The Colorado Health Foundation™



(Re)Writing Narratives: Advancing Equity and Justice at the Colorado Health Foundation's Annual Symposium

I am thrilled to reflect on our 2024 Colorado Health Symposium, which took place in Keystone from July 24 through 26. The Symposium is one of our most visible and important moments of the year to come together with community members and champions from across Colorado. We get to dig into tough challenges and innovative solutions related to health equity and justice, and this year was nothing short of extraordinary! With the theme **(Re)Writing Narratives: Advancing Equity and Justice**, we gathered to engage in vital conversations about how our **narratives can help drive meaningful change toward health equity across Colorado and beyond.**

Over three days, we focused on the profound power each of us possesses in shaping narratives. Why? Because the stories we choose to uplift can shape public perception, policy, and, ultimately, the lives of our communities. In essence, we must seize opportunities to take control of our narratives now.

We started the first day with insightful remarks from Anand Giridharadas, prominent political analyst and author of four books, including The Persuaders. Anand, our final speaker at last year's Symposium, emphasized the power of narratives in shaping public perception and behavior. He argued that while those striving for positive change often underestimate the power of narratives, those promoting harmful ideas effectively leverage it. The role of narratives is so important, he suggested, "When you don't take narratives seriously, you don't take people seriously."

Following Anand, we had the privilege of hearing from Jose Antonio Vargas, a renowned journalist, filmmaker and immigration rights activist. As the founder of Define American, Jose shared his compelling journey as an undocumented Filipino immigrant and highlighted the urgency of amplifying our voices. His powerful call for belonging resonated deeply with all of us present, emphasizing that our identities are multifaceted and that we must ensure everyone's story is not only heard but celebrated.

On day two, we were honored to host Dr. Tiffany Manuel, President and CEO of The Case Made and author of Case Made! Dr. T started her talk with a moment of dance and celebration to mark the momentous time in history with the second Black woman running for the office of President. She eloquently emphasized the importance of reclaiming our stories as a means to assert our power. Her insights, outlined in 10 Powerful Leadership Principles, the importance of shifting narratives through personal experiences and social disruptions, urging participants to focus on collective success and compassion in their messaging. Dr.T concluded by advocating for a joyful and optimistic approach to inspire broader engagement and envision a future rooted in equity.

I also had the opportunity to facilitate a vibrant media discussion with four leaders in the news media. The panelists challenged us to think critically about the media's role in shaping narratives and how nonprofits can connect media to stories that are not on their radar. Each emphasized that with great power comes great responsibility—highlighting the need, even as media rooms are shrinking across the nation, to hold media accountable to ensure our stories are told with accuracy and integrity.

A throughline of each of our speakers was the concept of celebration and fun. This theme was aptly put into motion with the vibrant energy our special guests from the Ballroom community brought on Thursday night just before dancing and candle making! Juicy 007 and a host of voguers added a unique flair to our

gathering, reminding us of the power of creativity and self-expression and reinforcing the notion that advocacy can be both impactful and enjoyable.

On day three, we rolled up our sleeves and dove into workshops, practicing the concepts we had discussed throughout the Symposium. This hands-on approach allowed us to translate our conversations into actionable strategies, providing us with tools to change public discourse.

I must also mention the many organizations and individuals who presented afternoon exchange sessions. Indeed, attendees had a host of compelling topics to select from. And a huge shout-out goes to Warm Cookies of the Revolution, an organization that creatively intersects community engagement and social change. Their efforts to connect Symposium attendees and foster dialogue through innovative approaches reminded us that engaging our communities can take many forms, and we must embrace diverse strategies to drive our collective mission forward.

I felt an overwhelming sense of hope as I looked around the room where everyone gathered in Keystone. There were faces of all shades and people from all backgrounds and corners of Colorado! Most importantly, with a shared commitment to advancing equity and justice, our discussions were not just theoretical; they were grounded in our lived experiences and collective aspirations for a better future.

I invite you all to channel this momentum into your work, whether you attended the Symposium this year or not. Let us (re)write the narratives that uplift, empower, and demand justice. Together, we possess the strength to create a future where equity is not merely an aspiration but a reality for all.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this remarkable event. I look forward to our continued journey together. Remember, our stories matter—they are our most important currency. Let’s tell them boldly and with purpose.

Save the date for next year’s Symposium, which is scheduled for July 30 - Aug. 1, 2025.

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Blog

POST DATE

Aug 7, 2024

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