



COLORADO ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS

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 Association of Local Public Health Officials

The [Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials](#) (CALPHO) is a vital partner in building a health equity field, given its reach within Colorado’s public health system. CALPHO’s mission is to bring together the leadership of local public health agencies (LPHAs) and other public health partners to foster an effective and efficient public health system, and to encourage improvement in the quality, capacity and leadership of LPHAs and public health professionals. CALPHO’s membership includes leaders from 53 of the 54 LPHAs in Colorado. These LPHAs include county government, district, and non-profit health departments throughout Colorado. Additionally, CALPHO maintains long-standing

partnerships with the state health department and other public health-related organizations. CALPHO—through its policy and program work—is connected to more than 3,000 public health professionals across Colorado.

At the launch of Phase 2, in recognition of local public health agency members’ growing interest in focusing on social determinants of health, CALPHO had already been actively engaged in state-wide efforts to advance health equity in public health programs and initiatives. Specifically, as part of their Phase I HEA efforts, CALPHO was involved in developing the health equity portion of the state health improvement plan. CALPHO also built foundational readiness to be a “change agent for health equity” by exploring the connectedness of health equity advocacy to CALPHO’s strategic vision and work. According to former Executive Director, Lisa VanRaemdonck, the statewide professional association was well-positioned to identify and advance health equity policy solutions on behalf of and in partnership with local partners at a moment when the public health networks in the state were expressing an interest in deepening work around health equity.

CALPHO’s Phase 2 Work

Fundamentally, HEA Phase 2 capacity-building support provided critical resources for CALPHO to serve as an engaged leader in this work. CALPHO has been dedicated to participating in and sponsoring a range of equity-focused activities and trainings intended to foster self-reflection and professional development of individual staff members, as well as of CALPHO’s broader network of local public agency partners. These included sending a group to attend the national Facing Race conference, providing a workshop on skill building related to government agency roles in advancing health/racial equity, and equity-focused coaching and discussions among CALPHO staff, local public health agency directors, and representatives of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE).

In addition, the nature of the HEA grant support allowed CALPHO to dedicate meaningful time towards field-level engagement, something that would not otherwise be covered in their organizational budget. For example, CALPHO had the opportunity to co-lead the creation of equity-focused capacity-building resources within the CDPHE, with partners from the Rocky Mountain Public Health Training Center (RMPHTC) and the Colorado



When you talk about what CALPHO seeded... I really think that [fostering] internal champions for the work has been a place we have really tried to seed and cultivate both formally and informally.”

– Lisa VanRaemdonck,
Former Executive Director


School of Public Health's Center for Public Health Practice (CPHP). As explained by VanRaemdonck, the HEA funding allowed her to leverage her staff's time on behalf of others with a shared interest in developing health equity resources, and once she was at the table, she could say, "Look, I can coordinate this—I can run this for us."

One of the tangible results from these efforts represents an important seed in an emerging health equity advocacy field—namely, the launch of the Health Equity and Environmental Justice 101 training for governmental public health employees. This 45-minute online module was designed to increase awareness and knowledge of the basic principles of health equity and environmental justice, and is currently mandatory for all CDPHE staff members and for new CDPHE staff to complete within their first year of employment. As of December 2016, more than 500 staff members had completed the training either in-person or online. It is housed in the Learning Management System, which is available to any public health staff member and volunteer in the country. VanRaemdonck articulated the potential reach of the tool: "Because this is mandatory for all state employees... those people who have the power to create grant requirements, to monitor contracts, to approve budgets, will have a different and uniform understanding of the basics of health equity."

Laying the Groundwork for an Emerging Field

Reflecting on the work that has been seeded in Phase 2, CALPHO staff recognize that there is more than can be done to cultivate what has been planted. The Health Equity and Environmental Justice 101 training provides a useful starting point, with potential to align health equity framing and enforce shared language, not just within the CDPHE but across local public health agencies throughout the state. Going forward, CALPHO intends to continue to market the training with the hope that it will become mandatory at some local public health agencies. CALPHO also plans to work with the newly hired staff at the state Office of Health Equity to co-create and co-market additional health equity trainings and tools.

Beyond the specific products emerging from CALPHO's Phase 2 efforts are the groundwork of relationships and shared understanding that is being fostered by introducing health equity as a concept within local public health agencies. Leaders within CALPHO's network are serving as champions for health equity within their respective agencies, but also serving on regional and statewide equity-focused leadership teams, presenting at health equity sessions and professional conferences, and speaking and writing blogs reflecting on the intersection of health equity, race, and racism in the public health field. While recognizing the real challenges of different regional contexts that influence local public health agencies' abilities to advance health equity framing and



practice, CALPHO staff strongly believe that a good foundation has been laid for the work ahead.

Looking Forward

Beginning in 2017, the 17 HEA cohort members, including CALPHO, 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. CALPHO is poised to serve as a leader in this collective endeavor.

Highlights: Colorado Association of Public Health Officials' Seeds of the Field

- Greater capacity for CALPHO and local public health agency partners to serve as leaders in advancing health equity advocacy
- Working relationships within the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Office of Health Equity
- Robust network of state-level relationships to collaborate on health equity projects and knowledge dissemination
- New online health equity training to foster shared understanding and language around health equity and social determinants of health

