

**COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN**  
FOR EVERY KID. FOR 40 YEARS.



## Forty Years of Change for Kids

**When kids' needs are met, they get the chance to just be kids.**

That's why the Colorado Children's Campaign exists. Since 1985, passionate, talented advocates have worked tirelessly so that every child in Colorado has what they need to thrive.

Colorado has grown and changed in the last 40 years. But some things don't change. Children need and deserve a great education. Quality health care. Support for their development in early childhood. A safe place to live and healthy food to eat.

The Campaign has built a legacy of powerful, evidence-based policies and services to improve kids' lives. The Campaign's advocacy has helped Colorado create strong systems that support children's health, education, and well-being from early childhood on.

The Colorado Children's Campaign is a champion for kids at the Colorado State Capitol and in communities across the state. For 40 years, The Campaign has made sure that kids have a seat at the table when decisions are being made that affect their lives. And we are committed to being there for the next 40 years and beyond.

## Research for Impact

From the start, The Campaign has relied on data and research to help decision-makers understand the challenges facing kids and to identify systems-level solutions. We released our first report on the state of children in Colorado in 1987, and in 1990 created a set of benchmark data for tracking the health and well-being of kids.

Since 1993, The Campaign has published the *KIDS COUNT in Colorado!* Report as part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's national network of child advocacy data partners. *KIDS COUNT in Colorado!* brings together data across issue areas to paint a picture of how kids are doing in areas ranging from economic stability to racial inequities to academic achievement to health. To this day, the annual *KIDS COUNT* report helps drive the conversation about what matters for kids in communities, newsrooms, and at the Capitol.

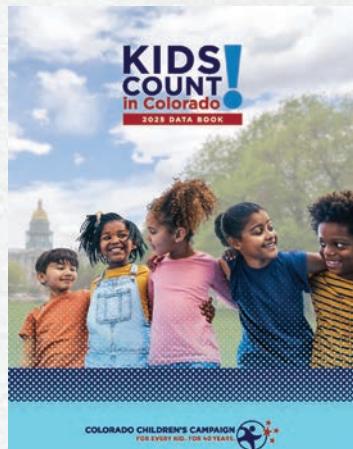
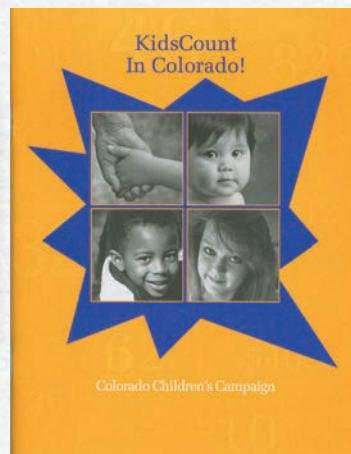


If you use data to drive your decisions, it really doesn't matter if you're a Democrat or a Republican because the data speaks for itself. That's the reason I think The Campaign has probably been more successful than most organizations at passing legislation on behalf of kids."

— NANCY GARY  
COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN  
CO-FOUNDER

When the Campaign was first founded, it's hard to believe, but children and children's issues were almost entirely invisible. They were never covered on the front page. No one was paying attention to them. The founding board thought, we need to have an organization that will follow kids issues and come up with long-term solutions. It was really first an effort to make sure children's issues were forefront for everyone."

— BARBARA O'BRIEN  
FORMER LT. GOVERNOR,  
STATE OF COLORADO;  
COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN  
PRESIDENT, 2001-2005



### By the NUMBERS

**850,000**  
kids lived in Colorado  
in 1985

**1.2 million**  
kids lived in Colorado  
in 2025

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey; Colorado Children's Campaign

## Coming Together for Kids

Coloradans want to make a difference for kids — whether they're legislators, educators, health providers, or committed community members. Over the years, the Colorado Children's Campaign has helped make that possible through educational and community-building events, advocacy days at the capitol, and effective networks of advocates, community members, and policymakers, including the It's About Kids network.

The dolls act like little constituents. Their stories reflect the actual needs, hopes and dreams of real Colorado kids, and policymakers respond to that.”

— LIZ HOUSTON  
FORMER MANAGER,  
IT'S ABOUT KIDS NETWORK



### THE DOLL PROJECT

The Doll Project was launched in 1994, when 3,000 handmade dolls were brought to the Capitol to remind lawmakers of the real children affected by the decisions they make. Advocates and children across the state decorated doll figurines and wrote children's stories on their backs. The Doll Project has taken different forms over the years. In some years, a doll from each legislator's district was placed on a chair at the Capitol along with the *KIDS COUNT in Colorado!* report as part of Doll Days. Around The Campaign's 20th anniversary, the organization brought paper doll chains representing the state's one million children to The West Steps.



### SPEAK UP FOR KIDS

Since 2011, hundreds of Coloradans have attended Speak Up for Kids advocacy events, coming together to share their experiences, concerns, and ideas with their representatives at the state capitol.



### MEETING THE UNMET NEED: PUTTING KIDS FIRST IN A CHANGING WORLD

As society and politics change, the Colorado Children's Campaign is the conscience for kids, outside the fray of partisan politics. The Colorado Children's Campaign is proud to support groundbreaking legislation on school finance, early childhood, health, and other issues with bipartisan support.

The Campaign provides leadership in times of crisis and change, helping the state move forward with kids' best interests at heart. During the COVID-19 pandemic, The Campaign elevated children's health and academic needs. And as the federal policy environment is changing in 2025, The Campaign is committed to championing kids' well-being in D.C., under the Gold Dome, and in our communities.

## A Voice for Early Childhood

When The Campaign was founded, early childhood was an afterthought in government, with few state resources or programs devoted to the youngest children. Today, Colorado has a Department of Early Childhood and a growing, committed community of early childhood champions focused on supporting children and families from birth. The Campaign helped lead this evolution, working with partners to build an increasingly robust set of policies and programs so that all children have access to safe, high-quality care, education, and services in these crucial years.

We're always looking for the big change, whether that's full-day Kindergarten, universal pre-K, Medicaid expansions, a new school finance formula."

— RILEY KITTS  
CHIEF POLICY AND RESEARCH OFFICER

**Expanding access to preschool:** From the Colorado Preschool Program, which supported children with academic or financial needs in attending preschool, to the Universal Preschool Program, which helps families across the state afford programs in a range of settings, The Campaign's advocacy has dramatically expanded access to preschool.

**Creating a place for early childhood in state government:** The Campaign helped establish first an Office of Early Childhood at the state's Department of Health and Human Services, and later the Colorado Department of Early Childhood — ensuring the state has a dedicated focus on the early years.

**Supporting access to safe, high-quality, affordable child care:** The Campaign has advanced a range of efforts to help families find and afford care for babies, toddlers, and young children, including the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP).

**Fostering a more equitable early childhood system:** All children deserve safe, consistent care — which is why The Campaign has supported tax credits for careworkers and child care providers and taken steps to prevent exclusionary discipline for the youngest kids.



By the  
**NUMBERS**

### #3 Nationally

In 2025, after the introduction of the Universal Preschool program, **Colorado was ranked third in the nation** for the number of 4-year-olds enrolled in preschool

## A Voice for Health

The Colorado Children's Campaign has been at the forefront of a remarkable expansion in health coverage for children, bringing the state's uninsured rate for kids to below 5% and ensuring families can afford and access medical care when they need it. The Campaign has also supported pivotal efforts to keep kids vaccinated, healthy, and mentally well.



**Covering Colorado's kids:** The Campaign has pushed Colorado's health policy forward so that more children have health coverage — from the creation of Child Health Plan Plus (CHP+) to the expansion of Medicaid to making sure public health coverage is available to all Colorado children, regardless of immigration status.

**Helping children get critical immunizations:** Since the 1980s, The Campaign has supported efforts to help all children access vaccines — work that remains critical today.

**A holistic, data-informed approach to health and prevention:** The Campaign's efforts to support health have reflected emerging issues over the decades, including tobacco awareness and prevention programs, the Youth Crime Prevention and Intervention Program, and efforts to support mental health and reduce maternal mortality.

### By the NUMBERS

**14%**

Approximate uninsured rate  
for children in Colorado, **2008**

**4%**

Approximate uninsured rate  
for children in Colorado, **2023**

## A Voice for K-12 Education

As Colorado has grown, the Colorado Children's Campaign has worked to make sure our state is investing in K-12 education and creating schools that meet every student's needs. The Campaign has elevated the importance of funding schools equitably and helped the state make important changes to how it distributes resources; launched Full-Day Kindergarten; focused on strong standards, curriculum, and assessments; and pushed for educational opportunity for all.

I had a legislator once tell me, you know, we have a lot of people come in and testify...telling important stories on both sides of an issue. But a lot of times we wait until the Children's Campaign comes because they come with no agenda other than kids."

— CHRIS WATNEY  
COLORADO CHILDREN'S CAMPAIGN  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, 2010-2015



**Meeting students' diverse needs:** The Campaign helped Colorado become an innovator and a leader in school choice, helping the state create an ecosystem of schools that meet students' diverse needs.

**Supporting high-quality academics and school readiness:** How does Colorado support children's access to an excellent education? From the School Readiness Act, legislation to support teachers and leaders, the READ ACT, and more, The Campaign has been a voice for evidence-based approaches to support children's learning.

**Keeping public school funded fully and well:** The Campaign has helped make sure K-12 education is a priority in the state's budget, including leading an update of the state's school funding formula in 2024 to ensure that the state's resources are reaching the schools and students that need them.

**Creating a more equitable school system:** The Campaign uses data and research to understand what's happening in schools, whether it's trends in dropout rates, disparities in school discipline, or changes to students' mental health — and where information is missing, we advocate for better data.

## A Voice for Economic Security

When kids' basic needs are met, they can thrive today and in the future. The Colorado Children's Campaign has helped bring focused attention to the policies that affect the children in our state whose families have the least resources. The Campaign draws attention to what works and what doesn't work when it comes to promoting economic security, with a special focus on ensuring the thousands of Colorado children living in extreme poverty are not forgotten by state lawmakers.

**Support for children living in extreme poverty:** The Campaign has focused on modernizing programs that help children with the fewest resources meet their basic needs, including making sure families that receive basic cash assistance through Colorado Works receive ongoing cost-of-living adjustments.

**Making housing work for families and children:** As housing in Colorado has grown increasingly unaffordable, The Campaign is making sure policymakers and communities understand how the housing crisis is affecting families — and what we can do to help.

**Tax credits that make a difference:** The Campaign advocates for a tax system that works for kids, including the Child Tax Credit and the Family Affordability Tax Credit, which shore up families' financial resources when they need it most.





## For Every Kid FOR THE NEXT 40 YEARS.

Because of the Colorado Children's Campaign, Colorado's kids are healthier, safer, and better prepared for the future. And we're not done. The next 40 years depend on continued research, policy action, and bold leadership — and our community.

Today,  
a child in  
Colorado  
can...

- ★ Be cared for by a parent in their earliest weeks, thanks to FAMILI leave
- ★ Stay healthy with access to essential immunizations
- ★ Get comprehensive health coverage — including for prenatal and dental care — when their family faces financial hardship
- ★ Learn and grow in a high-quality preschool through the Universal Preschool program
- ★ Find full-day Kindergarten at any school district across the state
- ★ Choose from a wide variety of public school options that fit their needs
- ★ Attend a public school that is funded based on what its students need to succeed
- ★ Be more likely to graduate from high school than a generation ago
- ★ Enjoy free, nutritious meals at school through Healthy School Meals for All

*And so much more, thanks to the advocacy and impact of the Colorado Children's Campaign.*

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[coloradokids.org](http://coloradokids.org)