

2021



The future of work is now as we are working to build our economy back stronger than it was before. Rebuilding includes equity, reskilling and upskilling, investment in programs with promising results, and career-connected learning to continue to foster a Colorado for All.

Every single person in our state has been impacted by COVID-19 and its effects on the global economy. The financial impacts have been the hardest, however, on those who have lost jobs, the people who have struggled to find new opportunities, and the individuals who have left the labor force. While recovery is happening and we have made great progress, we remain focused on building a Colorado economy that works for all of us.

This year's Talent Pipeline Report shows us that we do have reason to celebrate and that every Coloradan has reason to be excited for the days ahead. Since April 2020, labor force demand in Colorado has recovered at a rapid pace, with the total number of job openings surpassing unemployment in May 2021. The unemployment rate has fallen significantly in 2021, and our labor force participation in Colorado is stronger than in the nation as a whole.

The report also indicates where we need to focus our efforts moving forward. Small businesses have been impacted by the global pandemic and now face challenges regarding rising premiums, disrupted

international supply chains, and constrained labor supply. We also know that women and women of color have been greatly affected, with Black and African American women having experienced the largest decreases in work participation. They need our support to come back to work, such as the support for expanded childcare.

Coloradans have never backed down from a challenge, and there is no shortage of innovative solutions or a willingness to try new concepts in our state. Lifelong opportunities to continue to develop and enhance skills are necessary for individual success in the economy of 2022 and beyond. Skills are the currency that communicate what tasks a person can perform, and how they can add value to business of any size.

Increasing economic opportunity for individuals requires that we both enhance access to credentials, including non-degree credentials, and work with employers to adopt skills-based hiring. Shifting from degree-based hiring to a skills-based approach can open up new pipelines for organizations struggling to find talent, and allows more people with the work skills to compete for open positions to put their skills, talent, and work ethic to the highest and best use.

We invite you to dig into the information in the report, and then roll-up your sleeves and dig into the work with us to build back stronger.



Colorado Workforce  
Development Council



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The talent pipeline in Colorado is comprehensive, and workforce development encompasses all manner of education, upskilling, and support for all current and future workers, regardless of age. An effective talent and workforce development ecosystem must therefore support career-connected education and training for the population now learning in full-time education and for the three million Coloradans currently working throughout the state.

As we move into the 2022 Legislative Session, the following priorities and recommendations can further strengthen the talent pipeline by focusing resources and policy change on all components of the system. Additionally, legislators and local policy makers are encouraged to look at the reports coming from interim committees authorized in the 2021 Legislative Session, such as the Student Success and Workforce Revitalization Task Force, and to consider those priorities alongside the recommendations in this document to guide the implementation of new concepts.



## 2021 RECOMMENDATIONS

### Enhance opportunities for employers to implement talent development strategies

- » **Recommendation:** Enhance the promotion of the Skill Advance Colorado program and the other skills training/workforce development courses through dedicated staff in all regions of the state. The program has shown strong success and outcomes, serving 14 counties, 90 businesses, and more than 4,000 learners during state fiscal year 2021.
- » **Recommendation:** Increase marketing and outreach to companies to raise awareness and understanding of skills-based hiring and work-based learning opportunities, and provide financial support for these efforts as needed.

### Strengthen critical industries so all businesses can thrive

- » **Recommendation:** Invest in a tiered and expanded behavioral health workforce that includes paraprofessional staff, including peer specialists and peer navigators. A statewide initiative to train the workforce could include a state-run training and certification, a reimbursement avenue for the paraprofessional workforce, and processes for supervision and monitoring of the workforce, which is often delegated to the providers. The new Behavioral Health Administration would be responsible for working with partners such as CDHS, HCPF, and others to support implementation of this recommendation and to track the effectiveness of these models.

- » **Recommendation:** Implement strategies to expand a diverse early childhood workforce and streamline workforce pathways to ensure that high quality training opportunities articulate into transferable college credits to allow the early childhood workforce to apply experience and training toward further credential and degree attainment. The strategies pursued should be inclusive of providers; leadership positions; and greater consultative roles that support the early childhood workforce such as coaches, early childhood mental health consultants, home visitors, and related roles.

## Structure supports necessary to enhance the participation of targeted populations in the labor force

- » **Recommendation:** Build into new policies both a requirement that all new and existing workforce development and existing higher education programs specifically market to, and reach out to, underserved businesses and individuals, and allocate resources necessary to conduct appropriate outreach.
- » **Recommendation:** Increase funding for non-degree credentials that business needs through state-based financial aid or another funding source, so that individuals have more access to training that will lead to career advancement.
- » **Recommendation:** Prioritize the incorporation of a transferable skills training curriculum into academic institutions at the secondary and postsecondary level to increase the market value of degrees and credentials.
- » **Recommendation:** Expand the use of Fair Chance hiring, coupled with skills training in cooperation with the Department of Corrections or nonprofits operating in pre-release and post-release programs, to help ensure the successful integration of our incarcerated population back into their communities.

# BY THE NUMBERS

**376,593**

job seekers and 9,385 businesses were served by local workforce centers in PY2020

**+19%**

increase in total retail sales relative to 2019 pre-pandemic levels as of June 2021

**+52%**

of children without internet access live in households earning less than \$50,000/year

**+68%**

projected increase in Colorado's 75- to 84-year-old population between 2020 and 2030

**+124%**

change from Sept. 2020 to Sept. 2021 in remote postings

**90.7%**

of Tier 1 Top Jobs require a credential past high school

**61.7%**

of Coloradans have a postsecondary credential or degree

**1/8**

of Colorado's population is made up of immigrants

**\$228,835,710**

in wages returned to the economy through the Colorado public workforce system in PY2020



## 2021 Colorado Talent Pipeline Report

Produced by the Colorado Workforce Development Council  
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