



Press Contact:

Austin Montoya, [amontoya@coloradohealth.org](mailto:amontoya@coloradohealth.org), (719) 640-3441

*Note: Poll data can be segmented for media by the Eastern Plains, Colorado Springs/Pueblo, Larimer/Weld, Denver Metro Area, and the Western Slope, as well as some populous counties.*

**New statewide poll: Challenging year has threatened many Coloradans' economic security and strained their mental health while exposing fault lines that could worsen overall health inequities**

*Two out of five Black Coloradans say they have felt afraid of police in past year*

DENVER, COLORADO – A uniquely difficult year has strained many Coloradans' finances and mental health while exacerbating housing and food insecurity – dynamics that increase health inequities, according to a major new survey of 2,275 residents across the state.

Pulse: The Colorado Health Foundation Poll, conducted by a bipartisan team of researchers, found that one out of five Coloradans worry they will not be able to afford to feed their family, 22% fear losing their home, and more than a quarter are worried about losing their health insurance. Nearly two in five Coloradans have at least one of these three financial concerns. These concerns are more pronounced among Coloradans living on low incomes, Black/African American Coloradans, and Hispanic/Latinx Coloradans. Research has shown that financial insecurity can be a factor in driving health outcomes.

"It's important, now more than ever, to have an ear to what Coloradans are saying and thinking. Each question in the poll digs into the essentials we need in life to be healthy – from affordable housing to mental wellness to economic and food security. We want to know what's keeping people up at night, what's dominating their conversations, and what they think would make the state a better place for their neighbors, friends and family," said Karen McNeil-Miller, president and CEO of The Colorado Health Foundation. "This research allows us to listen and understand Coloradans, so that we can make the most informed decisions to bring health in reach and improve health equity today, and into the future."

Complete poll results are available at [COPulsePoll.org](http://COPulsePoll.org). There users can review the results by various demographic characteristics using a convenient interactive tool. The website also offers topline results and the full research report for download.

The pandemic and its impact on the economy and jobs have taken a disproportionate toll on Coloradans living on low incomes, threatening to widen income inequality. Of Coloradans with household incomes over \$100,000, 83% say their financial status has stayed the same or improved. Among those with incomes under \$30,000, 42% say their financial status has deteriorated.

Most Coloradans report that the COVID-19 pandemic has put a strain on their mental health, contributing to anxiety, loneliness or stress. This strain is often tied to financial stress: Coloradans living on low incomes (63%), unemployed Coloradans (69%) and those who are worried about paying their rent or mortgage (77%) are most likely to report anxiety, loneliness or stress.

"Every Coloradan has been affected in some way, but Coloradans with the lowest income are bearing the brunt of the coronavirus pandemic and ensuing economic disruptions. They're not just more likely to report having had their wages or hours cut or to have been laid off, but they're also more likely to have experienced difficulty in handling childcare. No wonder they are the most apt to report increased mental health strain," said Lori Weigel, Republican pollster for Pulse and Principal of New Bridge Strategy.

Although many Coloradans are facing financial fallout caused by the pandemic, half say we should prioritize saving lives over fully reopening the economy. In contrast, 39% of Coloradans say it is more important to fully reopen the economy. Even majorities of those who have been laid off (60%) or had work hours or wages cut (54%) prioritize protecting lives.

Rural residents are most likely to favor reopening the economy, while urban and suburban residents are most likely to support saving as many lives as possible. The partisan differences are stark; nearly three-quarters of Republicans (73%) want to fully reopen while Democrats overwhelmingly want to prioritize health (82%), and Independents narrowly favor a delayed reopening to save lives (48%).

Coloradans are more evenly split about whether it's a greater concern to keep kids learning online too long and thus undermine their education (44%) or go back to in-person learning too soon and risk the health of students, teachers and staff (46%). Partisanship is the main driver of preferences with Republicans worrying more about prolonged online learning, Democrats worrying more about premature in-person classes, and Independents evenly split. Parents of school-aged children are more concerned about children falling behind in their education than the health risks of restarting in-person learning too soon.

To address the pandemic, Coloradans show broad and strong support for a range of policies, including free COVID-19 testing, free COVID-19 medical treatment, free COVID-19 vaccines when it becomes available and mask requirements in indoor public places. These policies have

support across party lines, although Republicans are less enthusiastic about a mask mandate (53% support) than Democrats (96% support) and Independents (71% support).

In a year of protests over police use of force and police-involved deaths, 63% of Black Coloradans, 56% of LGBTQ Coloradans and half of Hispanic/Latinx Coloradans consider police misconduct to be a serious problem.

These views may reflect their experiences with police. Almost a quarter of LGBTQ Coloradans and 21% of people of color said they had a negative experience with the police in the past year. Nearly half of LGBTQ Coloradans, 42% of Black Coloradans and almost a quarter of Hispanic/Latinx Coloradans said they have felt afraid of the police in the past year. Those who speak a language other than English at home were twice as likely as others to say they had a negative experience with police or had felt afraid of police. In contrast, 12% of white Coloradans reported a negative experience with police, and 14% said they had felt afraid of police in the past year.

Majorities support the state spending money to improve Coloradans' health in a variety of ways including food programs, access to health care, employment assistance, mental health and substance abuse treatment, and safe, affordable, stable housing. Specifically, a majority of Coloradans said it was extremely or very important to increase state funding for:

- Ensuring that no Coloradan goes hungry (80%)
- Ensuring all Colorado communities have places to buy fresh, healthy food (79%)
- Providing discounted or free access to the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available (74%)
- Ensuring all Coloradans have access to health care (74%)
- Helping people who are not currently working to find employment (74%)
- Providing mental health or substance use treatment for all who need it (68%)
- Ensuring that all Coloradans have access to safe, stable, affordable housing (66%)
- Helping people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness (65%)
- Ensuring all Colorado communities have places for exercise and recreation (59%)
- Providing preschool for children under age 5 (51%)

“As they feel all the strains of COVID, Coloradans want help – and they are looking to state government. They want to ensure that COVID testing, treatment and vaccines are available free of charge – but they also want the state to step up and help with the pandemic's other impacts – from food to housing to mental health treatment,” said Dave Metz, Democratic pollster for Pulse and president of FM3 Research.

### **Details of the poll**

Pulse: The Colorado Health Foundation Poll is an annual survey that takes the pulse of a representative sample of Coloradans on a range of important health issues each year to inform policy far into the future. This year's inaugural questionnaire featured questions that represent the basics we need in life to be healthy.

- Conducted by Democratic firm FM3 Research and Republican firm New Bridge Strategy.
- 2,275 Colorado adults interviewed from August 5 – 24.
- Representative address-based sample where adults were contacted by postcard, phone call, text message and email.
- Oversamples of Black/African-American and Asian-American Coloradans.
- Respondents interviewed in English or Spanish.
- Margin of error is +/-2.83% at the 95% confidence level.

### **About The Colorado Health Foundation**

The Colorado Health Foundation is bringing health in reach for all Coloradans by engaging closely with communities across the state through investing, policy advocacy, learning and capacity building. For more information, please visit [www.coloradohealth.org](http://www.coloradohealth.org).

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