The Colorado Health Foundation™

Don’t Take the Bait

As I get closer to the end of my time at The Colorado Health Foundation, I find myself reflecting on the Colorado I’ve come to know.

I’ve had the privilege of spending time in communities across our state and seeing the ways people are working together to make Colorado a healthier place. I’ve seen neighbors organize around important issues and find solutions. I’ve watched leaders build power and create opportunities for people whose voices have too often been left out of decisions. And I’ve seen people come together across differences because they believe change and something better is possible.

Those experiences have deepened my belief that our communities are strongest when people know they belong, a belief that feels especially important right now.

Over the past several years, the Foundation has spoken out when policies and actions have threatened the health and well-being of the communities we serve. Today, I remain outraged by what immigrant, refugee, and transgender Coloradans are experiencing.

Immigrant and refugee communities are facing escalating uncertainty as federal immigration enforcement reaches deeper into everyday life. Across Colorado, families are navigating what increased enforcement means in schools and workplaces while a tuberculosis case at the Aurora ICE detention facility has raised serious concerns about the health and safety of people in detention. These actions affect whether children feel safe at school, whether families can participate fully in daily life, and whether people can trust that their health and dignity will be

protected.

Since 2025, the federal government has taken numerous actions targeting LGBTQ+ people. including transgender young people. It has rescinded protections related to gender identity, pursued policies that restrict access to gender-affirming healthcare, and threatened schools over efforts to support transgender students. These actions represent an unacceptable intrusion into deeply personal decisions about our bodies, our health, and how parents care for their children. Every Coloradan should have the freedom and agency to make decisions about their own and their children's health and well-being, and feel supported, not constrained, by public policy.

These are not abstract debates. Immigrant, refugee, and transgender Coloradans are part of our families, schools, workplaces, and communities. They are bearing the most direct and immediate harm, but the consequences affect us all. When neighbors are made less safe, children are afraid to attend school, or people cannot access the care they need, the trust and connection that help communities thrive begin to break down.

To immigrant, refugee, and transgender Coloradans, we see you. You belong here. To the organizations working alongside these communities, we have your back.

When our Challenges Become About Each Other

There is another reason this moment concerns me.

People across Colorado are facing very real problems. The cost of housing, groceries, childcare, and healthcare is stretching families thin. The 2026 Pulse Poll found that rising costs are forcing Coloradans to make difficult tradeoffs, while frustration with government's ability to address these challenges continues to grow.

That frustration deserves to be taken seriously. People want systems that work. They want to be able to afford their homes, care for their families, see a doctor when they need one, and believe their children will have opportunities to build healthy lives.

But when people are struggling, it can be tempting to explain those struggles by pointing toward someone else. To decide there isn't enough to go around and draw lines between who is deserving and who isn't. To turn our frustration with systems into frustration with one another.

That doesn't solve the problems Coloradans are facing. Targeting people because of who they are or where they come from won't make housing more affordable, put food on the table, or make healthcare easier to access. It distracts us from the challenges that demand our attention and makes it harder to solve them together.

The Colorado I know is more compassionate than that, and that is why this moment asks something of all of us.

We cannot allow fear or frustration to turn us against our neighbors. We cannot accept the idea that someone else must lose for our families to have what they need. We cannot look away when people are singled out, pushed aside, or told they do not belong.

We should name division when we see it, refuse to participate in it, and defend the freedoms and protections that allow all of us to belong and thrive. The challenges facing Colorado are real. Our neighbors are not the problem; they are part of the solution.

Don't take the bait. Stand up for one another and keep working together toward a Colorado where everyone has what they need to live a healthy life. I've seen what is possible when Coloradans come together. We can create communities where more people thrive.

Our best chance of building a healthier Colorado is always with each other. As I prepare to leave the Foundation, that is what I hope we will hold onto.

TYPE

Blog

POST DATE

Oct 7, 2026

BY

Karen McNeil-Miller