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Healthier Colorado's Director Says Group Can Be 'Transformative'

The advocacy group Healthier Colorado launched this week under the leadership of newly appointed Executive Director Jake Williams. Williams kicks off the organization's efforts with a state wide tour over the next two months, meeting with a geographical diversity of stakeholders.

In an interview with Policy Outreach Consultant Catherine Strode, Williams discusses the importance of advocacy efforts in mobilizing diverse health care groups across the state for policy change. He says that the group will form a legislative agenda in terms of 'what's most needed, what's achievable, and what will have the most impact' on improving the affordability, delivery, and quality of health care.



[Jake Williams,](#)
[Executive Director](#)
[Healthier Colorado](#)

What do you find exciting about this position?

“We’re Colorado’s first, and only, significantly funded 501(c) (4). That is meaningful and exciting in that we bring something to the health care advocacy table that’s new. We can do unlimited lobbying for example. We can weigh in on ballot measures as much as we’d like. And should we so choose, we could engage in electoral campaigns. At this time, we’re not planning on doing electoral campaigns, but in the future that might be something we choose to do. This is a new and unique project. You can expect robust advocacy, a lot of innovation, and even experimentation. It’s going to be a lot of fun and I hope people will join us because I think this could be a transformative effort in health care advocacy in Colorado.”

Who are the stakeholders composed of?

“I’m talking with everybody in state governments and the wider health care community. I’m particularly interested in building bridges with both sides of the political aisle. I think too often health care has been associated with the Democratic Party. I definitely welcome their input and their efforts on behalf of improving health care. I think Republicans have a lot to contribute as well. I’d like to work with that side of the aisle to really forge some common sense leadership on health care issues that perhaps hasn’t been seen to date in Colorado. To get anything done in health care, you need to involve multiple stakeholders because one incremental move in health care can have an effect on multiple stakeholders. The chance of unintended consequences is great if you don’t do the work up front to understand the perspectives of everyone who is involved in the system. I would say we’re not focusing on one stakeholder over another, I’m focusing on all stakeholders.”

Do you have any plans to bring legislation in the 2015 session?

“We’re interested in looking at physical education in the state. Colorado is one of four states that doesn’t require physical education in the schools. We want to find ways to help schools enhance physical education to make sure that kids are as healthy as possible.

For Coloradans of all ages, we want to find ways to improve infrastructure. I think there are plenty of Coloradans who would like to be healthier and like to engage in physical activity but they, for example, don't have a ride to the gym. Or they don't have a gym to go to; or physical activity is somehow cost prohibitive. We'd like to look at that and figure out ways we can help Coloradans make smart choices about health. Then, we're concerned about costs. Given that most people will be required to buy coverage, we want to make sure that it stays affordable. We're going to be tracking the Cost Commission and really looking for ways to work with them and other stakeholders to make sure that we can continue to use market forces, like transparency, to provide the best possible value for every Coloradan."

What is the strategic overview and measure of success for the advocacy efforts?

"We want to create a political grassroots constituency in Colorado. Right now, the disability community does an awesome job of activating the disability community on a handful of issues. I think there are other groups that do a great job in activating folks that are concerned about very focused issues. There is not an organization in Colorado, as far as I can see, that can activate Coloradans on a variety of health care issues and that's the space we want to fill. We will measure that on how many people we can get to take action on health care issues whether it will be calling their local official or sending an email or taking action on social media or knocking on doors in their neighborhood in support of policy change. Those are the things that we're going to look at to measure our success as well as the outcomes that result from the grassroots advocacy."

Catherine Strode is the Policy Outreach Consultant to the Health Care Advocacy Program. She holds a Masters degree in Public Administration



with an emphasis in Health Care Policy. Formerly the Coordinator of the Program, Catherine publishes the HCAP newsletter featuring interviews with state legislators and represents the Program at meetings and events which pertain to policy matters.

For questions or comments contact Catherine Strode at cstrode@advocacydenver.org

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