

Here's Another Health Funder Who Isn't Afraid of a Fight

[Kristina Strain](#)

We can't say this enough here at IP: The most effective giving looks upstream to change systems and policy, as opposed to forever cleaning up messes. So we're stoked about the Colorado Health Foundation's big bet on hard-hitting advocacy.

High in the thin mountain air of Denver, Colorado, the foundation is hatching a new health advocacy shop that it says "will have the power to add strength to Colorado's field of health advocates and to activate Coloradans to raise their voices in support of better health policies at the local and state levels."

Amen to that. We love when funders directly take on state officials who cut healthcare programs, or [turn away free money to expand them](#), as opposed to propping up overwhelmed health clinics and praying that policy will somehow magically change.

Colorado is a good place to muscle up, because while the state is now on the right track by embracing Medicaid expansion, there's a long history there of libertarian pushback to policies that run counter to cowboy fantasies of self-reliance. And even as Colorado takes a step forward with Obamacare, its ability to provide adequate health services remains deeply compromised by the state's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR), which limits revenue and spending.

While not yet officially named, (the working title is [Advocacy for a Healthy Colorado](#)), the new group seeded by CHF [appointed an executive director last week](#), and it is gearing up to launch formally in the coming months.

Unlike CHF, this outfit is a 501(c)(4), the type built for gloves-off advocacy and organizing.

Established in 1995, the Colorado Health Foundation has had an impressively meteoric rise to prominence. It made its first grants, totaling \$20.4 million, in 2006, and has since worked its way up to handing out nearly \$85 million in grants annually.

Most of that money goes to school districts to fund exercise and nutrition initiatives, or to community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club or the ARC, to fund expanded programming. As a 501(c)(3), there's a limit on how much advocacy work CHF can do. Under 20 percent of the group's budget can go toward lobbying work, and clearly CHF has felt restricted by that rule. And though it stresses that this new group will be fully independent from CHF, it's clearly intended to advance CHF's mission in new and harder hitting ways. CHF gets an iron rule of politics: If you want to make change, you need to have power, and that means organizing citizens and pressuring decisionmakers. If only every funder thought this way.

Which brings us to answering your burning question: Who's this executive director guy? Well, he's a basketball fan. A dad. He might even drive a minivan. He's [Jake Williams](#), and he has a long history of shaping policy as a grassroots union organizer, a political fundraiser, and an environmentalist. "Very excited about my new gig," he tweeted on May 27th, eight days after CHF announced his appointment as executive director.

Though he's got serious conservation chops, he's always worked closely on health issues. "Jake brings years of strong political and campaign experience in the environmental and health sectors that will strengthen our efforts to advance policies to make Colorado the healthiest state in the nation," said Mike Dino, the chairman of the emerging group's board of directors.

Go kick some ass, Jake.

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