



The Colorado Health Foundation

FACT SHEET

# Transforming State Governance: State Legislature



A government that is genuinely responsive and accountable to Coloradans is not just a cornerstone of a healthy democracy – it is an essential pathway to a future marked by greater health and well-being for everyone in Colorado. Since 2021, The Colorado Health Foundation (CHF) policy team has connected with more than 150 individual, organizational, and governmental actors to synthesize recommendations for strengthening Colorado’s state legislature and administrative rulemaking practices and procedures. This has resulted in three research reports with over 50 specific recommendations, a report on state procurement and grantmaking practices, and countless moments of connection with people inside and outside of government institutions who want to see democracy thriving in our state.

These conversations highlighted positive aspects of how Colorado’s legislature operates and lifted meaningful opportunities to improve transparency, accessibility, and efficiency in the legislative process. Recommendations fall into the following five categories:

### **Increase public trust through governmental accountability**

Clarifying, simplifying, and adhering to transparent rules and procedures is a vital mechanism for increasing public engagement and trust throughout the legislative process. Several suggestions included restructuring SMART Act hearings, increasing the media presence at the capitol and better enforcing Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) requirements.

### **Strengthen public engagement and support**

Systems that encourage and support community involvement in the legislative process are of fundamental importance to a healthy democracy. Recommended reforms ranged from clarifying the role of interim committees to offering childcare or transportation stipends for those testifying to lowering barriers to participation.

### **Strengthen support and resources for legislators**

Sometimes called a “citizen legislature,” Colorado’s General Assembly has a part-time structure and lower salary that is intended to make sure the legislature is made up of citizens who are still involved in the workforce and connected with their communities. In practice, this can set up a system that excludes individuals with lower-paying or less flexible jobs. The research surfaced suggestions to address this, including increasing legislator pay and offering more targeted support and training for new legislators, particularly those coming from communities of color and/or of lower wealth.

### **Support an inclusive environment at the capitol**

The rules, traditions, and procedures “under the dome” may feel familiar to those on the “inside,” but are often unclear and intimidating to people who aren’t regularly at the capitol. Ideas to address this included offering translation services, hosting training sessions to demystify the legislative process, and maintaining flexibilities such as remote testimony.

### **Update processes and procedures**

The legislature is governed by a complex series of rules, some which require Constitutional amendment to change and others that are procedural in nature and could be addressed more immediately. Suggestions included improving the scheduling process, enforcing the five-bill limit, and restructuring the legislative calendar and/or budget cycle.

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Full summary reports and description of methodology are available at: <https://coloradohealth.org/studies-reports>.



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