

# COLORADO FISCAL INSTITUTE

In 2014, The Colorado Trust launched the **Health Equity Advocacy (HEA) Strategy**, a multi-phased investment in building a strong and diverse field of health equity advocates to ensure equitable health outcomes for Colorado's most vulnerable. A centerpiece of the second phase of this strategy (2015-2016) included providing financial and capacity-building support to a cohort of direct service, community organizing, and policy advocacy organizations across the state. This support was designed to strengthen individual and collective capacity to "seed" an emerging health equity advocacy field in Colorado.

The following is part of a "**Seeds of the Field**" series of profiles of each of the 17 cohort members funded in the second phase of the HEA Strategy.

## Seeding a Health Equity Advocacy Field: The Story of Colorado Fiscal Institute

As an organization that focuses on research and public policy to advance tax and budget equity that promotes economic prosperity, the [Colorado Fiscal Institute](#) (CFI) has been an important partner in building a health equity advocacy field throughout Colorado. CFI's mission is to provide credible, independent and accessible information and analysis of fiscal and economic issues facing Colorado. To accomplish this, CFI aims to inform and influence policy debates and contribute to sound decisions that improve the well-being of individuals, communities and the state as a whole.

CFI uniquely contributes to the field by bringing to bear its expertise in fiscal and economic policies and highlighting the policy implications for working families in Colorado. CFI recognizes the importance of income disparity as a social determinant of

health, and the role tax policy and public investment play in the inequity that affects health outcomes for communities. As such, in Phase 1 of the HEA Strategy, CFI expanded its research to produce and disseminate a quarterly health equity bulletin, “Health Divides,” which examines equity and economic issues in health care. In addition, CFI began fostering partnerships with other HEA cohort members to identify applied research opportunities with diverse communities, provide and support cohort members’ use of economic data to bolster their work, and highlight opportunities for community members to share their stories in policy advocacy campaigns.

### CFI’s Phase 2 Work

During Phase 2, CFI continued to expand its health equity advocacy focus in two ways: 1) by continuing to pursue tax and budget policies that support widespread prosperity by increasing opportunities for income growth for low-, moderate-, and middle-income families; and 2) partnering in economic research and policy advocacy efforts with other organizations on community-identified priorities.

CFI dedicated itself to informing the public about what increasing minimum wages would mean for economic justice for Coloradans, as well as how suggested changes to the process by which the constitution can be amended could impact civic participation and the ability of the state to fund important priorities. CFI also supported voter engagement and education efforts that both encouraged people to vote and provided data on each of the measures to inform voters in making their decisions.

CFI’s participation in capacity-building activities strengthened the organization’s ability to be a leader in health equity advocacy work in Colorado. Throughout Phase 2, CFI staff participated in various workshops and activities to build their understanding and work in racial equity. For instance, almost all CFI staff attended Undoing Racism trainings and the Facing Race conference, both of which emphasized the importance of taking a systemic approach to understanding the complexity of race and how to move toward racial equity in institutions.



**We are now really committed as an organization that when we’re doing any kind of research, we always have it broken out by race and income and gender. [Also,] when designing our research model and questions, we are now intentionally engaging with partners both inside the cohort and outside the cohort.”**

– Carol Hedges,  
Executive Director

Additionally, CFI began working with other organizations to conduct research that is centered on Latino and immigrant communities in Colorado. Through these efforts, CFI produced [\*Comparing Colorado Care: An Analysis of Health Care Costs for Latino and Immigrant Coloradans\*](#), a report that examined the impact that Colorado Care would have on Latino and immigrant communities. Due to limited data sources, CFI worked with other organizations to gather survey data from Latino and immigrant community members to provide a deeper understanding on whether immigrants access health care and how much they spend on health care each year. Carol Hedges, CFI's executive director, found this experience to be "incredibly valuable," noting it has transformed the way that CFI approaches research by engaging communities in the research. Hedges added, "We have slowed down the process...we build in more time upfront...because we were asking them to help design the entire data gathering process to be more culturally competent. It's been transformational in the way we do research."




*CFI staff with Professor John Powell at CFI's 2017 Fiscal Forum, "Bridging the Divide: Colorado's Race to Equity"*

### Laying the Groundwork for an Emerging Field

Looking back at Phase 2, CFI staff stated that more work needs to happen to continue building the field of health equity advocacy in Colorado. CFI continues to be a leader in research and advocacy, and the expansion of its work to include direct research with affected communities has been impactful for the organization. CFI staff are excited to continue working with other community-based organizations in engaging Latino and other communities in

research to highlight the health equity needs of often underrepresented groups.

CFI will continue pushing for fair state and federal tax and budget policies and publishing briefs, reports, and blog posts to advocate for working communities across the state—with a particular focus on racial and economic equity. Bringing in a lens of health equity, CFI also plans to continue publishing the "Health Divides" bulletin to showcase disaggregated data for communities and their barriers to accessible and quality healthcare. This platform also highlights best practices and technological innovations that can improve access and decrease healthcare costs for communities. CFI recognizes



that the ever-changing context of state and federal policies may challenge health equity advocacy initiatives. However CFI will continue to rise to the challenge in its efforts to push health equity advocacy forward in Colorado, focusing foremost on tax code changes that can improve equity outcomes across the state.

## Looking Forward

Beginning in 2017, the 17 HEA cohort members, including CFI, are launching a new phase of work focused on further cultivating the seeds collectively planted across the state in Phase 2. Ultimately, guided by common values and empowered communities, cohort members will be aligning their change efforts to dismantle structural and racial inequities and build equitable health systems so that all Coloradans can thrive. CFI is poised to serve as a leader in this collective endeavor.

### Highlights: Colorado Fiscal Institute's Seeds of the Field

- [\*Comparing Colorado Care: An Analysis of Health Care Costs for Latino and Immigrant Coloradans\*](#) – a report depicting how health care costs affect these communities in Colorado
- Strong model for engaging with affected populations to support advocacy research
- Strategic partnerships with trusted community-based organizations with ties to Latino and Immigrant communities
- “Health Divides” newsletter and other products that inform Coloradans about health issues and access to health care