The Colorado Health Foundation™



Health is Everyone's Business

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Dr. Leana Wen, health commissioner for the city of Baltimore, shared a striking idea in a recent TEDx talk: that public health is the lens through which we can address poverty, discrimination, injustice and violence. Dr. Wen, who is scheduled to speak at our annual Colorado Health Symposium next month, urged all of us to redefine the role of public health in the 21st century as an urban solution and a critical social justice tool. She remarked, "If the currency of inequality is years of life, then the opposite of poverty is health.”

What a notion. At the Colorado Health Foundation, the lens through which we view our mission to improve the health of Coloradans is similar to what Dr. Wen envisioned during her talk. Just 10 months into my role as president and CEO of the Foundation, the lens for which I view health has widened – thanks to hundreds of residents across the state who have shared how they view health on the #HealthiestCO Statewide Listening Tour. After my exhilarating and eye-opening trek across Colorado, one thing I know for certain is that we have much more to do when it comes to understanding how to drive better health in all Colorado communities.

By addressing our work through a lens that ensures we improve the health of Coloradans who need it the most, will we have the impact that Dr. Wen envisions for 21st century public health? I hope so. But it may require us to widen our lens, to understand and address the many factors that influence the health of individuals and communities. If indeed the currency of inequality is based on how long we live, then we should come to understand that drivers of poverty also drive health. The solutions are multi-faceted and will require all of us to work together in new and innovative ways. Health is everyone’s business.

This message is the first of many I hope to share with you monthly. As we map our future and understand how our work – and that of our partners – might have the most significant impact, we commit to sharing information about our strategic direction in a timely and transparent manner.

Our Board of Directors recently gathered to reflect on our current work as well as new opportunities on the horizon. We'll spend time over the next few months understanding where we need to place focus for the greatest impact possible. We know that learning both from our past work and from the community are critical steps to having the most impact. We will call on many of you to help guide us in that journey, and thank you now for your time and input.

As we contemplate widening the lens through which we work, we will be – we must be – bold and determined in our mission to improve the health of all Coloradans. I look forward to seeing many of you in Keystone next month, and to meeting and learning from many more of you in the weeks and months ahead.

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