



BUILDING LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY POWER AND WELL-BEING:

FALL 2025

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVESTING



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Dear Reader,

For many years, our LGBTQ+ community has devoted itself to fostering strength and resilience across Colorado. Motivated by a desire to sustain our progress and directly support the LGBTQ+ community—rather than depending on foundations, government programs, or the business sector—a group of engaged individuals united to consider alternative ways of investing in our future. This group collectively raised funds to commission a comprehensive community feedback process, allowing us to gather valuable information and reveal potential pathways forward.

Alongside these outreach efforts, we also compiled and analyzed existing data to deepen our understanding. An advisory committee was formed to examine the possibility of establishing an LGBTQ+ Fund – Elevating Queer Hope & Opportunity (EQHO) - which would welcome contributions and planned gifts from individuals, foundations, and corporations alike.

The significance of this initiative cannot be overstated. Now, more than ever, there is a critical need for accessible funding to address community priorities as they arise. The following report presents the insights gained from community feedback, highlights relevant data, and offers recommendations for how EQHO can continue to advance this important work.

Sincerely,

Debra Pollock
Christiano Sosa
Renzo Walton

J. Ryann Peyton
Carlos Martinez

NOTE Throughout this report, you will see different references to the community featured here, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer + (LGBTQ+) community. There is not one established way of identifying this multifaceted and complex group of people, and there are different reasons for the different ways of doing so. However, in order to paint a comprehensive picture of this community's experience in Colorado, and identify possible ways to support this community, we rely on a variety of data sources that each have a different preferred approach, so when referring to those data we will use the term identified by the source, but the general narrative identifies this group as LGBTQ+.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Spring 2025, Elevating Queer Hope & Opportunity (EQHO) commissioned an environmental scan and conducted listening tours to gain a deeper understanding of the needs of the LGBTQ+ community in Colorado and how the philanthropic community can best support these needs. **What we heard, over and over, was that within the LGBTQ+ community, transgender people, people of color, youth, and people living in rural areas are facing the most significant challenges** compared to the group as a whole. What we also learned is that there isn't just one story to tell about this vibrant and diverse group.

Locally and nationally, the LGBTQ+ community has been at the forefront of advancing civil rights and equal protections throughout history. It is a community that demonstrates collective power, resilience, and resistance. And yet, people who identify as LGBTQ+ face widespread discrimination and persecution. The current national rollback of protections, especially for transgender people, is creating a particularly hostile climate.

According to the ACLU, in just the first four months after President Trump took office, "...the...administration [has] issued a series of executive orders that remove protections for trans people. His directives include targeting transgender students, banning trans Americans from military service, and giving federal agencies the green light to openly discriminate against their trans employees."

As members of the LGBTQ+ community see a decrease in rights, support, and general safety, it's even more critical for allies, institutions, local governments, and foundations to step up. EQHO was created to provide support for small organizations and communities across the State of Colorado, enabling them to access financial resources and increase their capacity to serve their local LGBTQ+ communities.

"What we heard, over and over, was that within the LGBTQ+ community, transgender people, people of color, youth, and people living in rural areas are facing the most significant challenges."



OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To accomplish our work, EQHO has a focused approach.

POWER BUILDING

EQHO recognizes that true power comes from within a community and is dedicated to encouraging and mobilizing the existing strengths of local leaders and organizations. By partnering locally, EQHO will support strategic collaborations, advocacy, and community organizing that are closest to the community, ensuring that LGBTQ+ voices are honored and have an impact on policy at all levels across Colorado, thereby creating a more just and equitable state.

CAPACITY BUILDING

EQHO's focus on capacity-building initiatives is designed to elevate the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of LGBTQ+ local leaders and nonprofits. EQHO co-creates programs and services tailored by and for the leaders and organizations it aims to support, focusing on leadership development, organizational capacity, and strategic growth.

COMMUNITY-CENTERED APPROACH

EQHO's approach is grounded in the values and cultures of LGBTQ+ communities across Colorado. We engage locally through partnership and co-creation, ensuring that our programs are developed with and for the community. EQHO recognizes the power of creating a sense of community rather than competition, through strong relationships and a shared sense of purpose, fostering an ecosystem where LGBTQ+ leaders and organizations can grow and thrive.

IMPACT

EQHO believes in raising LGBTQ+ voices on critical issues, including mental and physical health, as well as economic and social justice. Through increased collective participation, the LGBTQ+ nonprofit community can positively impact the lives of LGBTQ+ youth and adults, as well as their loved ones.

The LGBTQ+ community in Colorado has a strong desire to come together in collective spaces and unite across their differences. We heard their request to invest in positive and joyful community spaces and events that honor the diversity of the community.

"The LGBTQIA+ community is thriving and resilient, and continues to build transformative change across Colorado and the country through shaping and shifting social and political norms to create a more equitable society for all, despite ongoing experiences of bias, stigma, discrimination, harassment, and even violence." ⁽¹⁾

While the immediate future remains uncertain and chaotic, EQHO will build a web of connection, commitment, and consistency within the LGBTQ+ nonprofit community, creating a foundation for the leaders in these spaces to continue their good work and serve the LGBTQ+ people of Colorado.

OUR COMMUNITY AT A GLANCE



In gathering the data to understand the stories of Colorado's LGBTQ+ communities, we learned first and foremost that the data does not adequately collect or represent the diverse experiences of this diverse group.

Also, different data sources define the group in various ways. In a space where there is limited data, some sources collect information on LGBTQ+ individuals, some on LGBTQI+*, some LGB, some include only adults, and some include youth, making comparisons between data sets challenging if not impossible. Additionally, many sources are outdated and no longer relevant in a rapidly changing social environment.

One current example that highlights this challenge is how the U.S. Census only captures information about same-sex households - married or unmarried same-sex partners living together. This leaves out the BTQ+ portion of LGBTQ+ entirely, and also excludes information about lesbian or gay individuals who are not in a same-sex relationship. Moreover, when we gather data about this community as a monolith, we are neglecting to recognize the disparate experiences and outcomes for people within this group.

When we do have the opportunity to review disaggregated data, we see that within the LGBTQ+ umbrella, transgender people, people of color, youth, and people living in rural areas are facing far greater challenges than the group as a whole. And even within that, data about transgender people of color show particularly alarming outcomes.

According to a 2019 Williams Institute national study, LGBT people as a group have a poverty rate of 22%, much higher than the rate for straight* people of 16%. As a subset, 30% of transgender people are living in poverty. In contrast to this, gay men actually fare better than the straight population, with a 12% poverty rate, highlighting the disparate experiences within the LGBT community.

Furthermore, individuals with multiple systematically marginalized identities experience poverty at a drastically higher rate.

Almost half (48%) of hispanic transgender adults and 39% of black transgender adults are living in poverty (compared to 22% for the LGBT community as a whole and 16% for straight people).



COLORADO: A SAFER STATE

When we zoom in to see the local environment in Colorado, we see a state with a track record for progressive and supportive policies, but facing similar pressures and attacks against many of the advancements that have been made. Additionally, Colorado's high cost of living places additional burden on a group that is already experiencing disproportional rates of poverty. [Colorado is ranked 46th for cost of living in the US. (The only more expensive places are Massachusetts, Hawaii, and California. Colorado is tied with Montana.)]

According to a Rocky Mountain PBS report in early 2025, the "Trans Continental Pipeline, a Denver-based nonprofit that helps transgender people move to states or cities with more protections, said they have received 400 relocation requests since Trump's reelection." Additionally, the TRUE Center, Colorado's largest provider of gender-affirming care for minors, and Planned Parenthood of the

Rocky Mountains (PPRM), have both seen significant spikes in the number of people seeking gender-affirming care in recent years. In addition to folks moving to Colorado, these providers are seeing out-of-state patients, mostly from Wyoming, Texas, and Arizona.

In the 2025 legislative session, two significant laws to expand legal protections for transgender people and improve access to gender-affirming care were passed. HB 15-1309 (Protect Access to Gender Affirming Care) ensures coverage for medically necessary gender-affirming care and ends tracking of testosterone prescriptions for transgender individuals, and HB 25-1312 (the Kelly Loving Act) adds specific protections for transgender individuals in the Colorado Anti-Defamation Act.

COLORADO: BY THE NUMBERS

For Colorado and regional-level data, this scan primarily drew from the 2023 Colorado Health Initiative's Colorado Health Access Survey, which is produced every two years. As well as the William Institute's studies collected about LGBT adults. A section on LGBTQ+ youth data is compiled from the Health Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS), Colorado's implementation of the national Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS).

Demographics

Colorado's LGBTQ+ community as a whole is mostly young and educated, and fares better economically than in the national experience. That said, the same disparities within the community exist for those identifying as transgender, youth, rural, and/or POC. And, LGBTQ+ Coloradans experience poorer outcomes particularly related to mental health and access to care, when compared to the state as a whole.

As reported in the most recent Colorado Health Access Survey (CHAS 2023), 9% of Colorado's adult population, or almost 400,000 people, identify as LGBTQ+.

Among adults in Colorado, the percent of those identifying as LGBTQ+ are as follows:

20%
19-29 YEAR OLDS

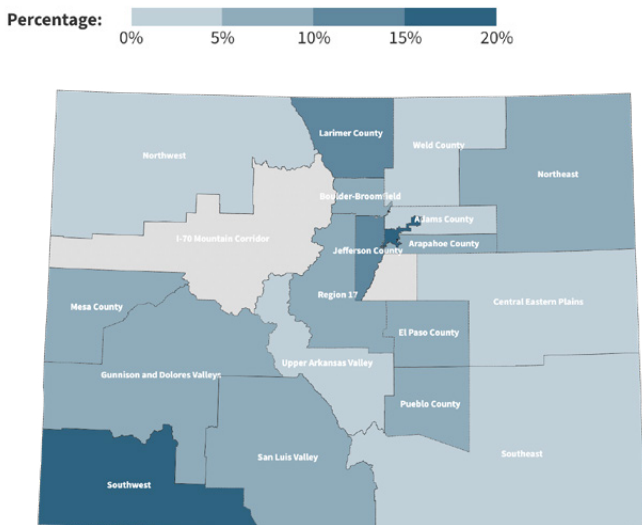
5%
50-64 YEAR OLDS

10%
30-49 YEAR OLDS

4%
65+ YEAR OLDS

LGBTQ+ Coloradans Lived Throughout the State

Topic: LGBTQ+ identity. Population: Colorado adults, by region. Year: 2023.



LGBTQ+ adults are evenly distributed across both rural and urban areas in Colorado, at 9% (similar to the overall rate of LGBTQ+ individuals in Colorado).

Most LGBTQ+ adults report living in Denver (15%), Larimer County (15%), and the southwest region of the state (17%), which includes Dolores, Montezuma, La Plata, San Juan, and Archuleta counties. Of the rural parts of the state, the northeast region, made up of Morgan, Logan, Washington, Yuma, Phillips, and Sedgwick counties, had a higher percent of folks (10%) identifying as LGBTQ+.

The vast majority (75%) of LGBTQ+ identifying individuals in Colorado also identify as white. The next largest category of folks (15%) identified as Hispanic/Latino.

Education, Employment, Income, and Housing

The LGBTQ+ adult community in Colorado is highly educated, with 54% having a college or postgraduate degree, compared to 43% of the state's straight community. Despite being well-educated as a group, the Williams Institute (2019) reports that 6% of Colorado's LGBT adult population is unemployed, compared to 4% of the non-LGBT population. In addition, 21% of the LGBT adult population in Colorado earns an annual income below \$24,000, and 24% reported being food insecure.

Almost 21% of LGBTQ+ adults in Colorado reported having trouble paying their rent or mortgage in the previous year of the survey, compared with 13% of straight adults. Generally, the biggest barrier to homeownership for LGBT individuals is affording the down payment or closing costs.

"We found the LGBT homeownership rate to be 46%, which is much lower than the overall U.S. homeownership rate of 65%. Our estimate is comparable with other surveys. However, age and marital status are likely contributing to this difference, as these factors have been found to be the primary demographic determinants of homeownership in prior literature."

According to the federal Fannie Mae

Physical and Behavioral Health and Access to Care

More than half of LGBTQ+ adults in Colorado, 54%, reported having poor mental health, which was defined as eight or more days in the past month of stress, depression, or problems with emotions. While the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the mental health of all groups, both LGBTQ+ and not, the impacts were worse for LGBTQ+ adults, with poor mental health increasing by more than 22% between 2015 and 2021, before improving slightly in 2023.

Disparities in health care and access are further seen in perception of coverage and cost of care as barriers to mental health care. 71% of LGBTQ+ adults in Colorado said they could not get an appointment when they needed one, which was significantly higher than the 50% of straight adults who reported the same. Additionally, 13% of LGBTQ+ adults in Colorado feel treated with less respect or receive lesser quality services compared to 7% of their straight peers, and 26% say their health provider dismissed their health concerns.

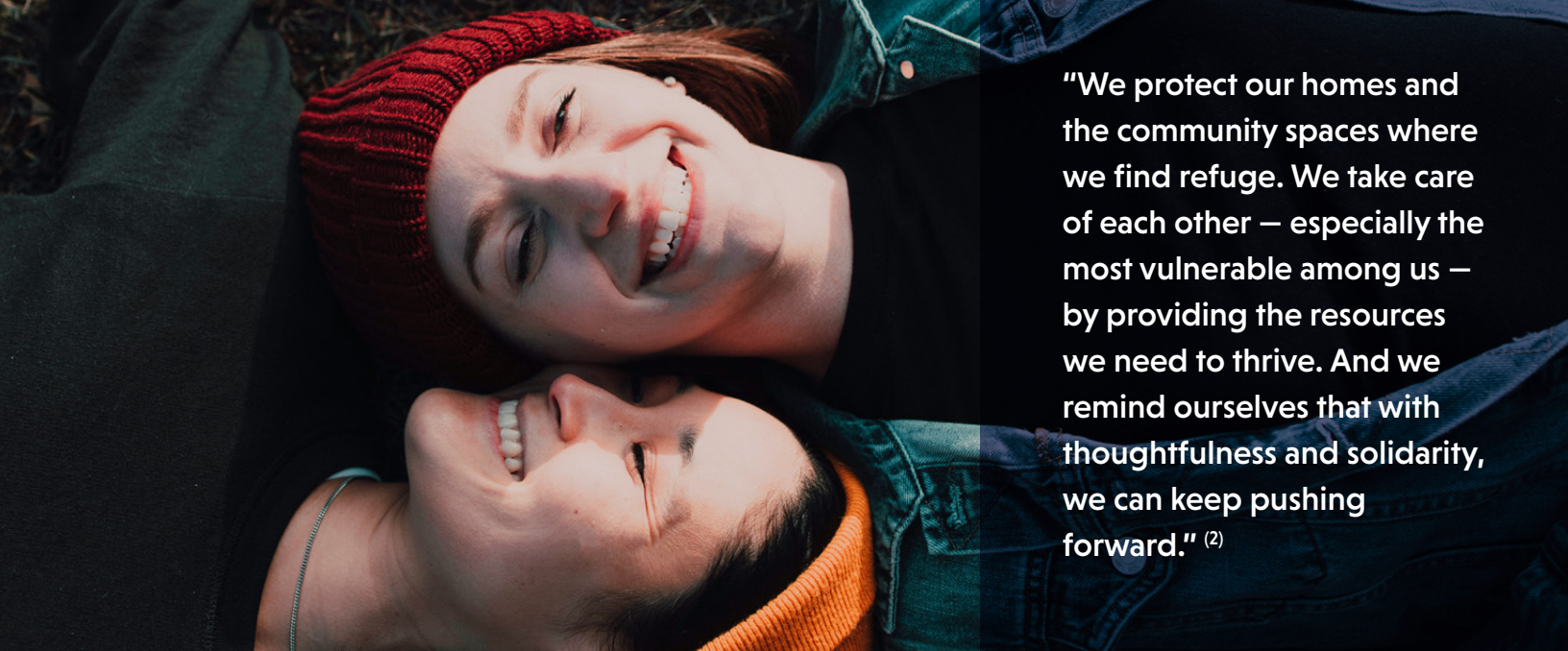
Additionally, 10% of LGBTQ+ adults in Colorado are uninsured, which is more than double the rate (5%) of uninsured among straight adults in Colorado. The main differences in coverage were due to Medicare

and Medicaid eligibility, with fewer LGBTQ+ adults qualifying for these benefits. This report identified perception of coverage and cost of care as major barriers to receiving treatment when needed.

National-level healthcare access initiatives have significantly impacted LGBTQ+ peoples' insurance rates. Before the passing of the Affordable Care Act in 2013, 34% of LGBTQ+ individuals were uninsured, with this rate dropping by more than half, to 16% by 2020. Similarly, through the 2021 American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA), almost 210,000 LGBTQ+ individuals enrolled into zero-premium health insurance plans.

When considering LGBTQ+ youth health (which is not gathered in the above data), we see again that there are disparities in poorer health outcomes for youth of color and youth who identify as LGBTQ+. In the 2023 HKCS survey, 3% of high school youth identified as non-binary or "another identity" beyond male and female, 21% identified with a sexual orientation other than "straight" (i.e. bisexual, gay/lesbian, pansexual, asexual, etc.), and 5% identified as transgender or not sure.

Among youth, we see the same pattern of disparity for transgender youth as well as pansexual youth across various health topics.



"We protect our homes and the community spaces where we find refuge. We take care of each other – especially the most vulnerable among us – by providing the resources we need to thrive. And we remind ourselves that with thoughtfulness and solidarity, we can keep pushing forward." ⁽²⁾

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Despite the current threats and challenges facing the LGBTQ+ community, it is important to also uplift the strength and collective power that this community demonstrates.

As reported by the Movement Advancement Project, as a result of the community's organizing and advocacy, "...since 2010, approximately 92% of the anti-LGBTQ bills introduced in state legislatures each year have been defeated." Locally and nationally, the LGBTQ+ community has been on the forefront of advancing civil rights and equal protections throughout history. By necessity, the community found one another and formed their collective power.

Throughout Colorado, individuals and organizations are serving and advocating for the well-being of their community. As a part of its listening tour, EQHO spoke to individuals representing organizations in the following regions and counties across the state:

- Mountain: Lake, Summit, Eagle, Chaffee
- Southwest: La Plata, Montezuma
- Western Slope: Gunnison, Garfield, Pitkin
- Central: El Paso, Teller
- Metro Denver
- Northern Colorado: Larimer, Weld

The main themes that emerged from these conversations were:

- The LGBTQ+ serving nonprofit community is strong, resilient, and eager to collaborate.
- Within the community, there is still a need to focus on "basic needs" and culturally-grounded services, especially in the current political climate.
- Consideration of intersectionality - LGBTQ+ needs alongside variable experiences for those of different race/ethnicities, ability/disability, geography, etc.
- Rural Pride events are expanding across the state, though often on a shoestring budget. These events provide a critical space for community-building, advocacy, and sharing joy, particularly for young people to see a hopeful way forward.
- There is generally public goodwill, but there is a need to channel this into education, awareness, advocacy, and action.
- There are fractures within the community, leading to competitiveness and gaps in services.
- There is a need for leadership development and capacity building.
- There is a need for a coordinated approach to understanding the needs of the community (data collection, storytelling).
- There is a need for a coordinated policy & advocacy infrastructure.

OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE FORWARD

“Trans people are scared and hurting right now – we don’t need vague statements of support or allyship, we need concrete action. It is refreshing to see that Colorado is actually putting its money where its mouth is when it comes to defending and protecting its citizens.”

- IRIS, A TRANS COLORADOAN (3)

The need is clear and the way is before us.

Drawing upon community democracy, which honors shared leadership, relational accountability, and cultural grounding, EQHO is joining alongside the leaders who are embedded in their communities to collectively shape the path ahead. Based on this environmental scan, some of the opportunities for EQHO include:

01.

Fund a nonprofit/ community organization infrastructure that supports collaboration, builds community power, and minimizes competition for resources.

- A coordinated philanthropic community can channel its resources to support strategic alliances between organizations, promoting collaboration over competition for resources.
- Philanthropy can also support operating costs and capacity building, resources that are often harder to fund through other avenues. This is particularly important in the current environment in which government funding for LGBTQ+ communities and initiatives is being threatened and discontinued.

02.

Promote visibility and awareness through research and data collection, supporting the diverse yet collective needs of the LGBTQ+ communities.

- The acronyms and groupings used to describe the community of focus for this work have evolved over the years to become more and more inclusive, supporting more unity across the community, recognizing its diversity, and bringing more visibility and validation to all identities within the community. However, there are great disparities in experience within this broad, diverse community. For example, transgender folks, people of color, young people, and folks living in rural areas within the overall LGBTQ+ experience have far worse outcomes on many of the measures summarized throughout this report, but current data collection methods suppress this information and reality.
- “Failing to collect sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics (SOGISC) data creates real harms—hindering the ability to fully understand the experiences of LGBTQI+ communities; to craft sound policies that are inclusive of LGBTQI+ people and their needs; and to evaluate the effectiveness of policies to address disparities and promote more equitable outcomes.”⁽⁴⁾
- In rural communities, “living in small towns where everyone knows each other, many participants indicated they did not feel safe disclosing their sexual or gender identity. Additionally, many participants used the phrase ‘it’s a conservative town’ as a qualifier for homophobic and transphobic behaviors and encounters they

02. (CONTINUED)

may have experienced or heard about. Perhaps unsurprisingly, social media plays an important role for both youth and adults for connecting to other LGBTQIA+ people and normalizing their experiences.”⁽⁵⁾

- Especially in light of the current national environment and the dismantling of recognition and protections for the LGBTQ+ community and individuals, it will be imperative to fund data collection in partnership with grantees and community partners regarding the LGBTQ+ community and their needs. This must, of course, be done with an attention to the potential vulnerability and safety of LGBTQ+ people, ensuring that their identities are not compromised in circumstances that they do not choose.

03.

Leverage the existing strength of the LGBTQ+ community’s social connectedness by investing in pro-social community spaces that honor the diversity of the community.

- Because of the rampant and growing discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, traditional community spaces are inaccessible and unsafe. “LGBTQ+ respondents also reported avoiding houses of worship (43 percent); public places such as stores, restaurants, or banks (31 percent); law enforcement (30 percent); medical offices, mental health providers, or hospitals (26 percent); and travel (20 percent).”⁽⁶⁾
- Creating more safety within school environments through GSAs and educating more adults to be well-equipped allies to young people. Funders can invest in identifying meaningful training opportunities and invest in those trainings for school districts and individual schools. This may even involve funding substitute teachers to enable classroom teachers to attend professional development opportunities, and funding incentives for school personnel who engage in additional work to support inclusiveness for LGBTQ+ youth.
- “Historically, many of the spaces catering to the LGBTQ+ community have been bars and clubs. Such venues are often the most visible spaces where individuals look to find community, thus creating an association between connection to others and engagement in substance use.”⁽⁷⁾ This, combined with the disproportionately higher rate of substance use disorder among this group signals the need for more LGBTQ+ friendly spaces to build and support community.
- For funders, this may include funding capital campaigns to secure and equip safe and welcoming community spaces.

04.

Coordinate strategic efforts to improve access to affirming health care

- Access to quality health care, particularly mental health and gender-affirming care, were major issues.
- “Nearly every single survey respondent said that they would use a resource of LGBTQ+ affirming health care providers if one were available and that currently available resources are hard to trust or out of date.”⁽⁸⁾
- This could mean ensuring providers are getting regular high-quality professional development in cultural competence, and in particular in treating and caring for LGBTQ+ individuals and their unique needs and interests. This should include staff at all levels of health care organizations, providing a more positive experience among the myriad interactions patients have within their health care settings.
- Ensure health care access and insurance, particularly for care involving gender identity and sexual orientation, remains available.

QUOTES

Quote 1: Colorado Trust, Resilient and Resourceful: LGBTQIA+ Community Member Perceptions of Living in Southwest and West Colorado. August 2021.

Quote 2: Movement Advancement Project, Despite the Attacks Against Us, LGBTQ+ People Know How to Win, 26 February 2025.

Quote 3: truthout. New Colorado Laws Could Set National Standard for Trans Protections. 1 April 2025.

Quote 4: Center for American Progress, Collecting Data About LGBTQI+ and Other Sexual and Gender-Diverse Communities, March 2025.

Quote 5: Colorado Trust, Resilient and Resourceful: LGBTQIA+ Community Member Perceptions of Living in Southwest and West Colorado. August 2021.

Quote 6: The Center for American Progress. Discrimination and Barriers to Well-Being: The State of the LGBTQI+ Community in 2022. January 2023.

Quotes 7 and 8: OMNI Institute. Colorado LGBTQ+ Behavioral Health State of the State Survey Report. Envision:You, 2021.

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OUR GRATITUDE

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JOIN US

As EQHO looks ahead, we envision a partnership with organizations led by and serving LGBTQ+ individuals at the forefront of creating equitable and thriving communities. EQHO will focus on investing in power and capacity-building to improve the lives of LGBTQ+ Coloradans and their families.

We respectfully invite you to join this movement to amplify the voices of Colorado's LGBTQ+ communities. Your contributions of money, talent, and solidarity, will directly support dedicated organizations embedded throughout Colorado.