



Colorado Collaborative for Reproductive Health Equity – 2017 to 2021

Executive Summary of Work to Date

May 14, 2021

Launched in partnership with The Colorado Health Foundation in late 2017, The Colorado Collaborative for Reproductive Health Equity (Collaborative) is a unique and innovative model that has incubated several reproductive health and rights projects. Guided by a vision for reproductive health equity, The Collaborative engages funders, clinicians, researchers, community organizations and grassroots community leaders in projects that call on systems, institutions, and our own expertise to reimagine what is possible when diverse communities across the state determine their own sexual and reproductive health.

Built on the foundations of the Colorado Initiative to Reduce Unintended Pregnancies (Colorado Initiative), the Collaborative coordinated strategies in contraceptive access, policy advocacy, human-centered design, comprehensive sexual health education, and provider training to leverage the wins from the Colorado Initiative, while addressing lingering opportunities and emerging needs. The Collaborative implemented five interconnected strategies with nearly 20 projects and engaged over 80 partners from rural, statewide, and national networks.

Guided by a set of reproductive health equity principles, we acknowledge and respond to social, economic, and political conditions of oppression which limit reproductive and sexual health choices. The Collaborative cultivated partnerships with reproductive justice organizations such as the Colorado Organization for Latina Opportunity for Reproductive Rights (COLOR) and Soul to Soul Sisters; safety net clinics, such as Marillac, Clinica Tepeyac and Doctors Care, and the Colorado Community Health Network; and policy advocacy organizations, such as Cobalt and the Colorado Children's Campaign.

Since 2017, the Collaborative has:

- Applied human-centered design to create a culturally safe and responsive peer-learning model for Latinx youth and caregivers on healthy development and agency, including sexual and social-emotional health.
- Broadened access to comprehensive, non-coercive, culturally responsive contraceptive counseling and services within Colorado's safety-net health care system.
- Influenced reproductive health policy through engagement with state agency leadership and consulted on coalition priorities and legislation to advance equity in reproductive health care, coverage and access.
- Elevated awareness, tools, resources, and trainings among clinicians that built confidence and skills for the provision of patient-centered sexual and reproductive health care.
- Ensured that youth in Colorado, during a national health crisis, had continuous access to comprehensive, culturally relevant, and high-quality sexual health education.
- Designed specific supports for rural health centers to increase access to all forms of contraception.
- Maintained a critical, hands-on training program to ensure health care providers at safety-net clinics are competent in placing and removing IUDs and implants.
- Created a series of one-of-a-kind virtual training techniques for adolescent health clinicians.
- Conducted epidemiological and geospatial analysis on fertility rates, gestation and births of teenagers and young adults in counties across the state.

The work of the Collaborative has demonstrated that a reproductive health equity approach can consistently be applied in the counseling for and provision of contraception specifically, and in sexual and reproductive health care and education more broadly. Directed by the expertise of Liz Romer and implemented by Caring for Colorado, the Collaborative challenged traditional approaches and held the bar high for meaningful improvements in care.

Incubating these projects uncovered opportunities and created space to explore creative solutions in the sexual and reproductive health landscape of Colorado. Within our Contraceptive Access Change Package project, ten safety-net clinics across Colorado implemented long-term changes to enhance the delivery of comprehensive, culturally responsive contraceptive counseling and care. On the ground, these clinics increased access to the most effective contraceptive methods. In a separate project, the Collaborative created the first and only virtual reality, patient-centered simulator experience to improve clinician competency and comfort in conducting inclusive and affirming sexual health visits with adolescents. The Collaborative is expanding the training pilot opportunity an additional 10 clinics committed to innovation. We are proud to carry forward a network of committed partners ready to design and test new ideas, approaches, and practices.

A driving force of the Collaborative is our commitment to ensuring we incorporate values of equity into all project activities. Although this is a learning process, we have excelled in this effort within our Human- and Community-Centered Innovation (HCCI) strategy. Using an empathy-led, problem-solving, and community-based methodology, we engaged two communities in leveraging community assets to drive solutions. The concept for the HCCI project emerged when the Collaborative identified a disconnect between Latina utilization of health care services and the availability of such services in certain geographical regions throughout the state. Following the leadership of seven Design Fellows – trusted leaders and experts within their own communities – we created five concepts that addressed the question “How might we understand the reproductive health needs and desires of Latina women 18-24 years old in Adams and Pueblo Counties?” After the inspiration and ideation phases of the HCCI process, SOMOS emerged. SOMOS is a Latina-led movement designed to gather Latina youth and caregivers together – to have meaningful conversations about issues that are essential to health and wellbeing – including sexual and reproductive health.

The Collaborative has provided significant leadership in state and national efforts, thus creating opportunities for all Coloradans. The Collaborative’s direct support of Colorado’s statewide family planning coalition in assessing and developing legislative initiatives for Title X expanded access to thousands of low-income people and families. We also leveraged our regulatory, legislative, <https://reprocollab.org/> and content expertise to consult with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) on critical changes within the department, as well as federal funding, to ensure that we maintained comprehensive, patient-centered programs. The Collaborative’s national presence with advocacy organizations, such as the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association, and key funder networks serve to elevate our vision for reproductive health equity in family planning and advocacy tables in benefit of all communities.

As the Collaborative renews and refreshes with an evolved brand – ReproCollab – and renewed funding, we will continue to engage our extensive network of community partner organizations and leaders to reflect on these innovations and identify gaps and opportunities in Colorado’s movement for reproductive health equity. We have seen a dramatic, COVID-related shift in the clinical environment for contraceptive access. Providers and patients are taking advantage of telehealth, creative service models and mail-order. It is yet to be determined which changes become permanent and how young people change care seeking behaviors. Yet, it remains clear that clinical training for LARC insertion, comprehensive counseling and patient centered care is still necessary, and we need improved data collection and analysis of statewide contraceptive access measures.

Nationally the environment for reproductive health is changing, with limitations on access to abortion care and for many, a need to address the high cost of health care. We must find opportunities for clinics without access to discount pricing to decrease the financial barriers to stock and provide contraceptive methods, so that we can make all sexual and reproductive health products available to the uninsured and underinsured.

Finally, sexual health education is essential for our young people and the population at large. We must plan for the future of sexual health education that includes community-based organizations and state programs. The Collaborative has fostered the leadership of several key stakeholders in this field, and we plan to take follow and support their lead in these efforts.

Clearly, there is a still a need and appetite for basic support of reproductive health access and innovation in Colorado. We are committed to our values and to creating a table of thinkers and doers ready to reimagine reproductive freedom.

We are eager to share lessons learned and more in-depth information on the progress made and outcomes achieved from the Collaborative's projects. Please feel free to be in touch.

Thank you for your on-going support and shared commitment.

Sincerely,

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