Data Reporting Coordinator at Community Health Provider Alliance (CHPA). Ms. Gordon graduated from her local community college with an associate degree to be a physical therapist assistant. Shortly after graduation, she pivoted from working in an outpatient physical therapy role into a data specialist role at a Delaware hospital in the trauma department, which is where she found her love for health care data. She enjoys seeing how much of a positive impact data can have on improving patients’ outcomes and experiences. Ms. Gordon is currently pursuing her bachelor of science in computer science. In her free time, she enjoys mountain biking and volunteering as a coach for a local women, girls, and non-binary mountain biking team. She also enjoys spending time with her partner and their two cats.

Caliay Pratt

Caliay Pratt is a Risk Adjustment and Quality Specialist at CHPA. Ms. Pratt started working in a billing office administering account receivables when she realized that she enjoyed the medical coding side of the revenue cycle. In 2017 she received her Certified Professional Coders (CPC) certification through the American Academy of Professional Coders (AAPC). She received three other licenses through AAPC as well. Ms. Pratt has worked in private practice, hospitals, and rural health clinics as a medical coder and biller for the past seven years. Most recently she served as a documentation improvement expert where she delivered provider education, coder education, and documentation and hierarchical condition category (HCC) auditing for a large multi-specialty group. She has two office assistants, a border collie named Tyson and a corgi named Brodie. In her free time, she enjoys photographing wildlife across the state of Colorado as well as fishing and camping with her spouse and dogs.

Heather Martinez, RN

Heather Martinez is the Practice Transformation Coach at CHPA. Ms. Martinez has 16 years of experience as a Registered Nurse that includes pediatric inpatient care, community behavioral health care, corrections nursing, and most recently, population health management in the primary care setting. . The more Ms. Martinez learned about population health management, and the positive impact this approach can have on not just individual patients and their caregivers, but on entire patient populations, there was no question she had found her place within health care. Ms. Martinez's experience within population health management includes developing a successful team of case managers, educating medical providers and care teams on annual wellness visit processes, and successfully working with multiple payors on varied value-based programs. In her spare time, she enjoys mountain biking throughout Colorado with her spouse, son, and three dogs in their little red camper van.

Paula Thingelstad, CPC

Paula Thingelstad is a Risk Adjustment and Quality Specialist at CHPA. She attended college at the University of Arkansas with the desire to participate in the nursing program, eventually shifting to Health Information Management (HIM). She became certified by the American Association of Professional Coders (AAPC) as a medical coder in January 2006. Mrs. Thingelstad worked for Indian Health Services for six years as a coder, biller, and accounts receivable clerk. After that, she worked for a rural health care clinic providing coding services for two years. Then she found her niche in the risk adjustment area.. She participates in her local AAPC Chapter where she served as Vice President from 2021-2022. She is married and has six children. She is also an avid dart thrower and enjoys camping, fishing, spending time with family, and creating projects on her Cricut machine.

Richelle Griffiths

Richelle Griffiths is a Risk Adjustment and Quality Specialist at CHPA. She attended San Diego Mesa College in 2012, participating in the Registered Health Information Technologist (RHIT) program. She graduated with her associate degree and certification as a Registered Health Information Technician in Health Information Management. She later became certified by the American Health Information Management Association as a medical coder in March 2014. Over the past nine years, Ms. Griffiths has worked as a contract coder for multiple hospital and physician networks around the country, strengthening her skills in many coding specialties. Most recently, she served as a clinical documentation integrity specialist, auditing provider coding as a risk adjustment coder/auditor. She has a 10-year-old son and has adopted multiple animals. If she is not working or playing Minecraft or Roblox with her son, she enjoys woodworking and rehabbing furniture she buys at yard sales or thrift stores.

Spring 2023 Newsletter Contributors

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About CCHN

The Colorado Community Health Network (CCHN) is the unified voice for Colorado's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs) and their patients. CHCs provide a health care home for more than 855,000 of their community members – more than one in seven people in Colorado - from 63 of the state's 64 counties. Without CHCs, hundreds of thousands of Colorado's low-income families and individuals would have no regular source of health care. CCHN's mission is to increase access to high quality health care for people in need in Colorado. For more information about CCHN, please visit <https://cchn.org/>.

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