



**THE  
COLORADO  
TRUST**

*A Health Equity Foundation*

# 2024-26 STRATEGIC PLAN



NOVEMBER 2023

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## LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

**Dear colleagues,**

We are pleased and excited to share a new, three-year strategic plan for The Colorado Trust that will guide our grantmaking and other work beginning in 2024.

This new plan is a milestone within a period of transition for our foundation. With new organizational leadership since 2022, and recent opportunities to reflect on our funding initiatives and other efforts to advance health equity in Colorado over the last several years, this strategic plan represents a new path forward for The Colorado Trust that we hope will provide opportunity, clarity and promise for our grantmaking initiatives and those with whom we partner.

Our board, staff and several external partners spent more than eight months working on various aspects of this plan during 2023. It is the result of substantial data gathering and analysis, including online surveys, personal conversations, statistical research, literature reviews and community meetings held across the state. We are grateful to the community members, nonprofit leaders, peer foundation staff, elected officials and many others who provided so much valuable input along the way.

As you will see in the pages that follow, we have reaffirmed our commitment to health equity, as well as the people we aim to serve via our grantmaking. We also are sharpening our focus to primarily fund entities and efforts that address three of the most pressing issues in our state. Please stay tuned for the launch of corresponding new funding initiatives in 2024 that align with this strategic plan.

That said, many things are not changing—our mission and vision remain the same, as does our commitment to advancing health equity in Colorado. This is a long-term undertaking, and we remain steadfastly dedicated to improving the health and well-being of the most marginalized people in our state.

While we hope this plan provides clarity for those who read it, we expect it will also generate some questions. To that end, we invite you to [email us](#) at any time. We will do our very best to get you the answers and information you need.

On behalf of the entire board of trustees and staff of The Colorado Trust, thank you for your interest in our work. We look forward to partnering with you in the days, weeks and months to come.



Rev. Louise Westfall  
2023 Chair of the Board of Trustees



Don Mares  
President & Chief Executive Officer

## VISION, MISSION, VALUES AND APPROACH TO HEALTH EQUITY

### About The Colorado Trust

The Colorado Trust is a grantmaking foundation dedicated to ensuring all Coloradans have the opportunity to thrive. When the nonprofit PSL Healthcare Corporation was sold to a for-profit organization in 1985, the proceeds of the sale were used to create The Colorado Trust. We partner with organizations across Colorado that are working to make positive changes

for people and communities. We provide funding and other resources to help every person living in Colorado have the opportunity to live a long and healthy life. Our grants support organizations and efforts focused on direct services, policy advocacy, community building, public education and more. We work side-by-side with grantees and community members to ensure grants are solution-based and effective.

### VISION

All Coloradans have fair and equal opportunities to lead healthy, productive lives regardless of race, ethnicity, income or where we live.

### MISSION

Advancing the health and well-being of the people of Colorado.

### How We Define Health Equity

Health equity is achieved when every person living in Colorado has the opportunity to attain their full health potential, and no one is disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of any socially determined circumstances. *(Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)*

### Who We Serve

We serve under-resourced people living in Colorado who are historically and/or systemically disadvantaged.

### VALUES

#### Collaboration

We intentionally engage the talents, knowledge and capabilities of our partners and staff, working together and supporting each other to realize mutual goals and achieve the best possible outcomes.

#### Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

We pursue and celebrate diversity at all organizational levels, promote equitable policies, and are inclusive and welcoming of different perspectives in decision-making.

#### Innovation

We courageously advance new ways to achieve our goals, while honoring experiences and making space for evaluation and strategic learning to direct our path.

#### Integrity

We conduct all aspects of our work with honesty and consistent communication.

#### Stewardship

We manage our resources with integrity and diligence.

#### Trust

We honor people, assume good intent, and do our best to reflect on our impact and cultivate relationships.

## CONTEXT FOR A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

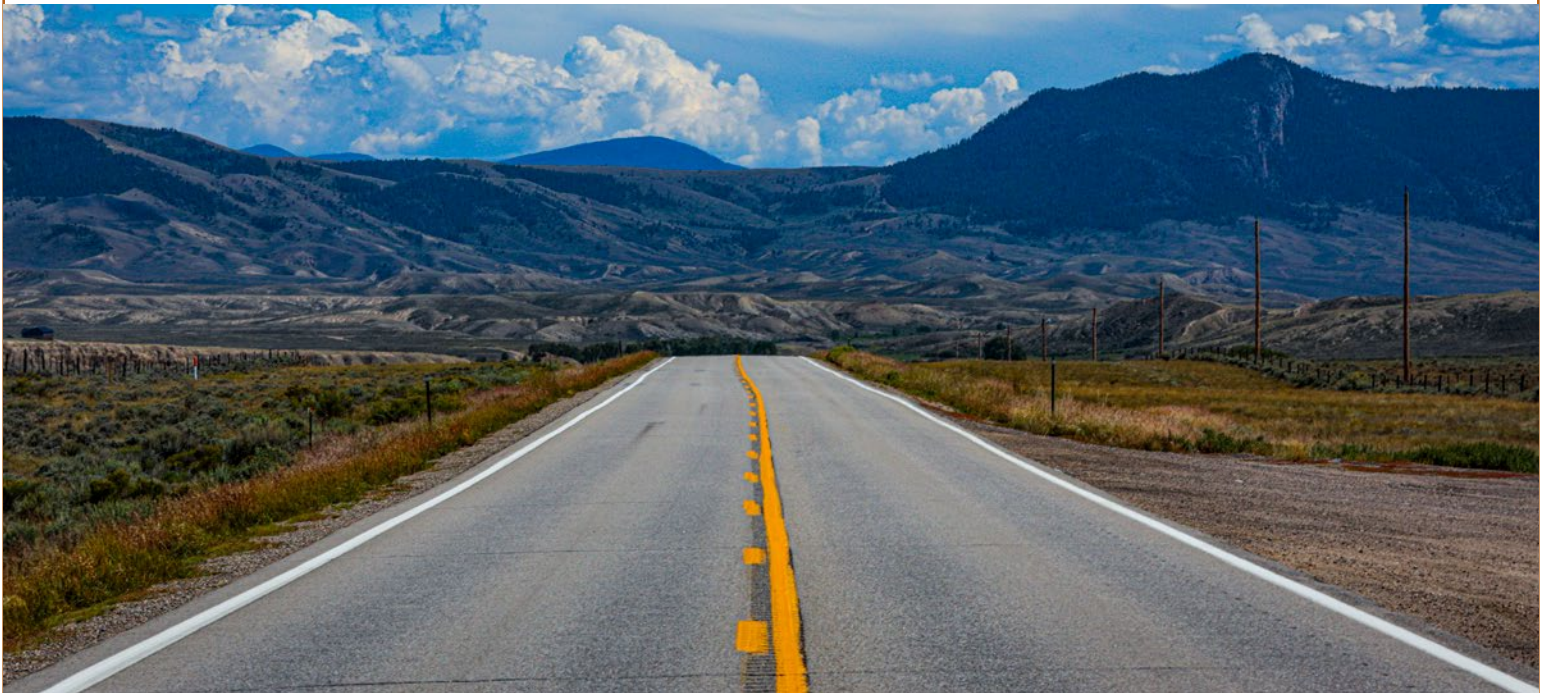
This plan marks a pivotal point in the history of The Colorado Trust, as well as among the people and communities the foundation strives to serve through its grantmaking.

By the beginning of 2023, Colorado was still recovering from the far-reaching ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Much had changed in communities across the state, and longstanding inequities were exacerbated by the medical, economic and societal fallout that occurred starting in 2020.

The Colorado Trust's first organizational leadership change in more than a decade took place in 2022, with Don Mares appointed as president & chief executive officer. This also coincided with a review of existing grantmaking initiatives and opportunities for iteration or improvement. After reviewing evaluation data and holding numerous discussions with stakeholders, The Colorado Trust decided to conclude its Community Partnerships for Health Equity, Community Leaders in Health Equity, and Health Equity Learning Series funding initiatives at the end of 2022.

It is important and necessary for any philanthropic foundation to periodically review its efforts and explore new and potentially more effective ways to deploy its resources toward impactful, meaningful change. Colorado Trust board members and staff want to ensure that the foundation's grantmaking has a significant and measurable impact on efforts to advance the health and well-being of people living in Colorado.

To that end, The Colorado Trust Board of Trustees authorized a strategic planning process to commence in early 2023. The goal was to create a multiyear plan that would chart a new path forward for the foundation and its grantmaking.



### THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

The Colorado Trust began its strategic planning effort by first commissioning a quantitative data analysis by the Colorado Health Institute. The Colorado Health Institute is a respected nonprofit, nonpartisan research and consulting organization that The Colorado Trust funded the founding of in 2002.

The institute's analysis examined and quantified various social determinants of health and how they impact the well-being of the people of Colorado. It included comprehensive data on race, geographic location, income and other variables that could be layered over longevity, self-reported quality of life and other health parameters.

Simultaneously, The Colorado Trust contracted with Arrow Performance Group to manage its strategic planning process over an approximately six-month period in 2023. Arrow Performance Group oversaw additional data gathering that included:

- Reviewing recent Colorado Trust funding initiatives and evaluation reports;
- Conducting 1:1 interviews with four peer foundation leaders, eight Colorado Trust board members and numerous staff members;
- Conducting an online survey of nonprofit staff members and other stakeholders (139 respondents overall);
- Conducting an online survey of community members (56 respondents overall); and
- Holding 11 community meetings in 10 locations across Colorado, with more than 100 in-person meeting attendees overall.

After the conclusion of Arrow Performance Group's information-gathering work, the board of trustees selected the focus areas for the plan. Grants Department staff was then tasked to conduct research on the prevalent issues within each focus area to determine a suitable strategic goal, in narrative format, that represented the needs of the state, aligned with the data on hand, and had the potential to create meaningful impact.

After the recommended strategic goals were approved by the board, staff then conducted a second round of research to create relevant and aligned objectives for each of the goals. Staff examined existing literature, surveillance and research data, current statewide plans and collaborative efforts already underway, as well as spoke with philanthropic and nonprofit partners to develop objectives that were specific enough to tackle more nuanced facets of the goal area, but also broad enough to encompass a wide array of tactical activities that could be supported by The Colorado Trust. The board then reviewed and approved these objectives.

## KEY LEARNINGS

Several months of quantitative and qualitative data gathering and analysis provided important lessons and will help inform The Colorado Trust's future work.

- 1 Some social determinants affect health more than others.** While there are numerous social determinants of health, a smaller subset of them appear to have an outsized impact on health and well-being among people living in Colorado. This is supported by multiple data sources—but also, importantly, it aligns with perceptions of community members and leaders as to which social determinants have a significant influence on the health of their communities.
- 2 The health equity funding landscape has expanded in the last decade.** In terms of The Colorado Trust's recent grantmaking initiatives, there has been increasing overlap with other funders that are working to advance health equity in the state. While it's important to avoid redundancy when possible, this also means there are now ample opportunities for leveraging collaboration, partnerships and multifunder initiatives to help increase impact.
- 3 Sharpening the foundation's focus can lead to better results.** The Colorado Trust likely diffused its impact over the last decade by attempting to fund efforts to address virtually every social determinant of health. In some cases, this appears to have potentially minimized or limited the outcomes of funding initiatives.
- 4 There are numerous experienced, successful entities addressing health equity in Colorado.** The Colorado Trust should focus its primary role on funding efforts by such entities to address social determinants of health, rather than attempt to undertake such work itself.
- 5 Community-informed grantmaking remains vital to advancing health equity.** The Colorado Trust should continue to listen to and honor the role of communities in identifying opportunities for improving their own health and well-being. This includes establishing and maintaining relationships with community members and leaders, as well as nonprofit and governmental entities.
- 6 Health equity can be addressed both "downstream" and "upstream."** Social determinants of health can be addressed along the full spectrum of approaches, from the individual or personal level (such as the delivery of direct services) to systems and structures (such as changing or implementing new laws and policies).
- 7 Patience is necessary.** Experience indicates that meaningful change on health equity issues can take time, especially at a systems level, and can and should be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. While this strategic plan is for three years, evaluating the results of funding initiatives should potentially stretch beyond this time frame.

## NEW FOCUS AREAS

Based on the multitude of both quantitative and qualitative data analyzed in this planning effort, The Colorado Trust Board of Trustees voted to focus its grantmaking primarily on the areas of **food, housing, and mental and behavioral health** beginning in 2024.

These three focus areas rose to the top of virtually every survey response, conversation and data point that were collected during this strategic planning process. In a sense, such findings were unsurprising—they confirmed that far too many people in Colorado face daily crises when it comes to food security, housing stability and affordability, and access to quality mental and behavioral health care.

There are urgent needs in all of these focus areas, especially among marginalized groups and populations. While these issues are not new for people living in Colorado, The Colorado Trust's research indicates that these challenges have become even more pressing in recent years. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated many such problems.



Food insecurity has markedly increased across Colorado recently, with major contributing factors including the COVID-19 pandemic, sustained inflation despite stagnant wages, and consolidation within the supermarket and grocery industry. Access to nutritious food remains **significantly worse** among non-white people living in Colorado, as well as people living in rural areas of the state. Colorado also has one of the lowest enrollment rates nationwide for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—44th out of 50 states as of 2018, **according** to the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger. People living in Colorado who report experiencing food insecurity are **several times more likely** to also report worse mental and physical health outcomes.





Numerous surveys have found that housing affordability is one of the top issues faced by people living in Colorado; this is especially true among people of color, many of whom have been denied the opportunity to build generational wealth due to discriminatory housing policies over the last century. By one measure, Colorado ranks as the 8th most unaffordable state for housing in the U.S. and is facing a dual crisis in terms of affordability and availability. By 2032, median rent in Colorado is expected to reach \$2,700 per month, requiring an income of \$106,000 per year or a job that pays nearly \$51 per hour. Wages have not come close to keeping up with housing prices; between 2009 and 2019, the average Colorado home price increased 77%, but the state's median income went up just 4.5%.



## HOUSING



## MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Mental Health America ranked Colorado last in the country for adult mental health in 2022, meaning Colorado has a particularly high prevalence of adult mental illness and significantly limited access to care. Mental Health America also found that Colorado has some of the worst rates in the country for mental health care unaffordability, unmet needs, lack of health care coverage, and unfavorable ratios of providers to patients. People in Colorado identifying as LGBTQ+, or people experiencing food insecurity or housing instability, are more likely to report poor mental health; many people of color in Colorado report accessing mental health care less than whites. Lower-income adults have significantly lower self-reported rates of receiving mental health care services than higher-income adults. Substance use disorders are associated with higher rates of chronic disease, suicide, drug overdose, violence, homelessness, recidivism and unemployment.



## STRATEGIC GOALS & OBJECTIVES

With these three focus areas identified and approved by the board of trustees, Colorado Trust staff sought to create viable strategic goals and objectives for each of these areas. Colorado Trust staff performed additional research related to food, housing, and mental and behavioral health, including identifying existing nonprofits and funders working to address these issues.

These overarching strategic goals were established by staff and approved by the board of trustees. Staff then created the following objectives for each strategic goal:

### STRATEGIC GOALS

#### FOOD

Increase access to nutritious and affordable food for those who face barriers to living a long and healthy life.

#### HOUSING

Increase housing affordability and stability for those who face barriers to living a long and healthy life.

#### MENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Increase and improve access to quality mental and behavioral health care for those who face barriers to living a long and healthy life.

### OBJECTIVES

1 Increase access to nutritious food

2 Increase economic stability for those experiencing food insecurity

3 Promote healthy eating

1 Increase comprehensive housing services focused on unhoused individuals

2 Increase stability for those at risk of losing housing or unable to secure adequate housing

3 Reduce stigma associated with people experiencing homelessness

1 Expand access to quality mental and behavioral health services

2 Improve the quality of mental and behavioral health services

3 Increase the diversity of the mental and behavioral health workforce

## EVALUATING IMPACT

The Colorado Trust has been committed to evaluating our grantmaking for over 30 years. Not only have we consistently supported grantees in helping them understand their impact; we also have continually done this for ourselves. Understanding what works, what doesn't, and why is critical to achieving our goals.

The Colorado Trust uses both summative evaluation (looking back at an initiative to measure success) and formative evaluation (prospectively used to assess how the initiative might be changed to achieve better results). We strongly believe evaluations are only as good as the learnings that emerge from them.

Successful learning from evaluation requires participation from the foundation, grantees and stakeholders. It requires an organizational culture that is receptive to change and has the capacity to learn from mistakes and adjust accordingly. The Colorado Trust collects data, interprets data, and repeatedly incorporates them into the implementation of initiatives over time.

Prior to announcing funding opportunities, staff will determine outcomes associated with each initiative. Grantees will be aware of these outcomes prior to funding, and evaluation processes will be implemented to best assess the difference an initiative makes. Based on learnings from past evaluations, we will make every effort to minimize the evaluation reporting burden on grantees, and offer options to provide evaluation data in languages other than English where appropriate.



### NEXT STEPS

The Colorado Trust will announce new funding initiatives starting in 2024 for the focus areas of food, housing, and mental and behavioral health. These funding initiatives will endeavor to support organizations working to address these focus areas along the full spectrum of approaches, from the delivery of direct services to policy advocacy and more.

Interested parties may [sign up](#) to automatically receive email notifications of new funding opportunities starting in 2024.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Colorado Trust would like to thank and appreciate the more than 200 people who took the time and energy to participate in the interviews, informal conversations, community meetings and online surveys that helped inform this strategic plan. The Colorado Trust would also like to recognize the invaluable work, expertise, advice and guidance from Arrow Performance Group and the Colorado Health Institute that led to the creation of this plan.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **When will The Colorado Trust announce new funding opportunities as part of this strategic plan?**

We hope to begin announcing new grantmaking initiatives in the first half of 2024. Interested parties may [sign up](#) to automatically receive email notifications of new funding opportunities in the future.

### **Are any of your current initiatives continuing?**

We will continue to fund existing initiatives through to their pre-approved end dates, including Building and Bridging Power and the Colorado Equity Compass. We also plan to continue to support Rural Philanthropy Days and local event sponsorships. None of these efforts or support are changing as a result of this new strategic plan.

### **Will there be a geographic focus to The Colorado Trust's funding?**

We have always been a statewide foundation in our work, and this will continue. We understand that the challenges facing urban and rural communities are not the same and that each community has a unique constellation of opportunities and challenges related to the three focus areas. We try to consider the unique needs from one community to the next, and not assume that a one-size-fits-all solution will advance health equity.

### **Has The Colorado Trust determined resource allocation for each of these three focus areas?**

We plan to allocate our resources equitably, prioritizing underserved and marginalized populations of Colorado, and provide significant resources to each focus area beginning in 2024. Numerous factors will influence the exact level of resource allocation over time, such as the details of the specific funding initiatives, the level of interest from potential grantee partners, opportunities to collaborate with other funders, the state policy and legislative landscape, the investment returns from our endowment, and more.

### **Will The Colorado Trust be providing other funding outside of these three focus areas over the next three years?**

The areas of food, housing, and mental and behavioral health are set to be our focus for our grantmaking and work starting in 2024. The Colorado Trust will continue to monitor for and support other health equity-involved circumstances or opportunities that may arise.

### **What types of organizations are eligible for Colorado Trust funding?**

The following types of organizations are eligible to apply for Colorado Trust grant opportunities:

- Nonprofit organizations that are exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and are classified as “not a private foundation” under Section 509(a)
- Independent, sponsored projects of a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization acting as a fiscal sponsor
- Government and public agencies.

### FAQS *continued*

#### **Is there anything The Colorado Trust does NOT fund?**

The Colorado Trust does not make grants for the following:

- Political campaigns or voter registration drives
- Operating deficits or retirement of debt
- Clinical and medical research studies.

#### **Why is this strategic plan only for three years?**

Sharpening the focus of our funding on three specific areas (food, housing, and mental and behavioral health) is a significant shift in approach for us. We want to spend the next three years learning as much as possible about these areas and the opportunities to address them. We also want to demonstrate to ourselves and our partners that this shift makes sense for everyone involved, and can lead to meaningful, impactful change for the health and well-being of people in Colorado. We understand that some of the changes we are hoping to achieve will take longer than this time frame, and it's important to make sure we're on the right track before investing our resources in a longer-term commitment.

#### **Will The Colorado Trust provide funding for more than three years as part of this plan?**

As of now, we intend to provide funding through the end of 2026 in the vast majority of grantmaking situations. That said, we will also look for the opportunity and rationale to extend funding to grantees beyond the time frame of this strategic plan. Much of these deliberations will depend on The Colorado Trust's goals and objectives for 2027 and beyond.

#### **What does "community-informed" mean to The Colorado Trust?**

We define this as:

- Gathering and respecting input from communities, especially among the most marginalized community members.
- Using community input to make thoughtful funding decisions that align with our need for fiscal responsibility and resource management.
- Creating a "feedback loop"—in other words, after gathering input, we explain our decisions and then listen to community feedback on our decisions.

#### **Who does The Colorado Trust consider a "marginalized" or "underserved" group or population, and why?**

Decades worth of social science and health care research have found that quality of life and health outcomes are not the same among all demographics in the United States. Due largely to entrenched discriminatory systems, policies and structures in this country, health outcomes have been worse among groups that include (but are not limited to) people of color, people earning wages at or below the poverty level, people who identify as LGBTQ+, people living in rural areas

## **FAQS** *continued*

with limited access to services, people living with disabilities, people with lower educational attainment, and others. Additionally, such groups and populations are often excluded from decision-making and positions of power and influence in society.

### **What is the difference between mental and behavioral health?**

Mental health typically refers to one's overall psychological state, including thoughts, feelings and emotions; behavioral health involves the behaviors that may be prompted by one's mental health. Such behaviors can be positive (e.g., exercising, eating healthy foods) or negative (e.g., substance use, attempting suicide). Our new focus area covers both mental and behavioral health due to their interrelated nature.

### **What do you mean by providing "comprehensive" housing services to unhoused individuals?**

This refers to services that go beyond simply the provision of housing and may include such resources as employment counseling, substance use treatment, legal assistance and more. The "wraparound" model is an example of comprehensive housing services, but other models also exist.

### **I still have questions about your grantmaking. How can I get those answered?**

[Email us](#) at any time. We will do our best to respond to your questions as completely and quickly as we can.

#### **Photography Credits**

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