

LARC4CO: Leading a coalition to establish public funding for an evidence-based program to reduce unintended pregnancies through LARC



Introduction

Publicly funded family planning services have been available in Colorado for more than 45 years. In 2008, funding was awarded to the Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE) to expand existing family planning services. This initiative included educating providers and increasing access to contraceptive counseling and to the most effective birth control methods, long-acting reversible contraception (LARC). These methods—IUDs and hormonal implants—can work for up to 12 years and are proven to be safe and effective for women, but are expensive on the front end, creating financial barriers to access. Given the opportunity to choose from the full range of methods, more women choose LARCs because of their reliability and effectiveness. IUD and implant use among family planning clients in Colorado using contraception grew from 4.5 percent before the initiative began to 29.6 percent in 2014, when nationally, only 12 percent of women who used contraception use these most effective methods, often due to their cost.

More than 36,000 women received benefits through this program with clear improvements in public health.

- The birth rate for young women ages 15-19 fell 48 percent from 2009 to 2014, and the birth rate for women ages 20 to 24 fell 20 percent.
- The number of teens giving birth for the second or third time dropped by 58 percent between 2009 and 2014.
- The abortion rate among women ages 15-19 fell by 48 percent and among women ages 20-24 by 18 percent between 2009 and 2014.
- In 2014, CDPHE's family planning program spent an average of \$404 per patient for a family planning visit. The average Medicaid birth costs more than \$11,500 per woman.

At the end of 2014, private funding for the program expired. A coalition, led by the Colorado Children's Campaign, formed to work together with CDPHE to advocate for public funding to continue the initiative. The coalition led a massive effort to pass needed legislation and succeeded in attracting media attention from around the country. Despite a robust legislative and communications strategy, the bill stalled in the state Senate. Local private funders provided gap-year funding for the program in 2015 while the coalition organized for a second year's effort.

Methods

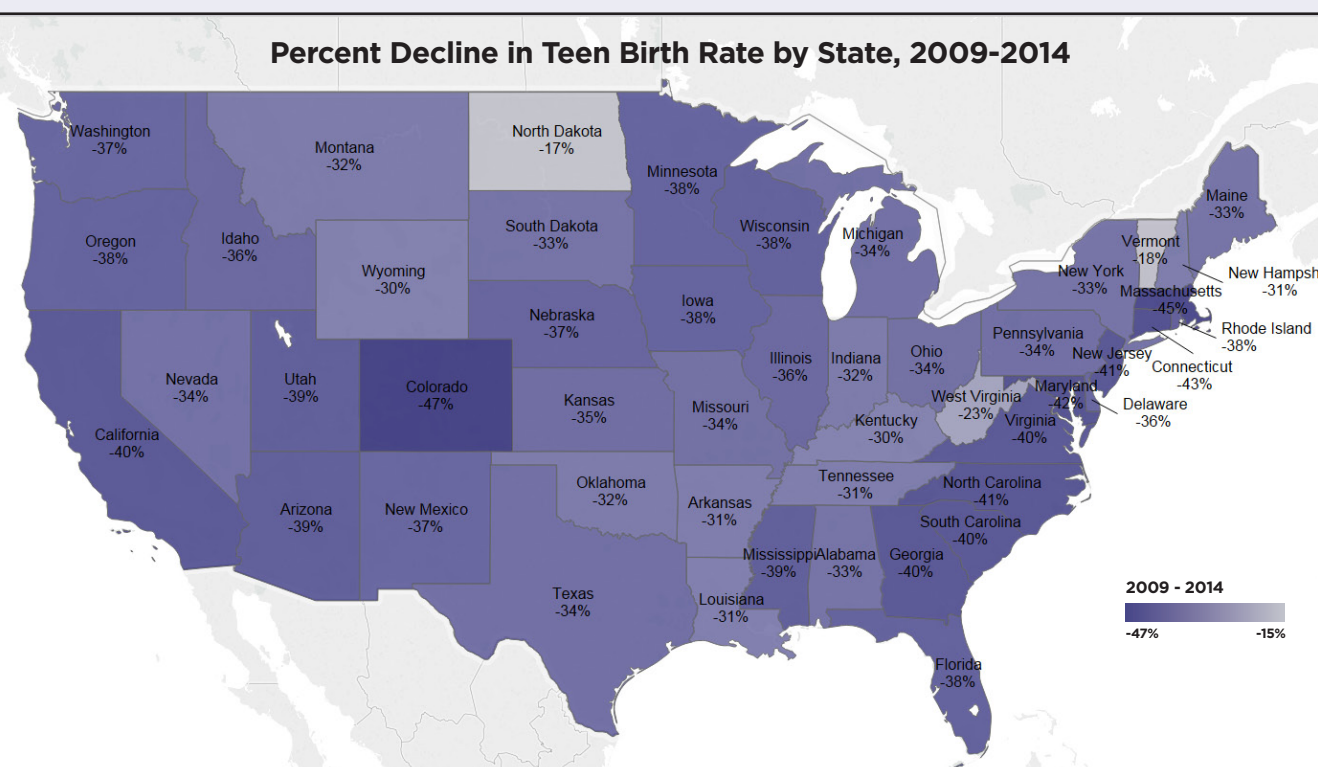
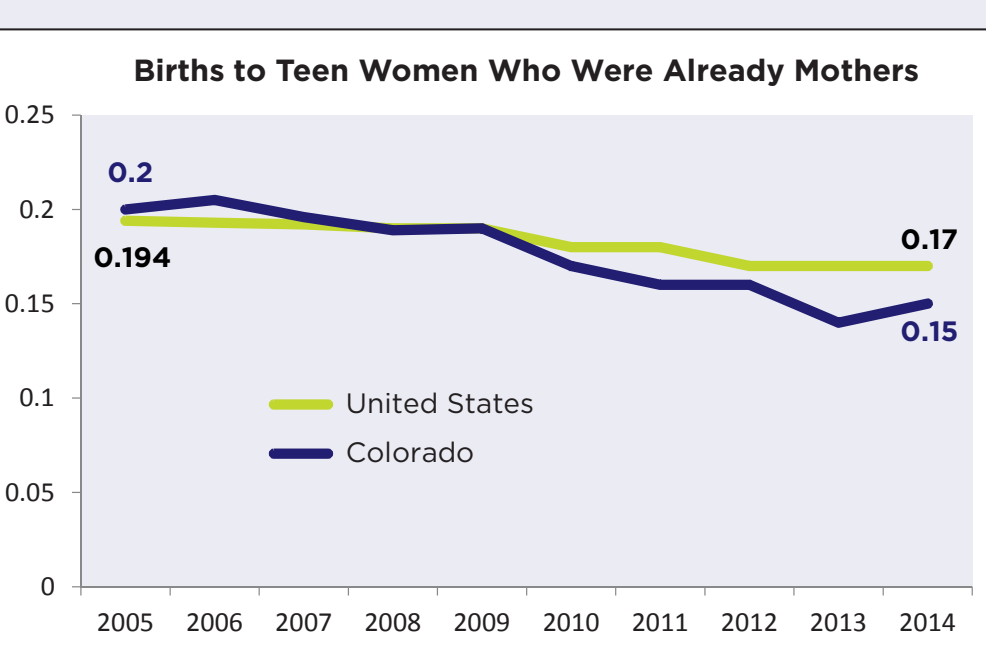
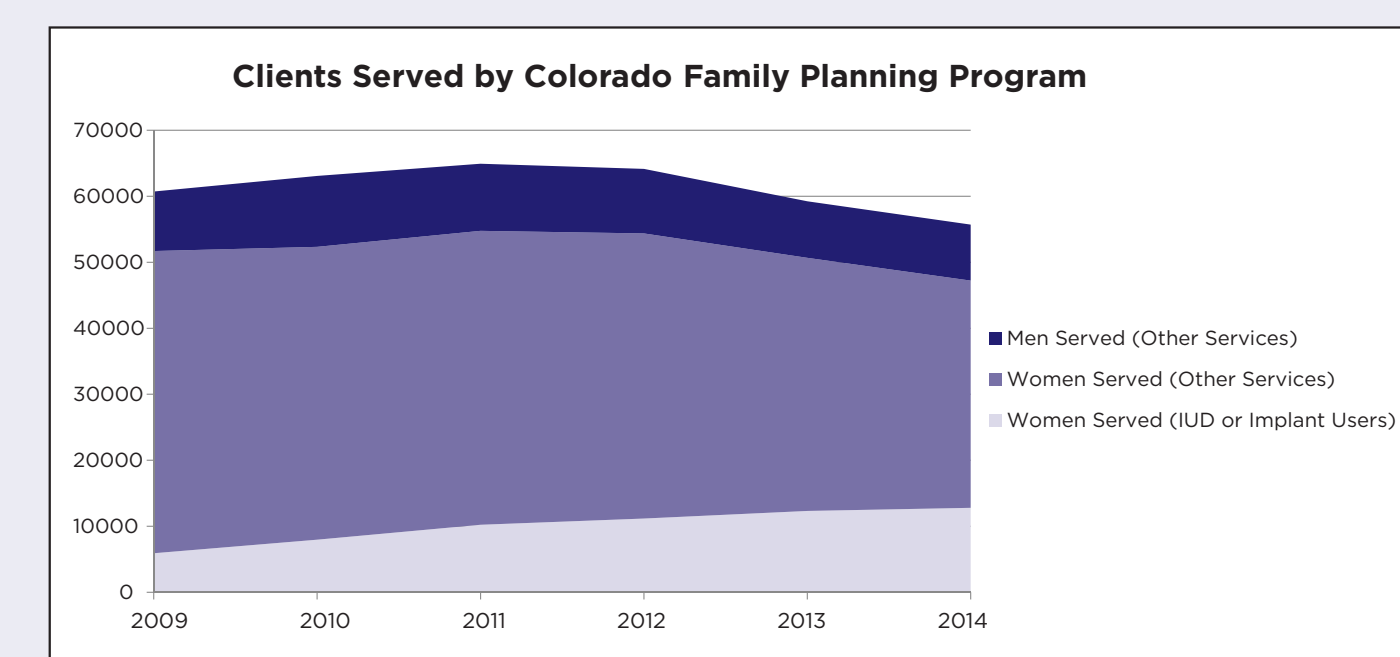
In 2016, the Colorado Children's Campaign co-lead the LARC4CO coalition together with the Colorado Association of Local Public Health Officials. Through coordinated communication, education, and lobbying efforts organized by the coalition, we secured a \$2.5 million increase in funding to support this program. The collaborative effort built bipartisan support for empowering more individuals to plan if and when they want to become pregnant.

How Colorado Advocates Secured LARCs for All in 8 Steps:

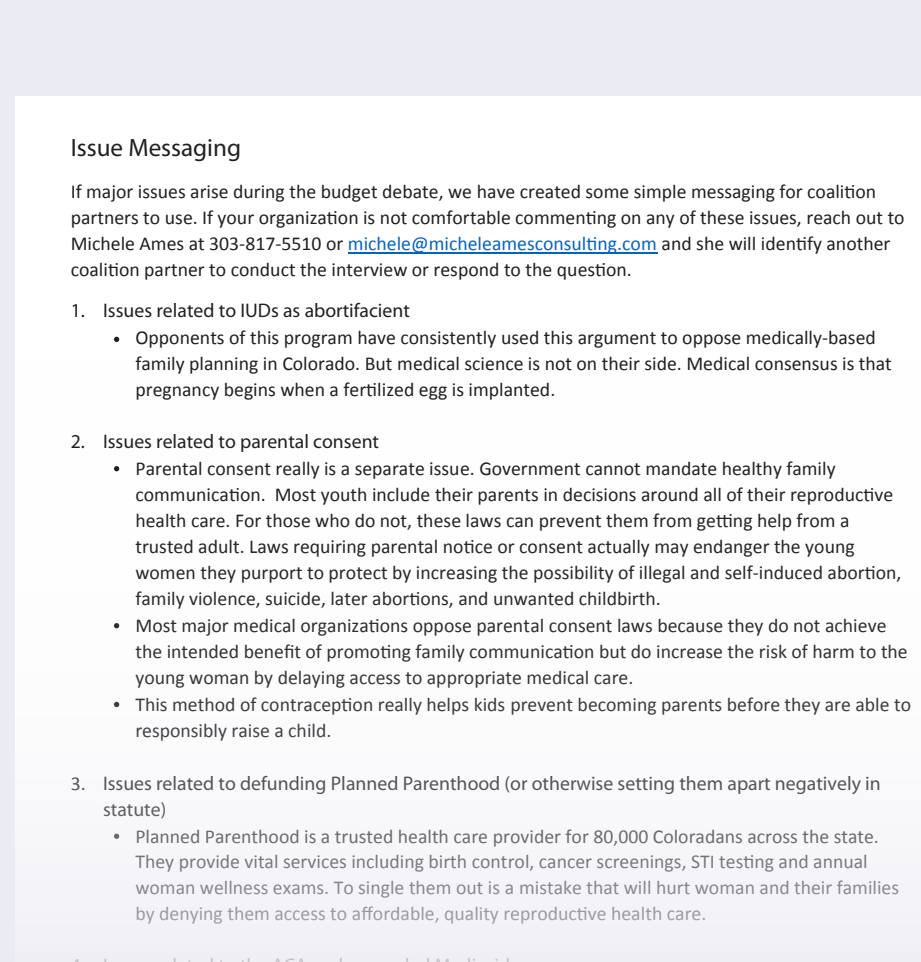
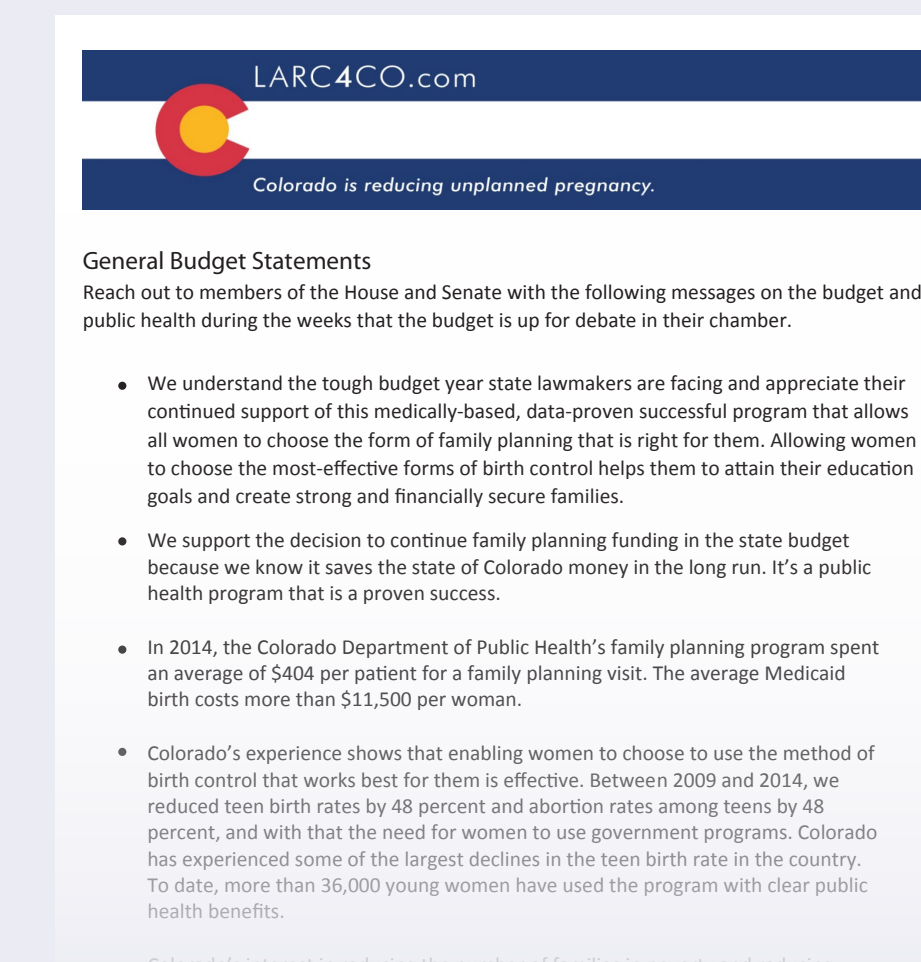
- 1. Gain Understanding of Coalition History:** Including the relationships among coalition members.
- 2. Agree on a Coalition Goal:** Allow all coalition members to discuss their long-term goals, and come to an agreement on a common goal for the coalition. Engage in honest conversations about the priority of the shared policy goal within each coalition member's agenda.
- 3. Secure Expert Communications and Messaging Support and Ensure Equity in Messaging.**



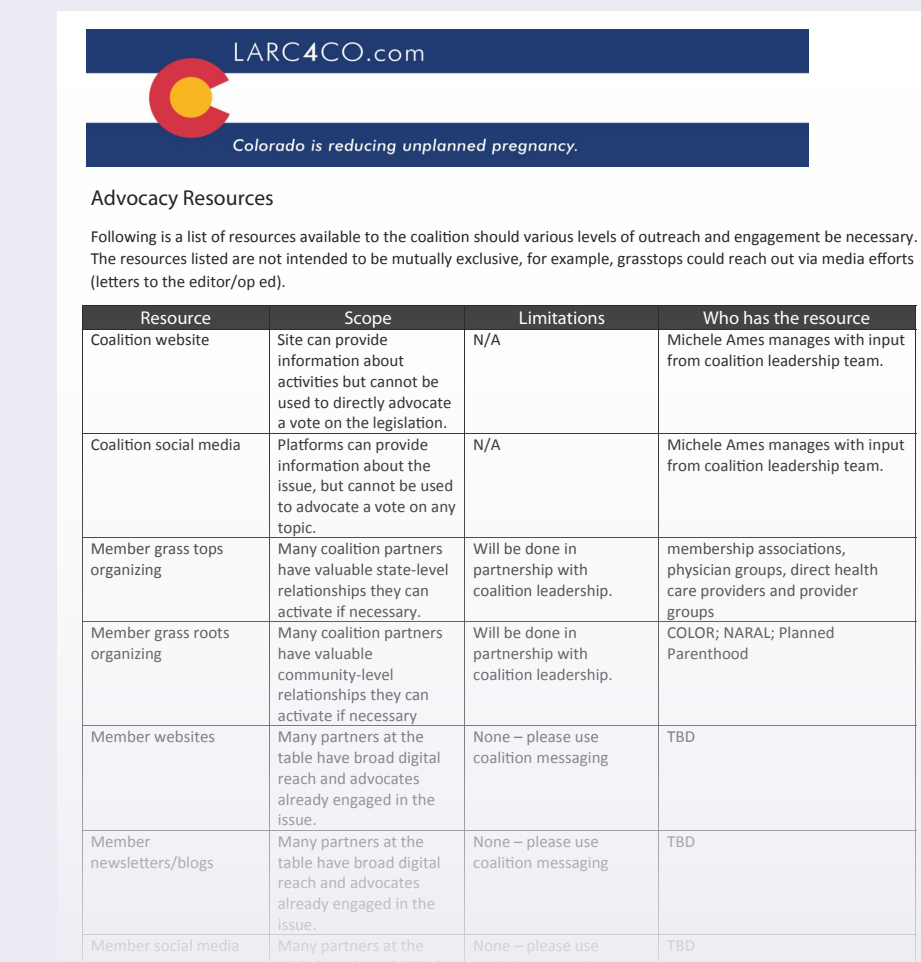
4. Gather and Share Data to Support Messages.



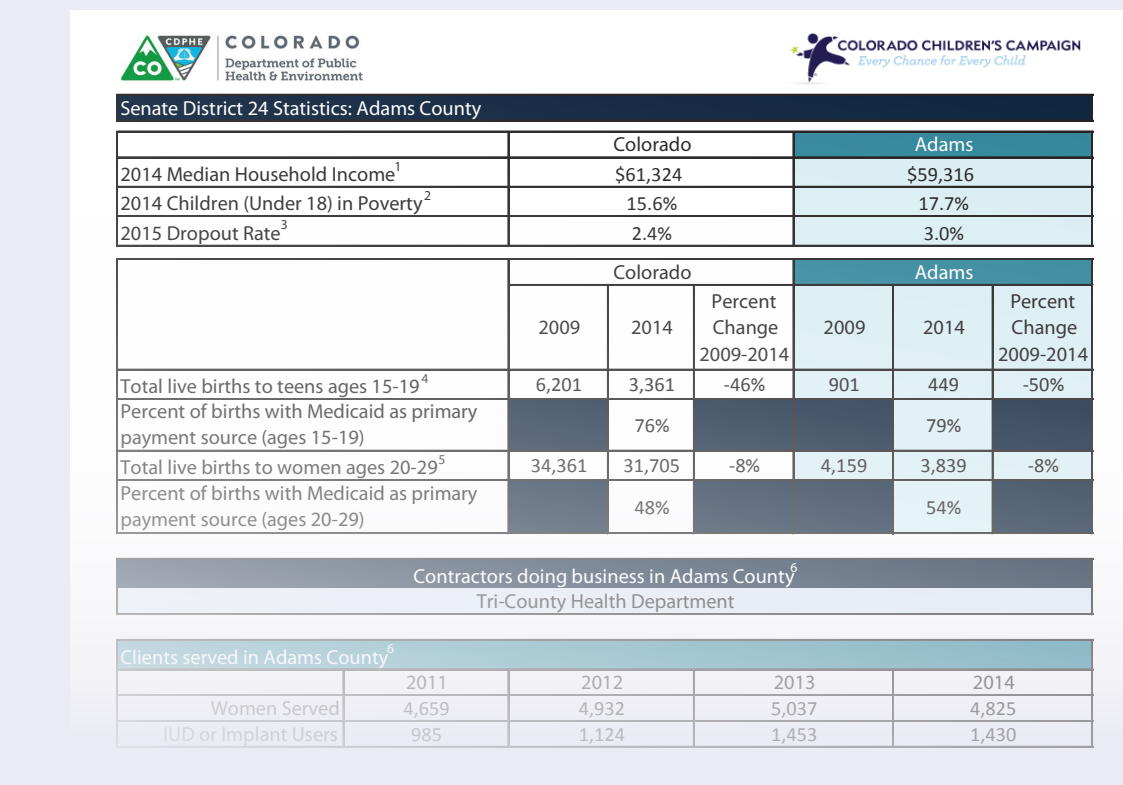
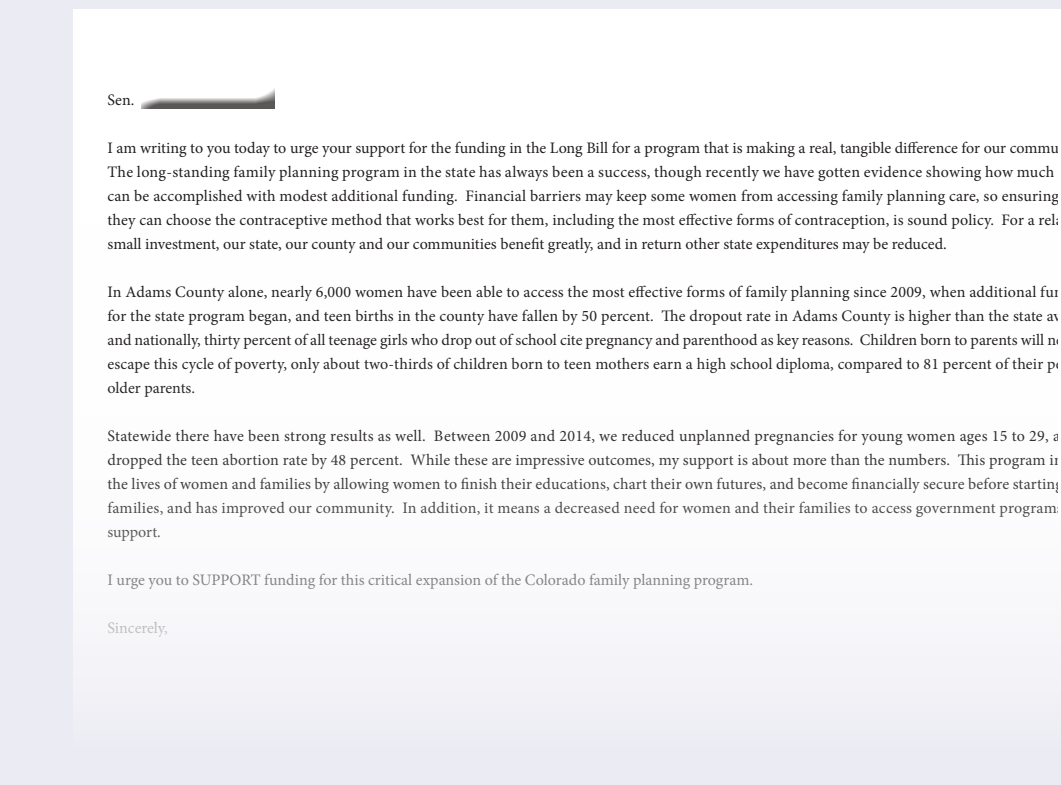
5. Ensure Strategy Meets Needs of Coalition Members and Share Messaging.



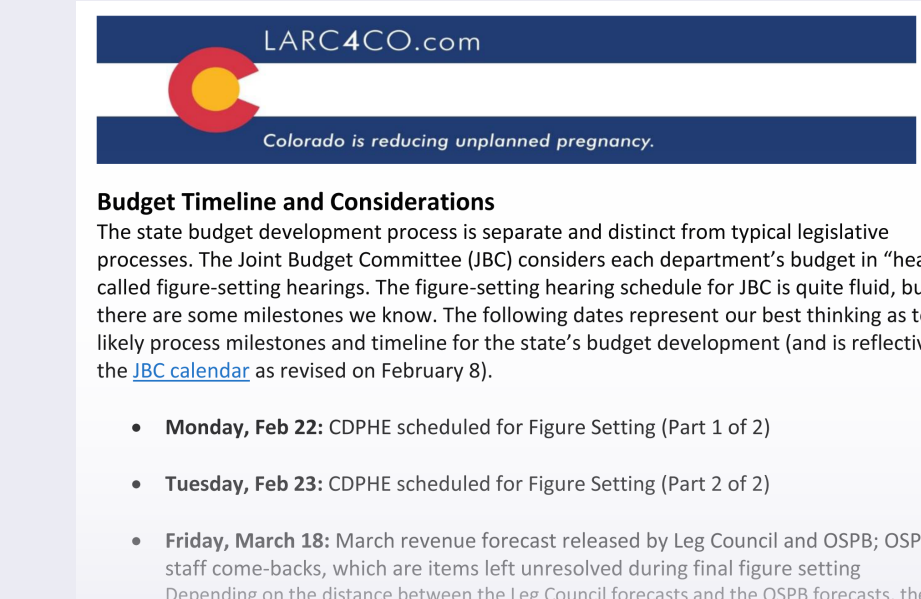
6. Establish Coalition Communications and Decision-making Protocols.



7. Engage Policymakers and Provide the Support they Need.



8. Maintain Ongoing Communication with Coalition as the Legislative Process Unfolds.



- **Week of March 21:** This week has two potential outcomes.
 1. The JBC finishes its work on March 18, the long bill is engrossed and the House debates the budget. This includes early work caucus debates for each party and second and third readings on the floor.
 2. The JBC needs one more week to finish its work and the rest of the calendar is pushed out by approximately one additional week.
- **Week of March 28 (or April 4):** Senate debates the budget including early work caucuses for each party and second and third readings on the floor.
- **Late March/Early April:** The long bill goes to a conference committee, made up of the JBC members. Any areas of divergence between the House and Senate versions of the bill will be reviewed. The conference committee is also granted authority to go beyond the scope, which means the conference committee can discuss any aspect of the budget they deem appropriate.
- **Late March/Early April:** The long bill returns to both chambers for final approval.

Results:

Additional funding for the family planning program in Colorado was established. Ensuring women have access to the most effective methods of birth control enables them to create the best future for themselves and support a healthy start for their children. And because teenagers have much higher rates of unintended pregnancies than other women, this initiative benefits two generations of Colorado kids.

Conclusion:

Successful advocacy coalition management requires relationship building and open and transparent communication. The steps outlined in this presentation can help guide other coalitions to successful results.

