The Colorado Health Foundation™

Still Here, Still Rising: Fortifying the Movement in Volatile Times

There's something about mountain air that sharpens clarity. Crisp, thin and bracing—like truth. That's what we breathed in Keystone last week.

Over three powerful days at the 2025 Colorado Health Symposium, more than 500 community leaders, advocates, organizers and thinkers gathered to reflect, recharge and recommit to the long road of equity and justice. Over half of this year's attendees were new to the Symposium, a fact that both humbled and inspired us. The movement is growing.

And we need that growth, because these are not normal times. We came together under the banner of "Fortifying the Movement in Volatile Times," and every part of the Symposium reflected the gravity of this moment and the power of collective resolve.

We began by framing the moment with truth and urgency. From my opening remarks to my Front Porch conversation with Joy-Ann Reid to Maria Hinojosa's riveting session, we named what we're up against: rising authoritarianism, deepening inequity and an erosion of resources for our communities. And we also named what we're standing on: the power of collective action, the resilience of grassroots leadership and the legacy of those who fought before us.



Joy-Ann laid it out plainly with three things we must do: 1) Put a mask on ourselves first, and save the communities we're in. 2) Behind the scenes, devise a plan. As noted by Joy-Ann, "You can't overthrow atrocities without one". 3) Start to project forward the America we want to live in.

That clarity, paired with strategy, is what will carry us forward.

We were also fortunate to welcome our old friend Jose Antonio Vargas back to the stage. In conversation with David Breña and Jazmin Chavez, Jose reminded us how storytelling—especially by those most affected—can deepen empathy, shift policy and disrupt fear-based narratives. The three of them brought a rare combination of insight, challenge and hope that left the room buzzing long after the session ended.





Maria reminded us that journalism with conscience is essential to justice and that stories are among our most potent tools against erasure. Her call to courage, "trust your gut, tell your story and act with moral clarity," echoed throughout the week.



And yet, this was not a space of despair.

Throughout the Symposium, we made room for joy, movement and community. From Flash Talks that pulsed with bold vision to Poster Sessions that sparked hallway dialogue, we learned from each other. The inaugural Poster Sessions featuring visual stories of innovation from across the state, were a vibrant new format, adding dimension to the learning experience and reminding us that wisdom doesn’t always come from a stage.



We danced. We hula-hooped. We honored those who brought the energy, whether it was a senior board chair two-stepping or a first-time attendee bringing the house down. Because celebration is not a distraction from the work, it is the heartbeat of resilience.



We closed with a luminous invitation from Valarie Kaur to practice Revolutionary Love. “Be the Jacaranda,” she urged us, offering an image of rooted, steadfast presence in the face of harm. Her words were a benediction, a call and a challenge all at once: to become a sanctuary for each other. To resist division not only with resistance, but with radical, grounded love.



So, what do we take with us?

We take clarity. That this work is urgent and necessary, especially in the face of retreat by funders or backlash by powerful systems.

We take courage. To say the words, name the harms and do the work, whether in public or in private, whether the cameras are on or not.

We take collective purpose. Not the shallow kind that lasts through a news cycle. The kind that mirrors the Montgomery bus boycott—years-long, disciplined, unshakable.

And we take community. The kind you can build with a glance, a story, a song. The kind that reminds you: you are not alone in this.

To our fellows, poster session presenters, speakers, staff, and every single participant, thank you. You made this a gathering to remember.

Now, as we descend from the mountains and return to our work, let’s keep our feet on the ground and our vision high. Let’s remember that while we may be facing a Category 5 storm, we are also planting seeds. And those seeds—of justice, of joy, of possibility—will grow.

Because, as one attendee so perfectly put it: “They think this is the end. It’s not. We’re still here.”

And we’re not going anywhere.

TYPE

Blog

POST DATE

Aug 26, 2025

BY

Karen McNeil-Miller