

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 18, 2002

CONTACT: Carrie Harmon

303-297-0456

1-866-283-8051

NEW REPORT LINKS ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY AND HEALTH, EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES IN COLORADO

DENVER, CO.... Although most Coloradans have access to the kinds of opportunities that enable them to get ahead in life, significant health, educational and economic barriers still stand in the way of far too many families, according to a new report issued by the nonprofit Bell Policy Center.

“Sadly, income, race and ethnicity clearly matter when it comes to the kind of opportunity one has in Colorado,” said Andy Hartman, Ph.D., director of policy and research at the Bell and lead author of the report, Colorado: The State of Opportunity. “For example, Latinos have a higher high school dropout rate and are less likely to have health insurance. African-Americans are less likely to own their own homes, and those who do own homes are more likely to be targeted by predatory lenders. And poor people are sick more and die younger.”

The report identifies critical gateways to what the Bell calls the “Cycle of Opportunity”--a series of experiences and events that make it possible to realize one’s economic, social and personal potential. A group of indicators – from low birth weight, third-grade reading proficiency and childhood obesity to high school graduation rates, access to adult education and homeownership--quantify access to opportunity through stages of life and across generations.

“The good news is that Colorado is indeed a ‘state of opportunity’ for many,” Dr. Hartman said. “Our economy is sound. Most families earn enough to get ahead. We are generally healthy. More than two-thirds of our families own homes. For most of us, Colorado is a great place to live, work and raise a family.”

But the report also highlights a number of disturbing facts about how some Coloradans are faring in 2002:

- Colorado has one of the highest rates of low-weight births, meaning that too many infants start life with diminished opportunities;
- More than one-third of Colorado's kindergarteners are judged by their teachers to be unprepared to learn when they enter school;
- At least one in four Colorado third-graders is not proficient in reading;
- One in five Colorado children and adolescents is overweight or obese, increasing the likelihood of serious health problems later in life;
- One in five Colorado students does not complete high school (the numbers are much worse for Latino students);
- Only 14% of Colorado 10th-graders are proficient in math (including less than 5% of African-American and Latino students);
- The average African-American and Latino 11th-grader in Colorado does not score high enough on the ACTs to attend a competitive college or university;
- Colorado ranks dead last in the nation in providing students from low-income families the opportunity to attend college;
- Only one in 25 Colorado adults without high school diplomas is served by any type of adult education or English as a Second Language program;
- More than one-quarter of young adults in Colorado smoke, greatly endangering their future health and earning potential;
- Adult diabetes is growing dramatically in Colorado, placing increasing numbers of adults at risk of serious and life-shortening health complications;
- 14% of working-age adults in Colorado are without health insurance (including 38% of adults in poverty and 33% of Hispanic adults), delaying preventive care and placing the economic security of families at risk;
- One in four Colorado families of four does not earn enough to be economically self-sufficient in our urban or resort communities;
- Homeownership among African-Americans and Latinos greatly lags behind that of Whites in Colorado, reflecting the relative place each group has attained within the Cycle of Opportunity.

In examining these and other topics, the report underscores that most issues are interrelated. For example, families that do not earn self-sufficiency incomes are more likely to be without health

coverage. Children who do not receive adequate health care are less likely to show up at school ready to learn. Kids who are not ready to learn are less likely to become proficient in key areas such as reading or math, or even to graduate. The children of parents who do not have high school diplomas are less likely to perform well in school. The list goes on and on.

“Although maintaining a broad and durable safety net is important, we must look beyond simply mitigating poverty to helping families move from a cycle of dependency to the Cycle of Opportunity,” Dr. Hartman said. “Opportunity motivates effort, unleashes talent, and feeds a dynamic economy – all of which are essential for maintaining a prosperous Colorado.”

In addition to highlighting some of the barriers to opportunity in the state, Colorado: The State of Opportunity includes more than forty policy recommendations. This summer, Bell Policy Center staff will host a series of “opportunity forums” across the state to help the organization develop a legislative agenda for some of these recommendations and to stimulate discussion about the role of public policy in helping families access opportunity.

According to Wade Buchanan, president of the Bell, “This document will always be a work in progress. We don’t pretend to have all the answers, but we do hope we’ve made a start at asking the right questions. Ultimately, our goal is for Coloradans to begin thinking about opportunity—not just as an ‘American dream,’ but as a worthy and achievable goal of public policy.”

For a copy of Colorado: The State of Opportunity and a schedule of public opportunity forums around the state, visit the Bell’s web site at www.thebell.org or call Adrian Miller at 303-297-0456 or toll-free at 1-866-283-8051.

The Bell is a nonpartisan organization that conducts objective research and advocates public policies that remove barriers between families and their ability to succeed—such as poor schools, poor health practices and inadequate access to health care, and lack of job skills. In addition to the opportunity report, the Bell is preparing an in-depth study on the effects of the Taxpayers Bill of Rights (TABOR) for release in early fall and is developing the state’s most comprehensive database of information about public schools as part of its “Schools of Opportunity” project.