The Colorado Health Foundation™



A Symbol of Our Commitment to Community Health

In a documentary showcasing his life's work, Dr. Licona eloquently shares his challenging, yet rewarding, journey as a grassroots activist:

"All of this, why? ... I've been able to focus my efforts within the health care arena to push forth those ideals that we had of the Chicano movement of improving the living status of our population, our communities and fighting for justice, fighting for equality. Fighting for those things that we think each one of us deserves, just because we are human beings and we breathe air, we're on this planet and we're in this together."

Inspired by Dr. Licona's pioneering spirit, our new award program, the Dr. Virgilio Licona Community Health Leadership Award, seeks to honor his life legacy as an advocate for social justice, civil rights and community health. It is a testament to the Foundation's new vision that across Colorado each of us can say: "We have all we need to live healthy lives." To point ourselves toward this new direction, we must first understand what it means to be unhealthy.



Dr. Virgilio Licona speaking at the inaugural Building Better Health conference, October 2014.

Evident from our conversations at the 2017 Colorado Health Symposium, we know we are not all granted the same opportunities for health. We see stories of inequity unfolding in the media, in our communities, neighborhoods and homes. Such stark disparities – lived or witnessed – necessitate that we ground our work to bring health in reach for all Coloradans. As the Foundation evolves to be more focused on health equity and broader social determinants of health, it is critical that we recognize the champions in our communities who are bold enough to build new bridges for those left behind.

A prior Foundation Board member, physician and community health leader, the late Dr. Licona dedicated his life's work to serving those with the highest needs. He brought a critical voice to some of the most important conversations related to the health of Coloradans. He elevated the lived experiences of Coloradans facing inequity and made them tangible to individuals who walked in different shoes.

To be the champion of people who are often left out of important conversation takes patience, energy and intention – all traits Dr. Licona embodied to the fullest extent. And today, more than a year after his passing, his legacy, leadership and commitment to health live on. Recognizing Dr. Licona's remarkable journey improving the health of vulnerable communities, our Board collectively decided to develop a new award program in his name. This new award program intends to honor impassioned Coloradans who are finding innovative and effective strategies to overcoming community health barriers across the state.



Sundari Kraft, 2017 Dr. Virgilio Licona Community Health Leadership Award Recipient, with her child and family goat.

The 2017 Dr. Licona Award recipient, Sundari Kraft, embodies our new direction and dedication to community health. A grassroots leader and gifted consensus builder, Sundari is working to address health barriers across Colorado communities by mobilizing and activating fellow Coloradans to engage with policymakers in conversations on important issues affecting their health. Sundari has championed a grassroots movement to pass local policies that made healthy food more accessible and affordable. In addition to advocating and advancing the local food movement, she has played a critical role in efforts around childhood vaccination in Colorado.

Like Dr. Licona, Sundari exemplifies an authentic commitment to bringing a voice to those who may have otherwise been voiceless. She brings to her work a keen understanding that our health is either nurtured or neglected by the places we live, work and play. Her journey shows us that, with a bit of grace and grit, the road to positive community health change is a promising one.

At the Foundation, we are relentless in our commitment to ensuring health is in reach for all Coloradans – our new award program is a symbol of this commitment. We are proud to introduce this program and to honor the on-the-ground change-makers helping Colorado's highest-need communities thrive today, tomorrow and in the years ahead.

As we look to the 2018 award program, we continue to be inspired by the many leaders working tirelessly to improve the health of Coloradans. Keep up the good work.

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