



COLORADO CHILDREN'S IMMUNIZATION COALITION

2019-2020 Policy Priorities

The Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition strategically mobilizes diverse partners and families to advance children's health through immunizations. CCIC works with health care providers, public health departments, businesses, policy makers and community organizations to fulfill our mission. By focusing on four key programming areas – coalition building, community outreach, provider education and public policy – the coalition leverages the strengths and resources of our members and community partners to maximize the effectiveness of our efforts.

In September of 2018, CCIC convened a multi-disciplinary stakeholder group to discuss policy concepts intended to increase childhood immunization rates and/or strengthen the immunization infrastructure. There were twenty pro-active policy concepts discussed and four emerged after small group discussions. The recommendations below reflect the CCIC Policy Committee's discussion and prioritization of the key issues.

POLICY ISSUE: Funding for School Nurses and Immunization Infrastructure

In Colorado there is a drastic shortage of school nurses, and often there is one school nurse for multiple schools responsible for upwards of 2,500 to 5,000 students. The Colorado Association of School Nurses (CASN) is pursuing legislation in 2019 to create a grant program and appropriate additional grant-based resources for school nurses throughout the state.

The stakeholder group also discussed optimizing the state's Immunization Registry (Colorado Immunization Information System). CIIS is a confidential, population based computerized system to record all vaccinations delivered by healthcare providers and is regarded as the backbone of Colorado's immunization system. School nurses and child care nurse consultants utilize CIIS daily to document immunization status and comply with reporting duties.

The stakeholder group and CCIC's Policy Committee recommend supporting legislation in 2019 to enhance funding for school nurses to increase their capacity to perform staff education, immunization status documentation, reporting and follow-up activities. Additionally, the stakeholder group recommends exploring infrastructure enhancements to CIIS to optimize the user experience for school nurses and child care nurse consultants.

POLICY ISSUE: Meaningful Exemption Processes

Colorado is currently ranked 50th among the states for its Kindergarten immunization rates despite recent efforts to increase transparency of rates in child care centers and schools. A major contributing factor to this public health concern is Colorado's lenient policies regarding non-medical exemptions (philosophical and religious) resulting in a 4.5 percent exemption rate (CDC, MMWR 2018.)

CCIC has historically supported evidence-based, medically-accurate and scientifically-supported policy recommendations regarding medical and non-medical exemptions. Similarly, CCIC has historically opposed any deviations from the current processes for medical and non-medical exemptions, as it is vitally important to collect standardized information that can be easily identified and analyzed, especially in the case of a vaccine preventable disease outbreak.

The stakeholder group discussed tightening the current non-medical exemption process via the concept of 'equal effort', rather than eliminating the non-medical exemption entirely. A focus on the process for submitting a non-medical exemption was favored in comparison to an education component or other requirements that may be construed as overreach. The group also discussed the political trade-offs and challenges associated with advocating for such a policy.

CCIC's Policy Committee recommends supporting legislation in 2019 which would strengthen the current non-medical exemption process, including both personal and religious exemptions, via a variety of process requirements.

POLICY ISSUE: Education Workforce and Population Health

Educators are the first line of contacts with children in both early childhood and K-12 school environments. The stakeholder group discussed adding immunization requirements for child care and K-12 educators in direct contact with children to ensure population health. Additionally, the stakeholder group discussed annual reporting of staff immunization rates, along with student rates to allow for consumer awareness and education about the health of their school community.

A similar structure was enacted several years ago which requires health care workers in direct contact with patients to have an annual flu vaccine. This was accomplished through regulatory changes to health facility licensing via the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and provided a three-year phased in approach and an annual reporting requirement.

The stakeholder group and CCIC's Policy Committee recommend exploring a funding opportunities for a stakeholder process in the summer of 2019 to discuss future policy changes regarding child care employees and school-based educators immunization status, including proof of immunization for flu and pertussis and annual reporting of immunization rates.