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2013

Colorado

The Status of Women & Girls in Colorado

Executive Summary

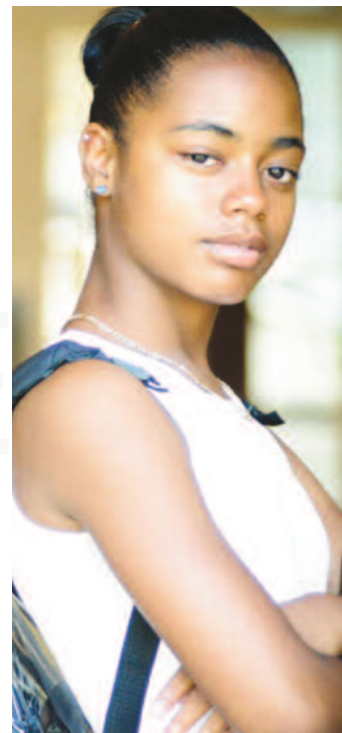


WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP
DEMOGRAPHICS

WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

INCOME

PERSONAL SAFETY



THE WOMEN'S
FOUNDATION
OF COLORADO

In partnership with



INSTITUTE FOR
WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

About This Report

The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado is one in a series of research reports that have guided the work of The Women's Foundation of Colorado (The WFCO). The topics chosen for this report were directly informed by a listening tour conducted by The WFCO in 2012, which provided a forum for women and girls in 10 communities across the state to reflect on what it means for women to achieve their full potential. This report also builds on an earlier (1994) report on the status of women and girls in Colorado by The WFCO and Girls Count and a 2000 report by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), *The Status of Women in Colorado*. The goals of this report are to raise awareness about women's issues and concerns, inform program development and grantmaking in the state, build a unified research and advocacy agenda, and provide information that can be used to create public policies that help women and girls in Colorado reach their full potential. The report was written by the Institute for Women's Policy Research in partnership with The Women's Foundation of Colorado and a Research Advisory Task Force.

About The Women's Foundation of Colorado

Through research, education, advocacy, and strategic philanthropy, The Women's Foundation of Colorado works alongside the community to ensure that women have the support needed to reach their full potential. The WFCO supports women and girls by identifying their needs and ensuring that those needs are addressed through strategic collaborations with donors, volunteers, and appropriate service-providing community partners. Since 1987, The Women's Foundation of Colorado has invested more than \$10 million with 250 strategic partners in 75 Colorado communities to create change for women and girls. The WFCO builds resources and leads systemic change by utilizing exceptional research to create a knowledge base and guide action, building up philanthropy that supports and advocates for women and girls in Colorado, promoting inclusiveness and diversity in the people The Foundation works with and the causes it works for, and creating strategic partnerships across the state.

About the Institute for Women's Policy Research

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. The Institute works with policy-makers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy and public administration programs at The George Washington University.

Since 1996, IWPR has produced an ongoing series of reports on the status of women and girls in states and localities throughout the United States. Status of women reports have been written for all 50 states and the District of Columbia and have been used throughout the country to highlight women's progress and the obstacles they continue to face and to encourage policy and programmatic changes that can improve women's opportunities. Created in partnership with local advisory committees, the reports have helped state and local partners achieve multiple goals, including educating the public on issues related to women's and girls' well-being, informing policies and programs, making the case for establishing commissions for women, helping donors and foundations establish investment priorities, and inspiring community efforts to strengthen economic growth by improving women's status.

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Preface

We are incredibly excited to share with you this much anticipated research on *The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado*. For more than 25 years, The Women's Foundation of Colorado has helped women and girls achieve their full potential. Through our work, hundreds of thousands of lives have been touched—and we are extremely proud of our collective accomplishments. When The Foundation was formed, the visionary founders knew from the start that data and research were important tools in driving the agenda for change and focusing the efforts of the organization. Today, research is still an important component of our work. As the voice for women and girls in Colorado, current and relevant data allows us to clearly identify trends and issues, as well as challenges and barriers that hinder women's and girls' progress. Research also enables us to focus on the most critical areas for women and girls; it helps us shape our advocacy and creates benchmarks for us to track outcomes and results.

The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado aims to provide baseline data to help empower communities across the state to build on the successes of women and girls and more effectively address the diverse needs and realities of their lives.

Some of the barriers and challenges that initially spurred the creation of The Women's Foundation of Colorado 25 years ago still exist today. This 2013 study reexamines these issues in the current environment, clearly demonstrating what has changed and what has remained unchanged.

- Technology has changed the way we work, communicate, and interact, bringing both opportunities and challenges to girls and women of all ages.
- Colorado's population and demographics are shifting. There is change in the racial and ethnic makeup of women in our state, and we must ensure that our efforts are diverse and inclusive.
- Women suffered substantial losses during the recent economic recession and have faced an especially slow recovery, more so than men. We need to lift women out of poverty and support them on their path to achieving economic security.

We will use this research to inform the focused and strategic work of The Women’s Foundation of Colorado, and it is our intent for this report to be a valuable resource to our communities in every corner of the state. We know that we alone cannot address all of the areas identified in this report, and we ask you to join us in this important work. It is our hope this critical information inspires collaboration and a collective movement to create positive changes for women and girls in Colorado.

Louise C. Atkinson
President and CEO
The Women’s Foundation of Colorado

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Introduction

The status of women and girls is a key component of the overall economic standing and well-being of Colorado's population. More than 2.5 million women and girls live in the state; when they thrive, whole communities prosper.

Local initiatives to increase the status of women and girls must address the complex realities of their lives. On the one hand, women and girls in Colorado have made considerable progress in recent decades. They are active in the workforce, support families through their work and caregiving, and lead and serve their communities in many ways—such as by heading local organizations, running businesses, getting involved in politics, volunteering in schools and for other organizations, and mentoring young girls. On the other hand, women and girls in Colorado, as in the nation as a whole, face persistent challenges that reflect slow progress toward equity. Women earn less than men and are more likely to be poor. They are also underrepresented in public offices and experience persistent racial and ethnic disparities, as well as disparities across different regions in the state. In addition, many women and girls lack personal safety. These challenges are often underrecognized but must be addressed for the state as a whole to thrive.

Those who are working to improve the circumstances of women and girls need reliable data on the state's female population. This report addresses this need by analyzing how women and girls in Colorado fare in five topical areas that profoundly shape their lives: **economic security and poverty; employment and earnings; educational opportunity; personal safety; and community leadership.** (Basic demographic data are also provided.) The selection of these topics was directly informed by a listening tour conducted by The Women's Foundation of Colorado (The WFCO) in 2012, which provided an opportunity for women and girls in 10 communities across the state to talk about what it means to reach their full potential and the barriers that often prevent women from achieving this goal. The report also builds on a 1994 report, *The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado*, from The WFCO and Girls Count, as well as a 2000 report, *The Status of Women in Colorado*, from the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR).

The analysis of the selected topical areas in this report draws largely on data from state and federal government agencies, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Department of Labor, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Colorado Department of Education. The report also draws on data from local and national organizations. While the information the report presents cannot capture every facet of women's and girls' lives, it provides a robust picture of the progress of women and girls, the challenges they still face, and their status in comparison with that of their male counterparts in the state and female counterparts in the nation as a whole.

Goals of the Report

In assessing the status of women in these regions and the state as a whole, the report aims to provide critical data that can help women and girls to reach their full potential. In the past, local and state organizations have used data from IWPR's status of women in the states reports to achieve multiple goals, including educating the public on issues related to women's well-being, informing policies and programs, making the case for establishing commissions for women, helping donors and foundations establish investment priorities, and inspiring community efforts to strengthen economic growth by improving women's and girls' status. Data on the status of women and girls give citizens the information they need to address the key issues that women and girls encounter and to allow their interests and concerns to fully inform service provision, advocacy, program initiatives, and policymaking.



I. Economic Security and Poverty

Introduction

Women's economic independence and security depend on having enough income and financial resources to meet basic needs and support themselves and their families. Many women find, however, that multiple factors make it difficult for them to make ends meet and care for their families. The persistent gender wage gap, women's prevalence in low-paid and female-dominated occupations, the high costs of child and elder care services, and women's relatively fewer hours of paid employment compared with men's make women more vulnerable to poverty and more likely to face economic insecurity. In addition, due to family caregiving responsibilities, women often take time out of the labor force, which diminishes their lifetime earnings and leaves them with lower incomes and fewer assets in their later years (Rose and Hartmann 2004). Having a spouse or partner with good earnings can certainly help women achieve economic security, but women generally spend a substantial portion of their adult lives as single women.

While many women and girls in Colorado enjoy economic prosperity, others do not have access to the resources and opportunities to achieve self-sufficiency and save for retirement. Nearly 12 percent of the state's adult residents live in poverty, and women are more likely than men to be poor.¹ Among women, single women with children, Latinas, African Americans, and Native Americans are especially vulnerable to economic insecurity. The challenges they face are often compounded by limited access to public benefits and educational inequities. A close look at women's economic status in Colorado's diverse populations and communities—focusing on women's income, poverty status, use of public programs, and need for child care—helps to identify women's specific challenges and points toward action steps to ensure the economic well-being of all women and families.

Key Findings

- In Colorado, families headed by single mothers have the lowest median annual income of all family types at \$26,705. The median annual income of families headed by single mothers is 63 percent of the median income of single-father families and just 31 percent of the median income of married-couple families with dependent children.
- The income of families headed by single mothers in Colorado falls well below the self-sufficiency standard, or the amount of money needed to support a family without public or private assistance. Among 10 counties analyzed for this report, single mothers in

For many women in Colorado, “[T]he wages don’t meet the basic needs. And if you can’t meet that, forget about retirement. Any bump in the road throws you off.”

Participant, The Women's Foundation of Colorado's Listening Tour 2012

¹ IWPR analysis of 2011 IPUMS American Community Survey microdata (Ruggles et al. 2010).

Prowers County fare the worst, with a median family income that is just 31 percent of the self-sufficiency standard in this area for a family of one adult, one preschooler, and one school-aged child. Single mothers fare the best in Garfield County but still have a median family income that is only 58 percent of the self-sufficiency standard in this area.

- In 2011, three in ten women (30 percent) aged 18 and older in Colorado had family incomes below or near the federal poverty line. Approximately one in eight (13 percent) had incomes below poverty, and 17 percent had incomes between 100 and 200 percent of the poverty line.
- In Colorado, poverty status varies considerably among women from the largest racial and ethnic groups. Latina, African American, and Native American women are much more likely than their white and Asian American counterparts to face substantial economic hardship. Half of Latinas (50 percent, or 158,689 women) and nearly half of Native American (48 percent, or 5,165) and African American (46 percent, or 28,173) women have family incomes that are below the federal poverty line or near poverty. One in four (25 percent, or 14,827) Asian American women and one in five (22 percent, or 310,992) white women live below or near poverty.
- Poverty rates in Colorado vary considerably in the state's different regions. Women aged 18 and older in the Southern region have the highest poverty rate at 20 percent, and women in the Northern region have the lowest at 9 percent. In each of the 10 regions analyzed for this report, women have higher poverty rates than men.
- Social Security provides an important economic base for older Coloradans, but women receive considerably less in benefits from the system than men. Women aged 65 and older in the state receive an average monthly benefit of \$986, compared with \$1,334 for comparable men.
- Colorado households eligible for food stamps are much less likely to receive them than their counterparts in the nation as a whole. Only 52 percent of Colorado households headed by single women with qualifying incomes receive food stamps, compared with 63 percent of comparable households nationwide.



II. Employment and Earnings

Introduction

Women are vital to Colorado's economy, and work is vital to the economic self-sufficiency of Colorado's families. Nearly one in two workers in Colorado is female and close to two-thirds of the state's women are in the workforce. Mothers with dependent children are even more likely to be in the labor force (73 percent) and their earnings are often essential to their family's economic security and stability. Yet, women continue to earn significantly less than men: they are the majority of the lowest earners in the state and are only about one in four of the highest earners. Women's economic progress in Colorado, as in the nation as a whole, has been slowed by their employment in fields with lower earnings and their responsibility for the lion's share of unpaid family work.

Key Findings

- Women are nearly half (an estimated 1,176,528) of all workers in Colorado, and nearly two-thirds of women in the state (or 1,289,977 women) are in the workforce. Although women's labor force participation overall is strong in Colorado, large gaps continue to exist in the labor force participation rates of mothers and fathers with dependent children.
- Although the Great Recession officially ended in June 2009, unemployment continued to rise in Colorado in 2010. In 2011, unemployment averaged 7.8 percent for women, which was more than twice as high as the unemployment rate in 2007 at the start of the recession. During this year, single mothers in the state were more than twice as likely as married women or married men to be unemployed.
- Women face a persistent gender wage gap in Colorado. In 2011, women working full-time and year-round had median annual earnings (\$40,000) that were 80 percent of men's full-time, year-round earnings (\$50,000). The gender wage gap is largest between women and men with a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Only about one in four women in Colorado (26 percent) are among the highest earners in the state, whereas women are more than half (53 percent) of the state's lowest earners.
- In Colorado between 1999 and 2008–2010, the gender wage gap between white women and white men grew smaller, while the gap between women from the other largest racial/ethnic groups and white men grew larger. The 2008–2010 median annual earnings of Latinas (\$28,000), Native American women (\$30,492), African American women (\$35,448), and Asian American women (\$35,500) are, for a family with a pre-school-aged child, well below the amount needed to be self-sufficient in many Colorado counties.

In total, 92,000 women in Colorado work part-time for family reasons, including child care problems, compared with only 7,000 men.

- Many women lack basic work/family benefits. Among workers in the private sector, four in ten women and half of Latinas do not have paid sick days.
- In 2007, women owned 29 percent of businesses in Colorado, which is a lower proportion than in 1992 when women owned 38 percent of businesses in the state. Women in Colorado are more likely to own businesses in sectors with lower revenues.



III. Educational Opportunity

Introduction

Education helps women to reach their full potential. Both nationally and in Colorado, women have made considerable educational progress in recent decades. In the United States as a whole, women have closed the educational gap in higher education and now outnumber men in both graduate and undergraduate degree programs (Snyder and Dillow 2012). In Colorado, signs of educational progress and success for women and girls have emerged: as of 2011, school dropout rates had declined, and women overall were more educated than their counterparts nationwide.

Yet, a closer look at disparities in educational attainment and resources for education and training across the state sheds light on Colorado's shifting needs. As in other states, demographic changes in Colorado, the high costs of college degrees and early care and education, and an increasing demand for postsecondary education in the labor market present challenges for the state's educational infrastructure in preparing women and girls for successful careers with family-sustaining wages. Addressing these challenges is essential to enabling women and their families to thrive and to strengthening the economy and well-being of Colorado as a whole.

Key Findings

- On the whole, women in Colorado are relatively well educated. More than one in three women aged 25 and older in the state (36 percent) have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 28 percent of women in the nation as a whole. The educational attainment of Colorado's women has increased substantially over the last two decades: in 1990, slightly less than one-quarter of women (23.5 percent) aged 25 and older in the state had a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Although women in Colorado overall have comparatively high levels of postsecondary education, a substantial number—an estimated 155,051—do not have a high school diploma. The share of women with this lowest level of education is largest in the Southern region (17 percent) and smallest in Boulder (5 percent).
- Educational attainment among women in Colorado varies considerably among the largest racial and ethnic groups. White women are the most likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher (41 percent), followed by Asian American women (40 percent), African American women (21 percent), Native American women (20 percent), and Latinas (13 percent).

Women with a high school diploma or the equivalent earn 30 percent more than those without a high school diploma and are nearly 20 percent less likely to live in poverty.

- The dropout rates for girls and boys in Colorado have declined several percentage points since the 2005–2006 school year, with the rates for girls remaining consistently below the rates for boys. In the 2010–2011 academic year, 2.8 percent of girls (or 5,750 girls) and 3.2 percent of boys (or 6,994 boys) in grades 7–12 dropped out.
- In 2009–2011, the live birth rate to teens aged 15–17 in Colorado was 17.2 per 1,000. In 2010, there were 1,717 live births to girls of this age range in the state.
- Girls in Colorado’s third through tenth grades outperform boys in reading and writing on the Transitional Colorado Assessment program examinations and perform nearly as well as boys in mathematics. Girls in the state, however, are considerably less likely than boys to meet college readiness benchmarks in mathematics and science but more likely to be prepared for college coursework in reading and writing.
- For many families in Colorado, child care is unaffordable. For a two-parent family with a preschooler and an infant, child care expenses are expected to be 21 percent to 34 percent of the family’s overall living expenses. The cost of full-time center-based child care for an infant is nearly half (48 percent) the median annual income for single mothers.



IV. Personal Safety

Introduction

Personal safety is a key to enabling women and girls to reach their full potential. Without a sense of safety, women and girls may remain reluctant to take on leadership roles or pursue educational and job-training opportunities that could lead to higher wages and better quality jobs.

Unfortunately, many women, men, and children in Colorado—as in the nation as a whole—live with circumstances that undermine their personal safety on an ongoing basis, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, bullying, and trafficking. While contextual factors such as poverty status, gender, immigration status, and racial/ethnic background correlate with greater vulnerability to these forms of harm, people from all walks of life can experience them. Consistent, reliable data on the realities that undermine safety are difficult to collect, but research indicates that they affect the lives of many women and girls in Colorado. Their pervasiveness points to the need to strengthen initiatives that ensure the personal safety of all women, men, and children in the state and nation as a whole.

Young women aged 20 to 24 are the most vulnerable to nonfatal intimate partner violence.

Key Findings

- Domestic violence undermines the economic security and safety of many women and girls in Colorado. In 2011, Colorado's 46 domestic violence crisis centers served 34,685 clients, which represents an increase over 2010 when 28,132 clients were served.
- Colorado has the sixth highest lifetime prevalence of rape in the nation: nearly one in four women in the state (24 percent, or an estimated 451,000) has been a victim of rape.
- Forty-seven percent of women in Colorado aged 18 and older (approximately 897,000 women) have experienced sexual violence other than rape in their lifetime, which is a slightly higher proportion than in the United States overall (45 percent).
- In one recent survey, approximately one in five high school girls reported having been bullied at school in the past 12 months and 10 percent said they had been forced to have sex.
- Mental health issues among girls in Colorado pose a serious concern. Twenty-seven percent of girls in ninth through twelfth grades report having felt sad or hopeless for two or more weeks in a row in the past 12 months.

- More than one in six high school girls (17.5 percent) have seriously considered suicide. Girls in Colorado are more likely to report having seriously considered suicide than boys and having tried to commit suicide, but boys are more likely to have their suicide attempt result in their death.
- Latina/o middle and high school students are substantially more likely than non-Latina/o white students to report having made a plan to commit suicide, attempted suicide, or sustained an injury due to a suicide attempt.
- Human trafficking is a significant problem in Colorado, as in other states across the nation. One recent study suggests that many organizations involved in anti-trafficking efforts in the state offer important services such as intensive case management and long-term housing to trafficking survivors, but gaps in services remain, including a limited number of shelters for youth and a lack of mental health services specifically for trafficking victims.



V. Women's Leadership

Introduction

Colorado is home to women who serve as leaders in their communities in various ways, including through their work as executives, volunteers, activists and community organizers, policymakers, teachers, and philanthropists. Together, women who fill these diverse roles have the experience, knowledge, and skills to help the state address its existing inequities and disparities.

While Colorado greatly benefits from women's leadership and active participation in local communities and institutions, the collective leadership power of women in the state has not yet been fully tapped. For example, although Colorado has the highest proportion of women in state legislatures across the nation, women continue to be underrepresented in the state's legislature relative to their share of the total population. In addition, women in the state, as in the nation as a whole, experience challenges that can make it difficult for them to assume leadership roles in other sectors, including limited time and resources and a lack of role models. This section presents data on multiple aspects of women's leadership, focusing on four key areas: women's political participation, representation in elected office, participation in nongovernmental leadership, and philanthropic and volunteer activities.

Key Findings

- In 2013, Colorado ranked first in the nation for women's representation in state legislatures. Women held 41 percent of the legislative seats in Colorado's General Assembly, including 27 of 65 seats in the House of Representatives and 14 of 35 seats in the Senate.
- Only one of Colorado's nine seats in the national legislature, however, was occupied by a woman. In the state's history, only four women have represented Colorado in the U.S. Congress. No woman of color has ever represented Colorado in the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives.
- In Colorado, as in the United States as a whole, women are more likely than men to register to vote and go to the polls on election days. In the 2008 elections, 73 percent of eligible women in Colorado registered to vote and 69 percent voted, compared with 71 percent of eligible men who registered to vote and 67 percent who went to the polls.
- Colorado receives low rankings nationally for its female board representation. In a study of corporate board leadership in Colorado, 54 percent of companies surveyed had only one or two women serving on their boards.

With the exception of 2005 and 2006, Colorado has consistently ranked since 1992 among the top five states in the country with the highest number of women in the state legislature.

- In 2007, Colorado ranked thirteenth in the nation for women-owned businesses. Twenty-nine percent of businesses in the state were women-owned firms (159,353 of 549,157), which is equal to the share of businesses owned by women nationwide.
- Charitable giving represents one way women serve as leaders in their communities. In Colorado, women are more likely to respond to appeals for donations than men.
- Between 2008 and 2010, women in Colorado volunteered at greater rates than men (38.5 percent of women volunteered compared with 27.4 of men). Women and men, however, had the same median annual number of volunteer hours (50 hours per year).



VI. Demographics

Introduction

This chapter includes basic demographic information on women and girls in Colorado. Statistics on the age, sex ratio, marital status, and racial/ethnic distribution of women and girls present an image of the state's female population that provides insight on the topics covered in this report. Demographic factors have implications for the location of economic activity, the types of jobs available, and the kinds of public services needed. In rural areas, for example, women typically have fewer opportunities for paid employment than in urban areas, in part because they may lack access to public transportation that can take them to jobs as well as to licensed child care centers.

Key Findings

- In Colorado, 56 percent of those aged 65 and older are women. In general, older women are less likely than older men to live with someone who can care for them in their later years.
- The share of single-mother households in Colorado is more than double the share of single-father households. Of all family households with dependent children in the state, 20 percent are headed by single women with children and 9 percent are headed by comparable men.
- The female population in Colorado has a higher proportion of white women and girls and Latinas than the United States as a whole. The racial and ethnic distribution of the state's female population, however, varies considerably across its different regions. The Southern region has the most racial and ethnic diversity, and Boulder and the Southwest and Northern regions have the least.
- The Latina population in Colorado has grown considerably in recent years and will likely continue to grow rapidly. Among Latinas, 36 percent of the female population is aged 18 and under, compared with 27 percent of African American women and girls, 21 percent of Asian American women and girls, 17 percent of Native American women and girls, and 20 percent of white women and girls.
- The growth in Colorado's Latina population stems in part from an influx of immigrants to the state. Between 1990 and 2011, the share of Colorado's female population comprised of foreign-born women and girls more than doubled, increasing from 4.5 percent to 10 percent. More than half of Colorado's immigrants (56 percent) are from Latin America.

Conclusion



The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado examines critical issues that shape the lives of women and girls in the state. It shows that in recent decades, women and girls have made considerable progress: women are better represented in the state legislature than in 1999, have experienced a narrowing of the gender wage gap, and are much more likely than 20 years ago to hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Teen birth rates and dropout rates among girls have also declined. At the same time, women continue to be underrepresented in Colorado's state legislature relative to their share of the population, and many women—especially those with low levels of education—hold jobs that do not provide family-sustaining wages. In addition, Colorado's women and men still often lack basic supports in the workplace such as paid sick leave and affordable child care. Poverty also continues to be a problem for many women and girls, especially those who are African American, Native American, or Latina. These findings suggest that addressing the persistent obstacles to women's and girls' advancement is essential to promoting the stability and well-being of Colorado and the nation as a whole.

Community investments and program initiatives as well as changes to public policies provide promising opportunities to create a better future for women and girls. To implement changes that benefit women and girls—and therefore all members of Colorado's many communities—it is necessary to understand not only the challenges that women and girls face but also the interconnections among these challenges and the varied experiences of women and girls across the state.

Interconnected Challenges

The issues discussed in this report are closely linked. For example, educational opportunity is integral to economic security, since without the supports necessary to complete postsecondary education women's chances of securing jobs with family-sustaining wages and good benefits diminish significantly. In addition, the careers and fields of study that women and girls choose matter to their long-term economic security. Women and girls often do not pursue careers and degrees in typically male-dominated fields—such as science, engineering, technology, and mathematics—and concentrate instead in female-dominated fields and jobs that provide lower earnings and more limited opportunities to accumulate financial assets. For many women, the lower earnings they receive throughout their working lifetimes increase their economic insecurity at older ages.

Work supports and personal safety are also integral to women's economic security. Without supports such as affordable, quality child care and job-guaranteed paid leave, many women find it difficult to hold on to their jobs and advance in their careers. For those who face domestic or sexual violence, establishing economic security may be an even more elusive goal. Without a sense of personal safety, many women and girls are unable to pursue

educational and career opportunities that would help them reach their full potential. They may also remain unable to take on volunteer and other leadership roles.

Many other connections between the issues discussed in this report exist. For example, women's political participation is essential to shaping public policies that address women's interests and enable women and girls to thrive. By voting, running for office, and taking on other public leadership roles, women can ensure that their concerns are at the forefront of policy debates and discussions. Similarly, employment directly relates to women's well-being, since without quality jobs women often lack access to basic health insurance and health care. Understanding such connections between these issues is integral to creating programs and policies that capitalize on women's achievements and better address their needs.

The analysis conducted for this report shows the experiences of women in Colorado differ in many ways from those of men and there exist significant differences in the circumstances of women depending on their race, ethnicity, place of birth, and residence in the state. These differences point to the need to consider the varied experiences of women and girls across Colorado's diverse regions when proposing changes to programs, policies, and services. Women and girls are an integral part of Colorado's future; attending to their varied experiences can help make Colorado a place where women and girls from all walks of life thrive. And it can lead to new, innovative approaches to create a brighter future for women and girls in the state and nation as a whole.

Strategies for Action



Changes to public policies and program initiatives will provide opportunities to create a better future for women and girls in Colorado. Recommended action strategies for advocates, community leaders, policymakers, service providers, and other key stakeholders include:

- **educating** young girls about the effects of their decisions regarding education, workforce engagement, and career paths on their long-term economic security;
- **advising** employers on how to implement best practices for recruiting and retaining women and encouraging them to share data on women’s contributions to the workplace and companies’ financial success;
- **holding** public authorities such as the Workforce Investment System, the Office of Apprenticeship, community colleges, and education authorities accountable for establishing gender balance in training and education and encouraging them to set (and publish) meaningful targets for improving the gender balance in fields where women are underrepresented;
- **increasing** the accessibility and affordability of child care for working parents, especially for single mothers pursuing continued education and training;
- **informing** policymakers and funders about the effects and costs of violence against women and girls, as well as the benefits and costs of different approaches to addressing this violence; and
- **supporting** the efforts of organizations that provide mentoring, networking, and training to prepare and position women for leadership roles.

The more than 2.5 million women and girls who live in Colorado—and comprise half its population—are integral to the state’s economic status and overall well-being. This report’s findings, however, show that while women and girls in Colorado have made substantial progress, they continue to face a range of interrelated challenges that point to the need for further changes. As the nation continues to recover from a deep recession in which women suffered substantial losses and have faced an especially slow recovery, it is essential to understand the circumstances of women and girls and implement changes that will enable them—and Colorado as a whole—to thrive. *The Status of Women and Girls in Colorado* aims to provide information that will help make these goals a reality.

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