



colorado school of public health

ANNUAL REPORT

2024—2025



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A Word From Dean Bradley: A Year in Review

The Colorado School of Public Health has had a terrific year with many causes for celebration. While uncertainties loom on many fronts, our school has thrived and remained a steadfast, trusted source of research that is translated into practice and serves Coloradans. We educate public health leaders who go into many different sectors and fields, but always with a public health lens.

In many ways, our school is stronger than ever. Notable and transformational gifts include a donation from The Anschutz Foundation. The \$6M gift will support our mental health resources and support via our Rocky Mountain Prevention Research Center (RMPRC) and the

Injury and Violence Prevention Center (IVPC). We also received \$1.75M for an Endowed Chair in Innovation from longtime school supporter Dr. Richard Hoffman and from the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Overall, the 2025 fiscal year was our largest year yet. And, in a matching campaign, more than 50 new donors stepped forward to support the ColoradoSPH's innovation fund.

IN RESEARCH, we grew to new heights that allows us to conduct critical research for which our school is known, such as climate, diabetes, and cancer research. We also had new research funded in critical areas such as child health and global health.



Convocation Speaker Gina McCarthy



Awards Banquet with Honorary Delta Omega Inductee Lieutenant Governor Dianne Primavera



ColoradoSPH Awards Banquet

IN PEOPLE, we appointed a new Director of the Center for Global Health, Dr. Elizabeth Brickley, and a new Chair of the Department of Biostatistics and Informatics, Dr. David Conti.

IN THE COMMUNITY, we expanded our impact both locally and globally. Locally, we partnered with public health, nonprofit, and government organizations since our founding in 2008. With more than 900 community partners, our impact can be seen throughout the region – from the rural community in the San Luis Valley, to the Western Slope, to metro Denver.

Globally, the impact of our work is felt in regions such as Guatemala, where our Center for Global Health studies the pressing public health issues such as prenatal care, proper nutrition for mothers and babies, and preventive care. We also train and employ locals at the Trifinio Center in both administrative and scientific roles so that our work is sustainable.

FINALLY, IN EDUCATION, we have been busy! We have undertaken a year-long curriculum review, moved toward a centralized core curriculum across departments to provide a holistic cohort experience, and ensure all classes are timely, relevant, and feature experiential learning opportunities. We retired low-enrolling programs and are launching new concentrations, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Public Health.

All of this has been done under the direction of our 5-year strategic plan, which is our North Star. Our strategic pillars guide our work during challenging times and times of opportunity. Over the next several pages, we share research and community impact that brings to life what these pillars mean to: Pursue & Champion Health for All; Reimagine Public Health Education; Connect to Community & Build Partnerships for a Healthier Future; Be Centered in Science, Proven in Practice; and Enable & Uplift Our Community to Thrive.



Pursue & Champion Health for All

We are committed to advancing health for all people. Our dedication and our actions ensure that every community and each individual can achieve optimal health and wellness.

COLORADOSPH FACTS

Top 20

U.S. News & World Report ranking among schools of public health

7th

U.S. News & World Report ranking among public schools of public health

Science in Action Drives Rural Innovation for Public Health

Rural Health, Three Ways

Colorado School of Public Health researchers and faculty members don't just operate in classrooms and labs, they get out into the community, meet with residents, talk about local challenges, brainstorm solutions, and track results for years if not decades. Colorado's rural areas include agricultural lands and remote mountain communities, each with its own unique set of public health challenges. ColoradoSPH is doing research on the ground in these areas that informs public health locally and globally.

For nearly two decades, [Dr. Katherine James, PhD, MS, MPH](#), has cultivated a commitment to the people of the San Luis Valley. She follows the lead of the rural community, which has centuries-old roots in the southern Colorado soil.

"People in the San Luis Valley share a connection to the air, the land, the water, and their history and culture," said James, associate professor in the [Department of Environmental and Occupational Health](#) at Colorado School of Public Health.

A stubborn super drought, stretching across years, has put the San Luis Valley under duress. It has also spurred James and local leaders to pursue and champion health for all its residents.

The Valley's steady shift to a drier climate has had serious consequences, including water scarcity, declining water quality, loss of top soil, and increases in dust storms and wildfires, James said. These changes, in turn, have increased health problems, including asthma and chronic

pulmonary disease, renal disease, and cardiovascular disease, especially in children, aging adults, and outdoor workers, she noted.

A HELPING HAND THROUGH SCIENCE & RESEARCH

James applies her expertise in epidemiology and engineering in a search for solutions to these and other problems, but emphasizes that she does not work in isolation. She describes her role as a "gear" interconnected to a system of community partners who have homegrown ideas for addressing the Valley's climate change challenges.

"Most of my work is meeting with people across multiple systems and sectors," James said. "More of the meetings are about listening and learning than about, 'I've got this great idea.'"

An example of James' commitment to problem-solving collaboration is the [Mountain West-Partnerships in Action Towards Health \(MW-PATH\)](#), that defines itself as a "collaborative partnership to promote strong and healthy rural and urban communities."

In partnership with the San Luis Valley Community Advisory Board, this project implements economical and efficient indoor air filters to mitigate exposure to ambient dust and wildfire smoke, both of which are common with increasing drought.

The effort could reduce the health risks posed by poor air quality for all people in the San Luis Valley, James said, and encourage other rural communities in the Mountain West to develop similar approaches to protecting the health of their citizens.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES TO THE QUANTITY OF WATER

A [current project](#) of the James-led [Rural Air & Water Research Group team](#) also aims to protect the health of people in the San Luis Valley. It explores the possible connections between intensifying drought, rising levels of arsenic in the environment, and cardiometabolic outcomes. Years of drought intensified these and other threats to the health and economies of the San Luis Valley. Yet, James said its residents remain resilient and determined to find innovative ways to preserve their resources and their culture.

This project aims to protect the Rio Grande aquifer system, the lifeblood of the region. James and her community partners led a large-scale water-sampling effort for all households using private wells that measured metals, hardness, and water age.

"Nearly 830, or 45%, of households on private wells participated in supporting the development of hydrologic and geospatial models of exposure to toxic metals, especially arsenic, uranium, lead, and tungsten," James said.

Another effort aims to highlight the age of the water being drawn from wells in the Valley. Some samples showed water more than 25,000 years old. That's a sign of the toll the drought has taken, James said. "Younger" water age indicates the aquifer is actively replenished, while older "fossil water" indicates a less sustainable environment.

This work can aid leaders in the Valley in making local decisions about preserving water and the aquifer, James said.

"In many cases, the community already has ideas and solutions, and this data helps support strategic implementation," she said.

She noted several key local initiatives aimed at conserving water:

- Switching crops from alfalfa, which requires three cuttings, to hemp, which requires only one.
- Using technologies like [agrivoltaics](#), which simultaneously use solar power to generate energy and help grow crops more efficiently and with less water use.
- Developing "precision irrigation," which maps out areas of land where water efficiently infiltrates to groundwater. The mapping "aims to recharge the aquifer in a very strategic way," James said.

ADDRESSING THE HEALTH CHALLENGES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The community is also doing "an extensive amount of work" to address the health risks of climate change, James said. For example, the MW-PATH project encourages community members, such as school nurses, pharmacists, and other medical providers, to jointly develop plans to help patients with chronic health conditions protect themselves on days with bad air or soaring temperatures, she said.

That's another area where James provides support with data from research. She works closely with [Dr. Lisa Cicutto, PhD, RN](#), director of community research at National Jewish Health's Department of Medicine, an expert on the effects of worsening air quality in the Valley on children with asthma.

The two co-authored [a 2018 study](#) that associated levels of tiny air particles, driven by frequent dust storms in the Valley, with increases in the number of emergency/urgent care visits and hospitalizations.

"I have yet to meet anyone in the Valley who isn't committed to their community and its preservation," James said. "What are you fighting for if you don't have hope? And they all do."

"I am from a family of generational farmers. My philosophy as a researcher working with rural communities has always been that there is more to learn from them than from me. I have seen that all people in the San Luis Valley have unique knowledge and stories that have been the foundation to develop research projects. The San Luis Valley is one of the richest communities when it comes to people's commitment, service, and passion for the land, water, air, heritage, culture, language, history, and most importantly their neighbors. One of the many incredible community advocates I have had the pleasure of working with is Shirley Romero-Otero," James said.



Shirley Romero-Otero is the definition of a community organizer. For more than five decades (and her family has been in the area for 20 generations), she has worked as a teacher, volunteer, and mentor, and has raised her family in the community, in the same home her grandmother raised her in. Unofficially, she and other elders have been protectors of the land, water, and air, as well as heirs to the [Sangre de Cristo Land Grant](#), which protects 80,000 acres of land for their use.

“That connection to the land is in our DNA,” Romero-Otero said.

Everything she and other community organizers do, Romero-Otero said, is about the health of their community – from protecting the air and water, to planting, growing, and harvesting their own food, to mental health and physical activities for the youth in the community through a nonprofit for which she serves as executive director, [Move Mountains Youth Project Inc.](#)

“Water is very important to us, the quality of the air, the land is very important to us,” she said.

This is why she works with ColoradoSPH researchers, such as James, on research projects.

Works “with” is the key, from both of their perspectives. James applies for the grants, and conducts the research, while Romero-Otero helps garner local support (in the form of participants, volunteers, etc.), and advises on what would or would not work in the community. It’s a partnership of mutual respect.

It’s not something Romero-Otero has found with many researchers who come into her community over the years.

“She [James] came in as an outsider and we are all leery

of outsiders coming into our communities, because of our history,” she said.

However, James’ approach was different. She started by listening.

“In my 40 years of working with folks, she’s one of the best. She treats us as equals. That’s a sign of respect,” Romero-Otero said. “I consider her a colleague and a friend. She’s honest, she’s transparent, she’s here, she’s consistent, and she’s diligent about the work.”

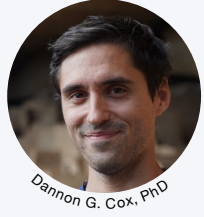
For example, if James needed water samples from wells, Romero-Otero would help facilitate communication with the well owners.

“She allowed us to do the work as we saw fit, how we would be most effective and most successful. She makes the decisions, we are the boots on the ground,” she said. “We know what our problems are, and usually we know what the solutions are.”

Romero-Otero and James ensure follow-up communication and solutions, such as water filters for households that tested with high levels of heavy metals, are provided through a new Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment Environmental Justice award.

Romero-Otero knows the importance of her community’s history in the area, and she wants it to thrive, which is why she is so involved in ensuring the health of the community and working with researchers, such as James, who want to ensure that as well.

“As the oldest community in the state, this is where Colorado begins,” she said.



ACTS OF CONNECTION

[Dr. Dannon Cox, PhD,](#)

ColoradoSPH faculty member at the University of Northern Colorado campus, has also traveled to rural communities to tackle some unique rural challenges.

One example is the impact of loneliness and isolation in rural communities. While these issues impact people in all areas, the impact can be acute in remote areas. Whereas loneliness is subjective, isolation is objective and can be more pronounced in areas that are physically removed from populated areas.

From [the Weld County Bulletin](#): “According to the U.S. Surgeon General’s 2023 Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community, the mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. Poor social relationships, social isolation, and loneliness can also increase the risk of heart disease by 29%, the risk of stroke by 32%, and among older adults, chronic loneliness and social isolation can increase the risk of developing dementia by approximately 50%.”

One of the solutions to this that Cox and a volunteer team are implementing is connection workshops and meet-ups called “Circle Talk,” which utilize weekly meetings to build trust and connection. Already community members are engaging with each other in new ways, such as making commitments to “[Acts of Connection](#),” which include a simple voluntary online [pledge](#) participants take to commit to taking voluntary actions, such as calling a grandparent once a week.

Cox has also brought what he has learned into his media class, where students promote Acts of Connection with community organizations and county residents.

Cox is not the only connection that the volunteer-led project has to ColoradoSPH. Alumni Cody Speece, MPH, ’25, who worked with Cox as a student at the UNC campus, has now been hired as health education specialist at the Weld County Health Department, which is located in Greeley. Part of his role, Speece said, is helping to address loneliness and isolation.

SHOWING UP

In other rural areas throughout the state, [Dr. Molly Gutilla, DrPH, MS,](#) a ColoradoSPH faculty member at the Colorado State University campus, has begun connecting to the community as well. As the newly appointed director of ColoradoSPH’s Rural Public Health Initiative, Gutilla is traveling to all corners of the state to visit rural departments of public health. The initiative is a one-year pilot designed to enhance the school’s research, education, and connection within rural and frontier communities throughout Colorado and the Rocky Mountain Region.

As Gutilla notes, only one in five public health professionals has formal public health training and many haven’t had the opportunity to develop additional skills. Gutilla said she is mostly training on evidence-based services and adaptive leadership – how to pivot during challenging times.

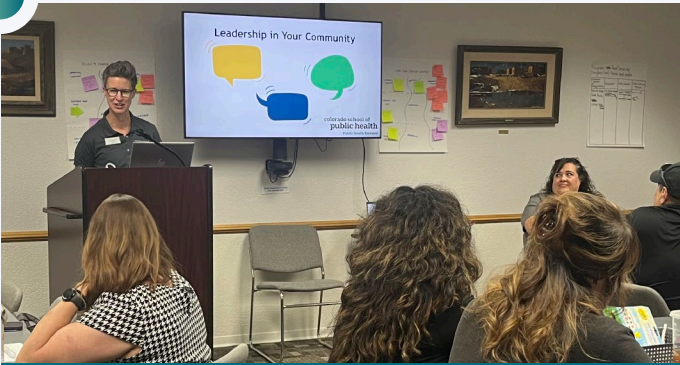
She has also seen the value of meeting in person, rather than on Zoom. Especially in rural communities, where everything is relational, she thinks it is important to show up where people live and work, and meet them where they are.

“There is such power in showing up in the present and listening,” Gutilla said.

She brings these lessons back to her students in the classroom and shares the importance of relationships when doing public health work, especially as more scrutiny has been placed on public health.

“Recognizing the challenges public health faces in building trust, we train students to continue that essential work - showing up, listening, and working alongside communities to improve health and well-being,” said Gutilla.

Growing up in a rural Ohio community and having lived and worked in rural Colorado, Gutilla brings a personal and professional understanding of the challenges and strengths of rural life. Her leadership in the Larimer County Academic Health Department and her presidency of the Health District of Northern Larimer County’s board of directors demonstrate her commitment to bridging academia and public health practice.



AT A GLANCE

Science in action drives innovation for rural public health

- **Community-Driven Climate Health Solutions:** Dr. Katherine James collaborates with San Luis Valley residents to address drought-related health issues through research and practical interventions like indoor air filtration.
- **Combating Isolation with Connection:** Dr. Dannon Cox’s “Circle Talk” initiative builds social bonds in rural Weld County, reducing the health risks of loneliness and inspiring future public health leaders.
- **Strengthening Rural Public Health Capacity:** Dr. Molly Gutilla’s statewide outreach through the Rural Public Health Initiative enhances training, trust, and leadership in underresourced communities.



Reimagine Public Health Education

As a premier school for public health leaders and workforce, we create a dynamic and engaging educational experience that prepares students to partner with an array of communities and populations to address the most daunting public health problems.

COLORADOSPH FACTS

120+
Primary Faculty

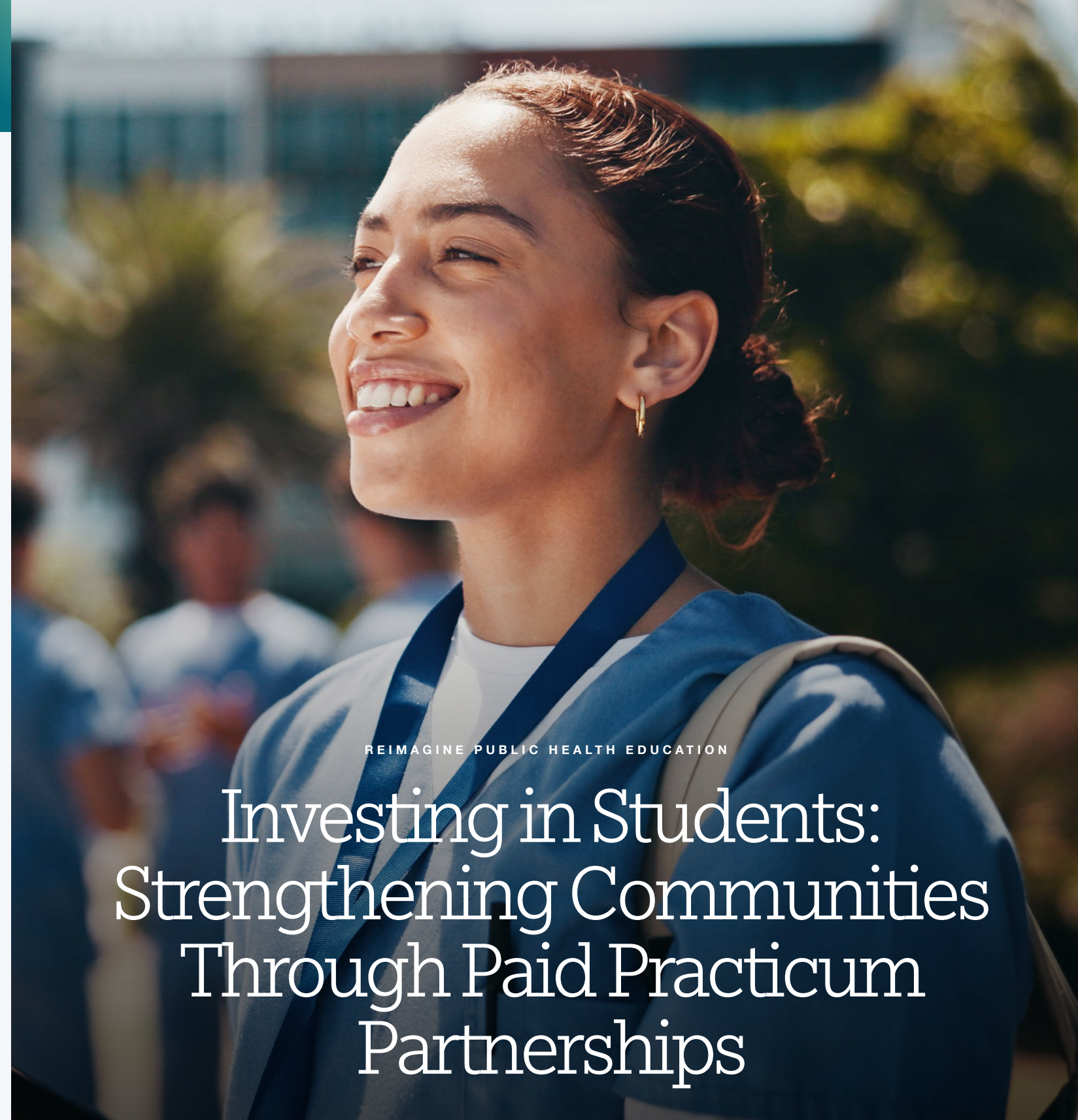
600+
Students

5:1
Student : Faculty Ratio

50+
Degrees & Programs

\$1.4M
in Scholarships Across
all Three Campuses

Photos of ColoradoSPH Convocation on the left side of page



Investing in Students: Strengthening Communities Through Paid Practicum Partnerships

Colorado School of Public Health's practice-based learning approach ensures that MPH and DrPH students get hands-on experience contributing to real-world solutions with external partners who also benefit from the time and expertise that students bring to their practicum projects. Many organizations, particularly smaller ones serving rural and underresourced communities, cannot afford to pay students for their practicum work, leading

students to either work for free or opt to work with larger organizations. ColoradoSPH's new initiative seeks to expand paid practicum opportunities for students working with smaller public health organizations, delivering tangible benefits for both students and our partners. Since more than 70% of our graduates stay in Colorado to work after graduation, we are a major pipeline to the public health workforce.



When Alisa Witt started in public health decades ago, first as a professor in Illinois, then later as the director of the Gilpin County Public Health, she never thought she would be forced to kick people out of their homes for failing to have a working septic system. But after ten years in the mountain communities around Black Hawk, she has seen many people removed from their homes.

Septic system repair and replacement in the mountains can cost between \$20,000 and \$60,000. She saw families with disabled Veterans face evictions because they can't afford repairs, or even abandon their homes.

Witt knew that research, outreach, and community work would be needed to get an effective policy passed, so she reached out to Dr. Katie Dickinson, PhD, MS,

Department of Environmental and Occupational Health (EOH) faculty member at the Colorado School of Public Health, to see if students could help. Dickinson folded the project into her spring semester policy class, and then into a summer practicum for a grad student.

That student, Rachel Culli, a second-year MPH candidate, had only learned about policy development in Dickinson's class before heading to Gilpin County to work on a proposed state bill to fund decentralized septic tanks for rural residents.

While the process seemed straightforward in the classroom, Culli found the complexities of the real-world challenges first-hand. She took on everything from reading resident testimonies to meeting one-on-one with Representative Lesley Smith, who

sponsored the bill, to presenting at the county board of health.

The experience was part of a pilot project, funded by the EOH Department, to provide more students with paid, experiential learning opportunities serving underresourced organizations. Dickinson, who leads the school's Pursue & Champion Health for All strategic initiative, led the pilot project.

The two partners for this pilot year's opportunities included Gilpin County Public Health and Cultivando, a Latino-led nonprofit that focuses on environmental and health issues associated with the Suncor oil refinery.

For Cultivando Director of Environmental Justice Programs Guadalupe Solís, MPH, '21, the experience was special.

“Working with Dr. Katie Dickinson and the Colorado School of Public Health has been a very meaningful experience. This is especially meaningful for me, given that I am an alumna of the school. It is rare to have academic partners who show up with humility and deep understanding of community needs, and that’s made our collaboration feel like a real partnership,” said Solís.

“I’m grateful and hopeful about what this summer practicum pilot will offer—not just for the brilliant students, who deserve to be paid for community-based work, but for us too. There’s so much potential in building stronger, more reciprocal relationships between the school and community organizations like Cultivando, and I am proud of the school for piloting the program,” said Dickinson.

Dickinson wants to help the school pursue and champion health for all by finding partnerships between small organizations that serve community residents and need help, coupled with students who need real-world experience to enter a competitive job market.

“Both for our students’ benefits and the benefit of these small organizations...we want our students to do work in a place that is rewarding and give them a lot of hands-on, community-focused work,” Dickinson said.

Culli found the experience both humbling and inspiring - humbling

because of the amount of work done by a three-person team for all of Gilpin County, where about 6,000 residents reside, and inspiring for the same reason. Culli found herself in the role of teacher in many instances over her summer practicum. For example, as the go-between with local and state government agencies, she provided needed education on septic tank challenges in remote, mountain communities. The cost, time, and resources it takes came as a shock to several officials. It could cost millions and take years to repair septic systems for all the homes that need them in and around Gilpin County. She was also humbled by reading the testimony of residents, many of whom were forgoing paying for septic issues so that they could pay for heat, electricity, and other essentials.

“It’s becoming a housing issue. People don’t report it, and that impacts pollution in the community and affects neighbors,” Culli said.



AT A GLANCE

Investing in Students: Strengthening Communities Through Paid Practicum Partnerships

- **Expanding Access to Real-World Experience:** A new pilot initiative at ColoradoSPH funds paid practicum opportunities for students working with underresourced public health organizations, ensuring access to hands-on learning.
- **Supporting Community-Driven Policy:** Students like Rachel Culli contributed to impactful projects, from septic system policy in Gilpin County to environmental work with Cultivando, while learning the complexities of public health in action.
- **Building a Stronger Public Health Workforce:** With over 70% of graduates staying in Colorado, these partnerships not only benefit students and communities now, but also strengthen the state's future public health infrastructure.



Katie Dickinson, PhD, MS



Rachel Culli



Guadalupe Solís, MPH



ColoradoSPH Employee Gathering



ColoradoSPH Employee Kickball Tournament



ColoradoSPH Employee Kickball Tournament



ColoradoSPH Convocation



Connect to Community & Build Partnerships for a Healthier Future

At the heart of our mission are strong community connections and partnerships. We are indispensable to our partners and promote innovation that lays the foundation for thriving, healthier communities.

COLORADOSPH FACTS

3,330

Alumni

900+

Community Partnerships



CONNECT TO COMMUNITY &
BUILD PARTNERSHIPS FOR A
HEALTHIER FUTURE

Building Mental Health Readiness for School Safety Through Community Partnership

The safety of our children, teachers, and staff in our public schools is of the utmost concern in public health. Whether it be air quality in the classroom, the safety of buildings and equipment, or emergency preparedness to mitigate threats, both natural and man-made, Colorado School of Public Health researchers have long partnered with schools throughout Colorado to study the effectiveness of safety measures and implement better practices. By connecting with teachers and staff, ColoradoSPH researchers can understand their concerns at the ground level and provide solutions that professionals can implement. This is just one example of our efforts to connect to our community and build partnerships for a healthier future.



Natalie Schwatka, PhD, MS



Courtney Welton-Mitchell, PhD



Miranda Dally, DrPH, MS



Sarah Levine, MPH



Olivia Zarella, DrPH, MPH

In an ideal world, our schools provide a safe place for students, teachers, and staff to learn and grow. But the sobering reality is far different: [hundreds of shootings](#) have occurred in K-12 schools in the United States in the past decade alone.

“You can’t go a day during the school year without thinking about or remembering or hearing about an active shooter in a school,” said [Dr. Natalie Schwatka, PhD, MS](#), associate professor in the [Department of Environmental and Occupational Health \(EOH\)](#) and Centers for Health, Work, and Environment (CHWE) at Colorado School of Public Health.

Beginning in 2021, Schwatka and co-project leader Dr. [Courtney Welton-Mitchell, PhD](#), adjunct associate professor with the Department of EOH at ColoradoSPH, co-led an effort to prepare school workforces for the mental stress imposed by shootings, acts of in-school violence, natural hazards, and other events.

The research project, which aimed to complement emergency-preparedness drills with training to bolster mental health readiness, was a collaboration between CHWE and six schools – two each from elementary, middle school, and high schools – in the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD). The partnership builds a healthier future for school teachers, staff, and students.

The work earned CCSD’s Safety and Security Team the Community Impact Award for [CHWE’s 2023 Partner Awards](#).

TRAINING TO STRENGTHEN PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS FOR EMERGENCIES

The core of the project was a training program focused on psychological preparedness for emergencies the school workforce may encounter. Welton-Mitchell and Schwatka developed the “Mental Health Integrated Emergency Preparedness Training.” [It is free and available for download.](#)

Schwatka noted that CHWE is one of 10 National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health-designated [Centers of Excellence for Total Worker Health](#) (TWH),

with an approach to “prioritize a hazard-free work environment for all workers.”

The TWH philosophy, Schwatka said, is “focusing on people’s physical health at work, protecting them from injury and loss of life, and also their mental health and well-being.”

She and Welton-Mitchell worked jointly with Ian Lopez, director of safety and security for CCSD, mental health staff at the schools, and community members to develop the psychological preparedness training program.

The training was co-created with the school workforce. Content was developed and revised based on insights from some 60 interviews with Colorado teachers and staff about their primary concerns and perceived gaps in current emergency preparedness training, including how they viewed their roles during an emergency and their preparedness to respond to one, Welton-Mitchell said.

“Many educators express concern about the risks they may face at school, ranging from physical violence to natural hazards,” said Welton-Mitchell. “Media coverage of frequent school-based events can further exacerbate educators’ anxiety.”

MORE PSYCHOLOGICAL PREPARATION FOR TEACHERS NEEDED

The interviews with teachers revealed that many had unanswered questions about how

best to respond to the hazards they might encounter while doing their jobs, Schwatka said.

“They also expressed interest in being more involved and being a leader and having an active role in planning for emergencies,” she said.

The training materials include four modules, with an overarching goal of helping teachers prepare, both mentally and physically, for emergencies. This includes giving them resources to “cope in the moment,” Schwatka said.

THE MODULES ADDRESS:

- Emergency preparedness procedures
- Psychological preparedness
- Peer support between coworkers
- Feedback procedures for educators to share suggestions about emergency preparedness.

“After the training, teachers have learned how to prepare personally and psychologically for emergencies,” Schwatka said. “They’ve learned how to support their coworkers, and there’s a mechanism for them to be more engaged in emergency preparedness.”

Dr. Miranda Dally, DrPH, MS, research assistant professor with CHWE, helped the team analyze the study results, which were published in the [Journal of School Violence](#) this past year.

EXPANDING THE TRAINING’S REACH

Schwatka and her colleagues continue to spread the mental health emergency preparedness message. In September 2024, she and [Sarah Levine, MPH](#), research services professional with CHWE, presented the training materials in a 90-minute webinar titled “Creating a Culture of Support: Enhancing Staff Resilience in Emergency Situations.”

The webinar, designed as a train-the-trainer educational session, arose from a partnership with the [National Center for School Safety](#) at the University of Michigan and is available on its website.

More recently, the team, including Dr. Olivia Zarella, DrPH, MPH, research associate for implementation science with CHWE, created new materials, based on the curriculum developed for CCSD, that are applicable to all Colorado schools, and delivered a train-the-trainer session with the [Colorado Office of School Safety](#).

The goal, Schwatka said, is to build “a cadre of emergency preparedness and mental health trainers who are embedded around the state in local communities and will give trainings in districts all the time.” She anticipates districts using the curriculum “in the coming year,” both in-person and online.

Schwatka called CHWE’s work with the Colorado Office of School Safety timely in light of that organization’s [recent](#)

[report](#) on educator safety, which called out the importance of mental health resources for classroom teachers and staff. She noted that Amy Schamberg, TWH certificant and DrPH student in EOH, contributed to the report.

“Our Mental Health Integrated Emergency Preparedness curriculum will help the state address some of the problems in the report,” Schwatka said.

Overall, the two-year research project and the work that has followed “represents the ethos of what all of us in public health want, which is to have an impact on our communities,” Schwatka said. “I think it has had a great local impact in Colorado because we are focused on bringing it to all schools, with the help of the Colorado Office of School Safety.”



AT A GLANCE

Building Mental Health Readiness for School Safety

- **Partnering with Schools for Safer Learning Environment:** ColoradoSPH researchers collaborated with Cherry Creek School District to co-create emergency preparedness training focused on psychological resilience for educators and staff.
- **Empowering Educators Through Mental Health Training:** The Mental Health Integrated Emergency Preparedness curriculum helps school personnel prepare mentally and physically for emergencies, fostering peer support and active engagement.
- **Expanding Impact Statewide:** With support from the Colorado Office of School Safety, the training is being adapted and delivered across Colorado, building a network of trainers to support school communities.



Centered in Science, Proven in Practice

Our signature approach merges scientific discovery with practical application. By grounding our work in evidence-based methodologies, we translate academic insights into tangible health improvements that are indispensable to our constituents.

COLORADO SPH FACTS

525+

Published Research
Articles in FY25

\$7.5M

Research on Environmental
Influences on Child Health Outcomes

18th

Blue Ridge Institute of
Medical Research Ranking

\$12M

Research on Early
Determinants of Child Health

\$80M

In Research Funding

Photos of ColoradoSPH Research Exchange on the left side of page



CENTERED IN SCIENCE,
PROVEN IN PRACTICE

Global Health Lessons Rooted in Community & Carried into Practice

Global health can often seem, and is, a world away, but at Colorado School of Public Health, faculty and staff ensure those lessons are brought back to the classroom for students' education, and back to the lab for analysis, the outcomes from which can impact communities both locally and internationally.

ColoradoSPH community in Guatemala

When hourly farm workers in countries such as Guatemala get sick, it's not only feeling poorly that impacts them; it's the loss of wages, sometimes as the only provider for the family. During COVID-19 illnesses, for example, many households lost up to one-third of their monthly household income. More than half of families in the region face food insecurity and live paycheck to paycheck.

"The impact of infectious diseases on the public health of this community is immense," said Dr. Daniel Olson, MD, PhD, at Colorado School of Public Health's [Center for Global Health](#).

"We try to understand the true breadth of disease. Not just people who show up in the hospital, but what it means when they have to miss a week of work, or what it means for their household and their kids if they are losing income," Olson said.

That's why Olson is interested in studying the full impact of infectious and emerging diseases in the Trifinio region of Guatemala for more than a decade. While many epidemiologists focus on the origin and spread of disease, Olson is interested in the wide-ranging consequences of disease, such as the economic impacts, and interventions that improve those outcomes. As a faculty member at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and in the Department of Epidemiology at ColoradoSPH, he brings these insights and lessons back to his students.

He started going to Guatemala as a fellow in 2014. This was just a few years after the Center for Global Health's Trifinio center for

Human Development was built. The Center was built as a partnership between the University of Colorado, Children's Hospital Colorado, AgroAmerica—a Guatemalan banana and palm oil agribusiness—and the Bolaños family.

The first research nurse Olson hired was Neudy Rojop, who had just finished her training with no prior research experience. Learning as they went, they spent weeks in the community, driving by tuk-tuk to identify dengue and norovirus cases in the community, and returning to the clinic site each day, which was the only building at the time. Now, more than 10 years later, Rojop is the lead study coordinator, and has earned her MPH, and Olson, along with other ColoradoSPH leaders, has seen the expansion of the clinic site to include additional housing, a dedicated research building, a molecular laboratory, and a mosquito lab, all powered by an off-grid electrical system.

The investment comes from a wide range of partners at the University of Colorado, and Olson hopes to see the collaboration expand.

The new director for the Center for Global Health, Dr. Elizabeth Brickley, PhD, MPhil, agrees.

She joined this summer from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and is already making strides.

On behalf of the center, she has worked across schools on CU Anschutz campus to create agreements to partner for the next five years to work on interdisciplinary global health challenges. These include things such as improving vaccine confidence and strengthening health resilience to climate change.

Under her leadership, the center received gifts to support community programs to address childhood malnutrition in Guatemala, to finance more than a dozen scholarships that will enable students to undertake international experiences, and to launch the Susan Niernmeyer lecture series, which is focused on improving maternal-newborn health worldwide.

PhD student Blair Weikel, MPH, '18, hopes that part of this funding to the Center for Global Health will enable her to travel to the Trifinio site soon.



Photos of ColoradoSPH in Guatemala above



Daniel Olson, MD, PhD



Elizabeth Brickley, PhD, MPhil



Blair Weikel, MPH, PhD Candidate



ColoradoSPH student with family in Guatemala

She worked on research with her peers from the site since she was an MPH student at ColoradoSPH in 2016, but has not yet visited. Since then, she graduated, got a job at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, and returned in 2022 to earn her PhD. She is encouraged that her research has real impact, not just on the lives of her research participants in Guatemala, but on her peers who work at the center and many of whom are from and live in the region.

"Because the Trifinio site is so embedded in the community, and we work with a lot of the staff that are either part of the community or nearby, it helps me see the full picture of things," Weikel said. "Often, we study lab test results or we do a survey, and so only get a snapshot. I enjoy that the Center for Global Health and the Trifinio site are focused on service to the community in addition to

studying them. A lot of the time, research stops at publication...but at the Trifinio site, I feel like there's effort to make sure we are studying things that are important to the community, things that they actually care about, and then doing what we can to intervene."

Due to this, Weikel, who received an award for her research presentation at the ColoradoSPH's 2025 Research Exchange day, will continue to travel and present her work.

She said that she has been interested in studying global infectious diseases from a young age, even before she went to undergraduate school, and the Center for Global Health has given her that opportunity.

"It doesn't feel like kids and adults anywhere in the world should die from infectious diseases," Weikel said.

AT A GLANCE

Global Health Lessons Rooted in Community and Carried into Practice

- **Studying the Full Impact of Disease:** Dr. Daniel Olson's research at the Trifinio site in Guatemala explores not just infectious disease spread, but its economic and social consequences for agricultural workers and families.
- **Building Local Capacity Through Long-Term Partnership:** Over a decade of collaboration has transformed the Trifinio site into a hub for community-embedded research, training, and intervention, led by local professionals like Neudy Rojop, MPH.
- **Expanding Global Health Education & Impact:** Under new leadership, the Center for Global Health is growing its interdisciplinary reach, funding student research, and strengthening ties between ColoradoSPH and international communities.

CENTERED IN SCIENCE,
PROVEN IN PRACTICE

Tracking Diabetes Across Generations to Shape Prevention & Treatment

Chronic disease mitigation is one of the core tenets of public health. One such disease, that affects people across a spectrum of ages, backgrounds, and geographic locations, is diabetes. Unfortunately, Type 2 diabetes, that typically impacts adults, is growing at an aggressive rate in America among adolescents.

The [Lifecourse Epidemiology of Adiposity & Diabetes \(LEAD\) Center](#) at Colorado School of Public Health has been researching for more than 15 years with the goal of identifying the causes and preventing the condition before it starts. With such a long history of studying diabetes, researchers at the center follow the impacts of the disease, from pregnant mothers, through the birth of their children, through childhood, and now, into early adulthood.

The [continuity of the research](#) has made an impact, not only in the field, but in the lives of those studied. While it is critical that public health be centered in science, it is most impactful when the outcomes are felt in practice in the greater community.



It's a single word, heard all too frequently in the United States and around the world: diabetes. But for [Dr. Dana Dabelea, MD, PhD](#), director of the LEAD Center at Colorado School of Public Health, diabetes defies a simple summation.

"We've known for a while that diabetes is not just one disease. It is a heterogeneous condition," said Dabelea, who is also ColoradoSPH associate dean of research. "There are Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. There is diabetes in youth; there is diabetes in adults."

The search for more variations in the disease continues. Dabelea, [Dr. Wei Perng, PhD, MPH](#), deputy director of the LEAD Center and associate professor of Epidemiology, and their colleagues drive the science that leads to new, evidence-based treatments and paths to prevention.

MEET THE NEW TYPE 1 DIABETES

Most recently, Dabelea was a co-author of a [study](#) that revealed another form of Type 1 diabetes, long thought of as a single autoimmune disease that attacks the body's ability to make insulin. Researchers in sub-Saharan Africa discovered children and young adults who needed insulin treatment to live but who did not produce autoantibodies. They were also at low genetic risk for Type 1 diabetes, Dabelea said.

The researchers compared their data from the young Africans with data from the U.S.-based [SEARCH for Diabetes in Youth study](#), to which Dabelea contributed significant research. She noted that a portion of young Black people with Type 1 diabetes in the SEARCH study had the same non-autoantibody-producing characteristic as their counterparts in sub-Saharan Africa.

The discovery both expands and complicates the understanding of Type 1 diabetes for researchers and clinicians, Dabelea said.

"If it is caused by some other mechanism than autoimmunity, it might have a different treatment," she said.

NEW TAKES ON TYPE 2 DIABETES

Meanwhile, Perng helps lead a search for subtypes and drivers of Type 2 diabetes, which causes the body to resist insulin or not use it properly. She is a [principal investigator and steering committee member](#) for the Definition, Etiology, Function: INtegration to

Enhance Type 2 Diabetes treatment ([DEFINE T2D](#)) Consortium, a five-year, multisite National Institutes of Health-funded study that is now entering its second year.

Perng said DEFINE T2D leaders have identified four scientific projects that will use clinical, genetic, environmental, biologic, and other data to pinpoint differences in Type 2 diabetes and its causes.

The goal: develop more precise and effective ways to treat, reduce risk, and prevent the disease.

Perng said the projects will address the following areas:

- Replicate data that shows clusters of Type 2 diabetes in the United Kingdom, and identify new (de novo) clusters identified in the United States. The work could help to expose differences in risk factors among people in different societies. "We believe it is important to do this because the U.S. is a unique melting pot of cultures," Perng said.
- Cluster patients with prediabetes and Type 2 diabetes, study their genetic traits, and build tools to identify those at risk as early as possible.
- Cluster patients before they develop Type 2 diabetes and use data from metabolomics (the study of [metabolites](#) in the body) and proteomics (the study of proteins) to understand "the trajectory of development of Type 2 diabetes," Perng said. "The focus will be on the prediabetes phase, so that hopefully, the findings can inform prevention."
- Look for different ways to define Type 2 diabetes subtypes, based on the data available to the Consortium.

These projects receive support from the [Biostatistics Research Center](#) (BRC), which helps to generate, collect, coordinate, and analyze data. Perng is one of four principal investigators for the BRC, along with:

- [Dr. Katerina Kechris, PhD](#), professor of Biostatistics and Informatics and associate director of data science with ColoradoSPH's [Center for Innovative Design and Analysis](#).
- [Dr. Leslie Lange, PhD](#), professor with the [Department of Biomedical Informatics](#) at the

University of Colorado School of Medicine and the [Department of Epidemiology](#) at ColoradoSPH.

- [Dr. Ivana Yang, PhD](#), professor with ColoradoSPH's Department of Biomedical Informatics and ColoradoSPH's Department of Epidemiology.

A STUDY OF CARDIOVASCULAR RISK & TYPE 1 DIABETES

Meanwhile, Dabelea is principal investigator for a new study grant, [SEARCH CVD](#), which is connected to the SEARCH for Diabetes in Youth study. SEARCH CVD will probe the ways Type 1 diabetes contributes to cardiovascular disease and drives it to progress in some individuals and not others.

The work, which involves ColoradoSPH and University of Colorado School of Medicine researchers, will include carotid ultrasounds, echo cardiograms, and tests to measure arterial stiffness, Dabelea said.

She noted that the SEARCH study, which includes a varied population of individuals, suggests that Black and Hispanic individuals are at greater risk of cardiovascular disease than their White counterparts.

"Is that because they have more untreated hypertension or are treated with less aggressive modalities? We need to understand why, and this study will do exactly that," Dabelea said.

EPOCH STUDY: THE ADVANTAGES OF LONGEVITY

One of the great strengths of the LEAD Center is its emphasis on studying how diabetes progresses in individuals over time. A prime example is the Exploring Perinatal Outcomes among Children ([EPOCH](#)) study, which Dabelea launched shortly after joining the University of Colorado faculty two decades ago.

EPOCH began with collecting data on children born to women with maternal obesity and gestational diabetes. The study then recruited children from this group at 10 years of age and assessed them for obesity and risk for metabolic disease, including Type 2 diabetes. A follow-up took place when the children were 16 years old.

Now a third stage, at age 25, is underway, led by Perng, who noted EPOCH has a wealth of genetic and



ColoradoSPH Awards Banquet



ColoradoSPH Awards Banquet



ColoradoSPH Convocation



Enable & Uplift Our Community to Thrive

Our faculty, staff, and students are the foundation of our entire organization. We recognize their individual strengths, champion their growth, and foster a sense of belonging among all members of our school community. We create an environment where our people thrive so that they can help others to thrive.

COLORADOSPH FACTS

71%

of Graduates are Employed in Colorado

98.4%

of Alumni are Employed or Furthering their Education within One Year of Graduation

400+

Faculty & Staff

biologic data from the recruits, as well as environmental, behavioral, and lifestyle factors that could influence their development. In addition, researchers are collecting data from the gut microbiome, Perng said.

All of this data provides the platform to study “patterns of change” that predict prediabetes and early-onset Type 2 diabetes, Perng said. The goal is to gain insights into “precision prevention” for and the heterogeneity of Type 2 diabetes in the young, an area that is “largely unknown,” she said.

The growing number of young people with aggressive forms of Type 2 diabetes – as documented by the SEARCH study and others – is a sign that we need to continue to do better for our kids, Dabelea concluded.

“We need to discover how to treat it better, and most importantly, we need to prevent it. We at the LEAD Center are going to focus on that now and for the foreseeable future,” said Dabelea.

AT A GLANCE

Tracking Diabetes Across Generations to Shape Prevention & Treatment

- **Redefining Diabetes Through Global & Local Research:** LEAD Center researchers are uncovering new subtypes of Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, revealing how genetics, environment, and social factors shape disease risk and treatment needs.
- **Following Diabetes Across the Lifespan:** Long-term studies like EPOCH and SEARCH track individuals from birth to adulthood, offering insights into how early-life exposures influence diabetes development and cardiovascular risk.
- **Advancing Precision Prevention:** By integrating data from diverse populations and disciplines, the LEAD Center is driving more personalized approaches to diabetes prevention and care.



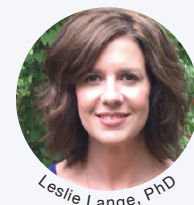
Dana Dabelea, MD, PhD



Wei Perng, PhD, MPH



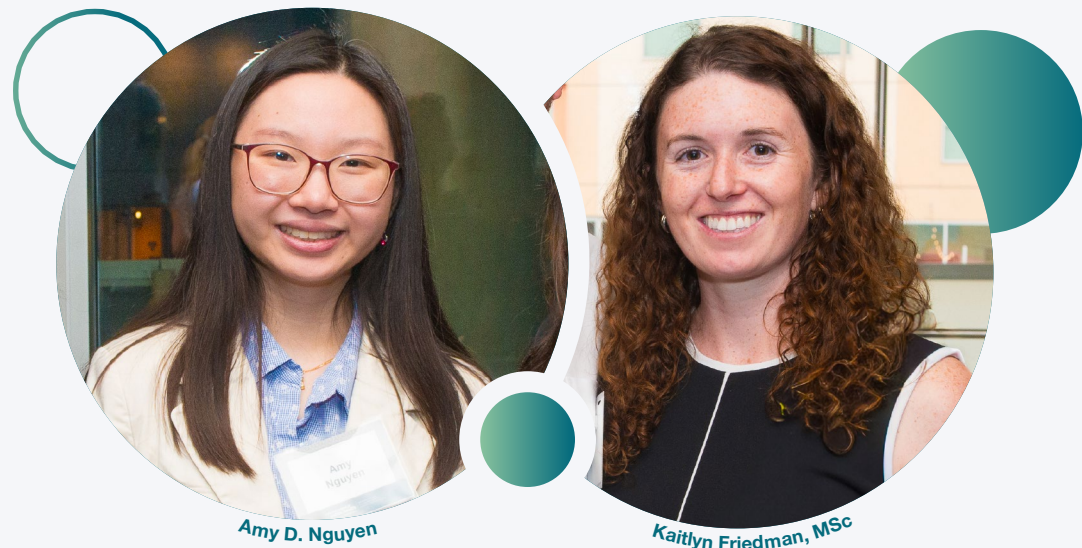
Katerina Kechris, PhD



Leslie Lange, PhD



Ivana Yang, PhD



Amy D. Nguyen

Kaitlyn Friedman, MSc

ENABLE & UPLIFT OUR COMMUNITY TO THRIVE

ColoradoSPH Students Lead the Future of Public Health

Our students are at the center of everything we do at Colorado School of Public Health. They are the reason we are here, and each year, graduates become the next generation of public health leaders, moving the field forward.

For second-year MPH student Amy D. Nguyen, her interest in health began at a very young age when she assisted her Vietnamese grandparents in translating at their doctor's appointments and navigating complex health care systems. She learned that language makes a big impact on the quality of health care received. She vowed to help the broader community by studying public health. At first, she considered studying medicine, but she quickly realized that health outcomes are influenced by factors beyond the doctor's office, at the population level. She wanted to learn about systems-level health policy, social determinants of health, and more.

After earning her undergraduate degree from University of Colorado Denver in public health, she wanted to stay in Colorado to be close to family, and chose Colorado School of Public Health, where she received a Judith Albino scholarship. She chose Health Systems, Management & Policy as her concentration. She wanted to impact health systems through administration and policy.

"It's important to think of how we can make the health experience better for communities that may not speak English," Nguyen said.

At a scholarship reception for ColoradoSPH, Nguyen was surrounded by donors, and her peers, along with school leaders.

"It made me proud to be in public health. I am very grateful and inspired, knowing that we have such a strong community of public health leaders and those who advocate for public health, as well as students who want to be in this field to contribute back to the amazing

work we are doing at the school and in Colorado," Nguyen said.

She said the location of the school, which is on the CU Anschutz campus, also makes her feel connected to opportunities with the University of Colorado School of Medicine, Children's Hospital Colorado, and UCHHealth, all on the same campus.

For DrPH student Kaitlyn Friedman, MSc, her interests in public health began in global injury and violence prevention but narrowed to a focus on firearm-related harms in the United States after a family friend who was experiencing intimate partner violence died by firearm-related suicide.

After earning her undergraduate degree from Vanderbilt University, her master of science degree from Duke University, she worked in the field for several years.

Then she chose ColoradoSPH because of the opportunities to partner with the school's Injury and Violence Prevention Center (IVPC) and the Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative (FIPI).

"IVPC and FIPI are among the leaders in the nation for work done on these issues," Friedman said.

Friedman was able to pursue this work because of a scholarship from Dr. Richard Hoffman.

"This support allows me to continue engaging in meaningful projects with IVPC and FIPI while advancing my academic and professional career. Personally, this scholarship lessens the financial burden of doctoral studies for me and my husband; and professionally, it gives me the space and resources to further my expertise and contribute to public health in ways that matter for communities in Colorado and across the country. I'm inspired and honored to be surrounded by people that are truly committed to building healthier and safer futures for us all," Friedman said.

AT A GLANCE

Students Lead the Future of Public Health

- **Empowering Communities Through Language and Policy:** MPH student Amy D. Nguyen draws from personal experience to improve health systems for non-English-speaking communities, focusing on health policy and administration.
- **Advancing Injury Prevention Through Scholarship and Research:** DrPH student Kaitlyn Friedman applies her academic training and personal motivation to address firearm-related harms, supported by ColoradoSPH's Injury and Violence Prevention Center.
- **Scholarships Fuel Purpose-Driven Careers:** Support from donors enables students to pursue meaningful public health work, strengthening Colorado's public health workforce and inspiring the next generation of leaders.



Alumnus Applies MBA & MPH Training to Tackle Barriers to Care

Part of enabling our people to thrive is seeking new opportunities for our students, faculty, staff, and alumni to learn, research, work, and make an impact. One of those pathways is in the private sector. Our students graduate from our programs prepared with the skills and know-how to enter a variety of positions across many sectors – both public and private.

Guillermo Besserer-Ochoa*, MBA, MPH '24, graduated from Colorado School of Public Health and is building a career at the intersection of business and health. With training in both fields, he manages clinical business operations at the UCHHealth University of Colorado Hospital, using operational strategy to improve health care delivery across more than 50 complex clinical areas.

Besserer-Ochoa works across inpatient and outpatient units, including radiology, respiratory, laboratory services, the emergency department, and more. His work aligns financial needs, business processes, reimbursement, and administration, with a goal to reduce bureaucracy, allowing clinicians to prioritize patient care.

"If we reduce administrative burden, staff can focus on the patient," he said. "That's where my work lives."

Besserer-Ochoa's journey reflects the wide-ranging impact ColoradoSPH alumni have across the public health landscape in Colorado, which includes both the public and

private sectors. His experience in the private sector includes financial services consulting at Ernst & Young (now EY) in New York, entrepreneurial ventures in Mexico, and even working as a scuba instructor. These experiences shaped a unique skill set that helps him connect with people from all walks of life. This wide-ranging background, combined with his commitment to collaborative leadership, enables him to navigate complex systems with both strategic insight and empathy. By integrating systems thinking with business and financial expertise, Besserer-Ochoa is not only improving operational excellence in health care but also demonstrating how inclusive, cross-disciplinary leadership can create meaningful changes in public health.

Although he does not directly provide patient care, his work facilitates timely appointments, enhances resource coordination, and supports a resilient health care system. This approach demonstrates how operational expertise with a public health lens underpins clinical care.



"Public health is often thought of as prevention, programs, and policy," Besserer-Ochoa explained. "But there's also an operational side. If the system isn't sustainable, access falls apart. That's where I try to make a difference."

Currently, Besserer-Ochoa is focused on reducing patient wait times, improving financial transparency for clinical teams, and exploring practical frameworks for public-private collaboration in health. Efficient navigation of care for patients and clear cost visibility for organizations enhances access, particularly for those facing significant barriers. Long term, he aims to inform policy and build sustainable systems that motivate businesses to advance public health as a core strategy.

As part of his MPH practicum at ColoradoSPH, Besserer-Ochoa interned in the oncology department at UCHHealth in 2023, joining their Curbside Care program (now called Community First Choice). This program was developed during the COVID-19 pandemic, a period when clinics had to deliver safe, reliable care under unique constraints. A positive outcome of the pandemic was the development of programs like the Curbside Care program, that provided more efficient, low-contact care services.

During his time with the team, he led an initiative to optimize infusion scheduling workflows by applying Lean Six Sigma methodologies (a structured approach to cut waste and reduce errors), that reduced process inefficiencies by approximately 20%. He also developed a staffing model and simulation tool to support long-term planning and expand access to appointments.

This work contributed to the Curbside Care program, that supported patients with mobility issues, older adults, and immunocompromised patients receiving cancer treatment. It allowed selected services to be delivered from patients' vehicles, minimizing exposure risk while maintaining continuity of care.

Besserer-Ochoa helped build the scheduling infrastructure that made these services scalable, demonstrating how logistics, such as scheduling and systems

design, can directly improve patient outcomes in clinical settings.

Besserer-Ochoa's work also highlights the idea that strong business infrastructure directly supports public health, building on his experience and academic foundation.

Trained at ColoradoSPH to understand the broader social determinants of health, Besserer-Ochoa now views business operations not just as economic tools but as powerful levers for equity, a core tenet of public health. His approach transcends traditional corporate social responsibility, directly addressing fundamental public health challenges.

"Our north star is always patient care," Besserer-Ochoa said. "But if we don't sustain ourselves financially, we can't keep the doors open."

Besserer-Ochoa points to his MPH coursework as foundational to his impact. Courses in health economics, health care finance, and policy sharpened his ability to navigate trade-offs in budgeting and reimbursement. One course stood out: Social and Behavioral Factors of Health CBHS 6610, taught by Evelinn Borrayo, professor, associate director for community outreach and engagement at CU Cancer Center. It gave him the language and framework to connect business decisions with population health outcomes.

"Scheduling is policy," Besserer-Ochoa said. "If someone can't get to their appointment because they don't have childcare or flexible hours, that's an operational equity issue."

As a health care finance teaching assistant and a Delta Omega Public Health Honor Society inductee, Besserer-Ochoa was recognized as a rising leader who could bridge the gap between theory and practice, bringing new perspectives to the health care system.

"The MBA keeps the doors open," he said. "The MPH ensures the right people can walk through them. If I can demonstrate that a process improves both care and sustainability, everyone listens," he said. "That's the common ground."

Katherine Brumfield, MA, manager of career services at ColoradoSPH, worked closely with Besserer-Ochoa during his graduate training and witnessed his transformation.

"Guillermo's public health journey as a career changer and non-traditional student is truly inspiring; it shows that returning to school can open doors to exciting new job opportunities. He was relentless in his networking, engaged with everyone he could, applied broadly, and ultimately secured his dream role despite having no prior work experience in the health sector. His resilience and determination are remarkable, and I couldn't be prouder of him," said Brumfield.

Besserer-Ochoa's story reflects the core of ColoradoSPH's strength in our alumni and their ability to feel confident in addressing complex health challenges. In his work, he champions the growth of others, streamlines systems to promote collaboration, and fosters a sense of belonging across departments, roles, and teams, enabling an entire ecosystem to flourish alongside him. His efforts ensure that providers can do their best work, patients can access care more easily, and administrators can lead with clarity and purpose.

Besserer-Ochoa advice for current ColoradoSPH students: "Take the classes that challenge your worldview. Build relationships like they are your next career step—because they probably are. And always show up with curiosity and respect. That's what people remember. That's what opens doors."

AT A GLANCE

Alumnus Applies MBA & MPH Training to Tackle Barriers to Care

- **Operational Strategy Meets Public Health:** Guillermo Besserer-Ochoa uses business and public health training to streamline clinical operations at UCHHealth, improving access and reducing administrative burden.
- **Practicum Impact in Oncology Care:** His MPH practicum led to a 20% reduction in scheduling inefficiencies and supported long-term planning through staffing simulations.
- **Inclusive Leadership Across Sectors:** With a background in consulting, entrepreneurship, and health care, Besserer-Ochoa demonstrates how cross-sector experience can drive meaningful change in public health systems.



ENABLE & UPLIFT OUR COMMUNITY TO THRIVE

Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Nicole Kelp

Bridging Science, Story, & Community through One Health

A biomedical scientist turned communication scholar, Dr. Nicole Kelp, PhD, assistant professor, Colorado School of Public Health at Colorado State University, shows how listening, storytelling, and science together build healthier communities.

Kelp's teaching spans both human medicine and public health. Her research focuses on health communication, infectious disease education, and inclusive science communication, bridging the fields of behavioral science, microbiology, and community engagement. Through her work, she examines how communication can foster collaboration, increase public understanding, and enhance trust between scientists and communities.

In the world of public health, a lot of people talk about "interdisciplinary work." Nicole Kelp lives it.

With her various roles, Kelp moves between classrooms, labs, and community conversations. Her work is at the intersection of microbiology, human behavior, and communication, the heart of One Health.

One Health is a collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary approach that recognizes the connection between human, animal, and environmental health. It emphasizes that the health of people is closely linked to the health of animals and the environment we share.

When Kelp talks about One Health, she speaks clearly and with confidence, avoiding complicated terms. To her, One Health is more than a trendy phrase. It is a perspective that keeps people connected to the world around them.

At Colorado State University, the One Health approach drives partnerships among veterinarians, public health professionals, ecologists, and social scientists to address complex challenges, including emerging infectious diseases, climate change, antimicrobial resistance, and food security.

The core idea is simple: We can't achieve lasting human health without protecting the ecosystems and species that sustain us.

FROM TEACHING SCIENCE TO TEACHING CONNECTION

Before joining ColoradoSPH in 2020, Kelp taught at Washington State University, where she found herself in an unexpected position: helping future scientists learn how to communicate science effectively. "I realized that many STEM students were never trained to communicate what they do," she recalled. "If we expect them to talk about things like antibiotic resistance or emerging infectious disease, we have to teach them how."

That realization hit just before the COVID-19 pandemic, and it shaped her career. As misinformation spread faster than the virus itself, Kelp saw the consequences of poor communication firsthand.

When she arrived at ColoradoSPH, she began building bridges that connected microbiologists, journalists, and behavioral scientists who could work together to make science more accessible, accurate, and human.

INCLUSIVE SCIENCE COMMUNICATION: A TWO-WAY STREET

Much of Kelp's work today revolves around what she calls inclusive

science communication. It's not just about telling people the facts. It's about listening, making sure science is shaped by the voices and experiences of those it affects.

Her favorite example comes from Dr. Anthony Fauci's memoir, where HIV activists in the 1980s changed how clinical trials were run by simply speaking up. "They weren't scientists," Kelp said, "but they understood their lives and their insights made the research better. That's the kind of dialogue we need more of."

She brings that same spirit to her projects. In a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-funded study on vector-borne diseases, she collaborates with epidemiologists, mosquito-control experts, and public health practitioners to investigate how communities perceive and discuss disease risk. "We don't just make a flyer and call it communication," she said. "We ask what people already know, how they feel, and how their insights can guide better decisions."

TEACHING THE NEXT GENERATION TO SPEAK SCIENCE

Kelp's classroom is where science and storytelling meet. She reminds her students that communication isn't an extra skill; it's part of being a good scientist. She introduces them to the psychology behind how people make health decisions, how beliefs form, and why facts alone rarely change minds.

"You don't have to be a communication researcher," she said, "But understanding how people process information makes your work more intentional and impactful."



Nicole Kelp, PhD

Her advice for future public health professionals is simple: Learn to translate and build relationships, not just transmit facts.

FINDING COMMON GROUND IN A NOISY WORLD

When asked what message she'd leave readers with, Kelp pauses. Then she says something that feels especially relevant right now.

"It's easy to think there's a war on science. But most people don't hate science. They care deeply about their families, their pets, and their communities. Even when we disagree, there's more common ground than conflict. We just must keep listening."

That blend of optimism and realism is what makes her voice

distinct within One Health. It's not about arguing louder, it's about understanding better.

"We can't treat communication as an afterthought. It's not just how we share science, it's how we make better science, together," said Kelp.

AT A GLANCE

Bridging Science, Story, & Community through One Health

- **Connecting Disciplines to Improve Health:** Dr. Nicole Kelp integrates microbiology, behavioral science, and communication to advance the One Health approach, linking human, animal, and environmental health.
- **Inclusive Science Communication in Action:** Her work emphasizes listening and collaboration, ensuring that public health messaging reflects community voices and builds trust through shared understanding.
- **Empowering Future Scientists to Speak Clearly:** Through teaching and research, Kelp equips students with the tools to communicate science effectively, fostering stronger relationships between scientists and the public.



Philanthropy at ColoradoSPH: Gratitude & Impact

Colorado School of Public Health extends its heartfelt appreciation to the many benefactors whose generosity empowered our mission this year. Thanks to your unwavering support, the past year marked a banner year for the school, with tremendous growth in philanthropic contributions.

Your commitment enabled us to build the resources necessary to advance a healthier future for all. Together, we are shaping the next generation of public health leaders and driving meaningful change in communities across

Colorado, the Rocky Mountain Region, and beyond.

This year, your support made possible a record number of student scholarship awards, the establishment of new lectureships that bring thought leaders into our academic community, and investments in innovative research that address the most pressing public health challenges of our time.

We are deeply grateful for your partnership and dedication to our mission. Thank you for being an essential part of our journey and for championing the future of public health.



Philanthropy by the Numbers

\$4,138,580

Total philanthropy contributed to ColoradoSPH between July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2025

1,371

Total individual benefactors to donate to ColoradoSPH since July 1, 2008

4,846

Total individual gifts donated to ColoradoSPH since July 1, 2008



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ColoradoSPH Night of Thanks



ColoradoSPH Awards Banquet



ColoradoSPH Night of Thanks

Fundraising Highlights:

THE ANSCHUTZ FOUNDATION GIFT FOR MENTAL HEALTH: In September, the launch of the CU Anschutz Mental Health Collaborative, made possible through the generosity of the Anschutz Foundation, was announced. As part of a transformative \$50 million gift to CU Anschutz, Colorado School of Public Health received \$6 million to advance the work of two of its centers: the Rocky Mountain Prevention Research Center (RMPRC) and the Injury and Violence Prevention Center (IVPC). The RMPRC will utilize this funding to enhance mental health and well-being among parents and educators in early childhood education settings—empowering them to deliver higher-quality care that fosters social-emotional development and resilience in young children, thereby helping to prevent future mental health challenges. The IVPC, in collaboration with the Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative (FIPI), will direct its portion of the funding toward innovative, home-based injury prevention programs, with a particular focus on reducing firearm-related suicides and drug overdoses.

COLORADOSPH ENDOWED CHAIR IN INNOVATION: In Fall 2025, ColoradoSPH established the Endowed Chair of Innovation, a position made possible through a \$1.75 million investment. This endowed chair reflects the school's strategic vision to lead the future of public health through

bold, forward-thinking initiatives. The appointment to this role is made at the discretion of the Dean. We are pleased to announce that Dr. David Conti, MS, PhD, has been named the inaugural Endowed Chair of Innovation. Conti also recently assumed the role of Chair of the Department of Biostatistics & Informatics, further positioning the school at the forefront of data-driven public health research and education.

SUCCESSFUL MATCH CAMPAIGN: This past summer, ColoradoSPH launched a successful fundraising campaign, made possible by the generous offer of a matching gift from an anonymous donor. During the months of June and July, nearly 70 donors, including many first-time contributors, collectively gave more than \$50,000 to ColoradoSPH's Public Health and Science Innovation Fund. These contributions were matched dollar-for-dollar, resulting in a total of \$100,000 raised to support strategic priorities. The funds will enable the school to address its most pressing needs, including advancing educational reform and expanding support for students. This campaign reflects the power of collective generosity and the growing commitment of our community to shaping the future of public health.

New Scholarship Funds

Established in Fiscal Year 2025

CAPEK FAMILY SCHOLARSHIP FUND: The Capek Family Foundation established this fund in memory of Dr. Richard Capek and Margaret Capek, who promoted science and education in the Pueblo, Colorado area for four decades, impacting countless lives in the region. The contribution was made at the direction of Ms. Susan Capek Calonge and Dr. Bruce Nedrow Calonge, who serves as the associate dean for public health practice at ColoradoSPH. The Capek family honors the legacy of Dr. Richard Capek and Margaret Capek by supporting students whose interest in health and science will directly benefit the Colorado community.

CYNTHIA A. SOMERS PUBLIC HEALTH SCHOLARSHIP FUND: Cynthia A. Somers is a 2012 MPH graduate of ColoradoSPH with a focus on policy. She established a career in compliance for a health care organization that provides home health care for former uranium workers and home nurse visits for clinical trials, and continues to be involved with the school through her role serving on the advisory board. Through her estate planning, she includes ColoradoSPH as part of her legacy by setting up a scholarship in her name. The scholarship is designated to students pursuing a career in mental health, another area that holds special significance to her.

DIANE L. FAIRCLOUGH, DRPH, MPH, MSPH, ENDOWED PUBLIC HEALTH FUND: Longtime ColoradoSPH colleague Dr. Diane L. Fairclough's career, which included roles at St. Jude's

Hospital, the Dana-Farber Cancer Center left a lasting imprint on the field of public health, particularly in cancer patient outcomes and statistical methodology. Her work was celebrated by many, including the International Society for Quality of Life Research, and her mentorship helped shape the careers of countless students and young researchers. Funds are used to support students pursuing a degree in biostatistics, informatics, health analytics, or similar, within the Department of Biostatistics & Informatics in the school.

DR. JILL NORRIS & DR. MICHAEL HOLERS ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP IN AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE EPIDEMIOLOGY: Dr. Jill Norris is professor and chair of the Department of Epidemiology at ColoradoSPH. One of the original faculty members during the founding of ColoradoSPH, Norris has chaired the Department of Epidemiology since 2011. Norris received recognition from the American Diabetes Association's Kelly M. West Award for Outstanding Achievement in Epidemiology and was named a University of Colorado Distinguished Professor. Norris' work is at the forefront of autoimmune disease research, including Type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, celiac disease, multiple sclerosis, and lupus. The Dr. Jill Norris & Dr. Michael Holers Endowed Scholarship in Autoimmune Disease Epidemiology fund is geared towards supporting students working in autoimmune disease epidemiology.



ColoradoSPH Convocation



ColoradoSPH Night of Thanks



ColoradoSPH Awards Banquet



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