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MEDIA CONTACT: Bob Mook,

bmook@cclponline.org;

303-573-5669, ext. 311

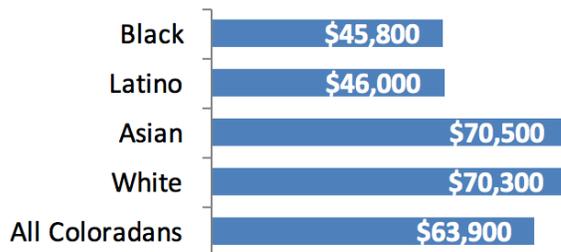
Report reveals how race, place and income determine health in Colorado

DENVER - Research consistently shows a direct correlation between income, race, where you live and your health. In general, health outcomes for low-income Latino and Black people are not as favorable as the outcomes for affluent White people. Colorado is no exception to this scientifically validated but preventable trend – despite making significant gains in providing health coverage to its residents and boasting the lowest obesity rate in the country.

“[Vital Signs,](#)” a new online report by the [Colorado Center on Law and Policy](#), highlights the dramatic influence of income, race and place on health and reveals stark disparities in this state and the effect on those who live here. The report is particularly relevant as Colorado becomes an increasingly multiracial state. Between 2000 and 2015, people of color increased from one-quarter of the state’s population to nearly one-third. By 2040, an estimated 45 percent of the state’s population will be people of color. Communities of color in Colorado are disproportionately low-income, more likely to live in high poverty neighborhoods and attend high poverty schools, and are at a greater risk for poor health outcomes. As the state’s demographics shift, the race-based economic and health chasm will drive the overall health and economic vitality of the state as a whole.

While Colorado’s economy has grown substantially in recent decades, data shows that the benefits of that growth have not been broadly shared. In fact, income gains have disproportionately flowed to families at the top of the income distribution. Wages for workers in the top 20 percent of earners are up nearly 9 percent since 2000 while earnings for the bottom 20 percent are down nearly 2 percent. Meanwhile, Colorado’s wage gap by race and ethnicity persists. Latino and Black workers tend to experience higher rates of unemployment, higher rates of poverty and lower wages compared to their White counterparts. Median income for Latino and Black workers is a paltry 65 percent of income for White workers.

Median household income by race and ethnicity, 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

Disparities in income and health care in rural and urban areas also result in disparities in health outcomes. In general, White, urban and affluent residents have easier access to quality health care and fare better than low-income, non-White and rural residents.

Among the report's other findings:

- **Income affects life expectancy of Coloradans** – Wealthier Coloradans live 6 to 10 years longer than people at the other end of the income spectrum. Men in the bottom quarter of the income distribution in Colorado, in particular, have not seen any improvement in life expectancy in the last 14 years. And the longevity gap between low- and high-income people varies substantially depending on where you live.
- **Nearly 23 percent of Coloradans living at the federal poverty level report experiencing poor or fair physical health** – At each progressively higher income level, a declining share of people report poor or fair health.
- **Living in poverty is taxing and stressful on both adults and children** – Research has shown that growing up poor can impair brain function and mental health as an adult. Hence, it's not surprising that Coloradans living in poverty were three times more likely to report poor mental health compared to people in higher income brackets.
- **The share of Coloradans reporting poor physical and mental health is substantially higher among lower-income people across racial and ethnic groups** – Disparities in health outcomes by race and ethnicity are well-documented. When broken out by income, however, differences in physical and mental health outcomes between White, Black and Latino Coloradans narrow. This finding points to the importance of addressing income disparities as a means of eliminating racial disparities in health outcomes in Colorado.
- **The economic gap between urban and rural areas of the state has continued to widen since the Great Recession which has direct consequences on health outcomes** – Median household income is 29 percent lower in rural areas of the state compared to urban areas. Poverty and unemployment rates are also higher in rural counties. Incidentally, the poorest health outcomes are concentrated in the southern part of the state.

“We live in a state of abundant resources, said Claire Levy, Executive Director of CCLP. “Yet, disparities persist that policy-makers have the power to address. With change coming in Washington and the 2017 Colorado legislative session approaching, we hope that ‘Vital Signs’ will help lawmakers and stakeholders identify the areas for improvement and the work to be done. Shared prosperity is essential to a sustainable state economy and the health and well-being of *all* Coloradans, regardless of income, race or place.”

In addition to these findings, Vital Signs also features the perspectives of four individuals who suffered because of health disparities but found assistance or a path to sustainability through a Colorado organization dedicated to improving health. The project was funded through a grant from The Colorado Trust's Health Equity Advocacy program.

[The Colorado Center on Law and Policy](#) is a nonprofit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that engages in legislative, administrative and legal advocacy on behalf of low-income Coloradans.