



Transforming Systems to Improve Early Childhood Development in Colorado

Through a grant with the Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems (ECDHS): Evidence to Impact Center, an innovative team in **Colorado is strengthening and expanding local early childhood systems** to improve the health and well-being of young children and their families. With technical assistance and evaluation support from the ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center, Colorado is improving how local services work together so families can more easily get the care and resources they need – creating a lasting impact on young children’s healthy development.



What is an early childhood system?

The network of child- and family-serving programs and services (e.g., health care, early learning, child welfare, housing) that exist in a region to help families grow and thrive. Comprehensive, well-designed systems support families to receive the services they need, when they need them.

KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN COLORADO

Colorado concentrates its efforts in the San Luis Valley, a rural region in southwestern Colorado with plentiful, but disconnected, early childhood resources. Accomplishments are driving change across the state.

E-Referral Project Connects More Families to Services



ACTION: The Colorado team developed a new e-referral system to strengthen how pediatricians refer families to developmental services and early intervention specialists. The system allows primary care providers to track whether the child has been successfully referred to a service. To support the rollout in early 2025, nearly 40 referral coordinators and providers received individualized training, and two care navigators were assigned to manage referrals and stay in touch with families to help them through the process. Regular meetings and communication between early intervention and local health system leaders support families’ successful journey throughout the e-referral process.



IMPACT: Strong data systems are active across the San Luis Valley to track e-referrals, helping ensure more families are connected to essential developmental services and more providers can confirm whether support was received.

HealthySteps Expansion Increases Access to Care



ACTION: Colorado is expanding HealthySteps, a team-based care model that promotes healthy development, addresses behavioral concerns, and connects families to resources. Beyond two San Luis Valley clinics already delivering the model, it was introduced to two sites in particularly rural parts of the Valley, reaching families who are less likely to access services and often rely on their medical providers for resources. Clinic staff received training and ongoing support to help implement the model successfully.



IMPACT: This expansion will reach more than 1,000 children in the San Luis Valley, increasing access to holistic and comprehensive care.

Workforce Training Advances Mental Health Expertise



ACTION: In partnership with the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Colorado is strengthening the early childhood mental health workforce. Workshops introduce students to the field, and community leaders work with Adams State University to incorporate information in classes. The effort has expanded to other colleges and universities across the state. Recent fellowship recruitment focused on communities with workforce shortages, including the San Luis Valley, with local leaders helping to spread the word and identify candidates.



IMPACT: More experts are prepared to support their communities — in FY25 alone, 20 fellows completed training to strengthen their ability to provide services.

SUCCESS SPOTLIGHT



Colorado's New Law Supports Early Childhood Health

Colorado passed SB 17, a bill in the 2025 state legislative session that supports continued investment in early childhood health by strengthening existing team-based pediatric practices, like HealthySteps. This bill builds on and leverages successes and insights the ECDHS team has achieved.



Family Engagement Promotes Responsive Strategies



ACTION: Colorado has embraced communication and engagement with families to ensure services meet local needs. The team held 20 community meetings and follow-up conversations to learn from families about their needs and challenges in accessing developmental care. A Family Co-Design Group with 10 San Luis Valley families meets monthly to identify products and opportunities that better support parent mental health, individualized care, and patient confidentiality.



IMPACT: Insights from families help health systems in the San Luis Valley make changes that reflect their priorities. Participants in the Family Co-Design Group are also building skills and gaining opportunities to share systems knowledge with other parents.

The Colorado ECDHS team includes state government, health care systems, nonprofits, and family leadership. Visit www.earlychildhoodimpact.org for resources to support systems transformation and more information about the ECDHS: Evidence to Impact Center.



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