

Health @ DU

Preliminary Draft

At the University of Denver, our dedication to the public good is anchored both in our current strengths and in our areas of greatest potential. Innovating across disciplines – and pursuing excellence every step of the way – empowers us to address society’s biggest issues and contribute to the greater good.

DU’s contributions to the field of health – both in established areas like mental health and social sciences as well as in emerging areas like aging, sports and biomechanics – improve lives every day. Through research and direct community involvement, our faculty members bring the latest knowledge of their fields to bear on the health-related needs of our community.

And we can do so much more.

By aligning areas of excellence and streamlining operational efficiencies, by working from cells to systems and from basic science to community application, the University of Denver can marshal our greatest strengths related to the social determinants of health and transform the impact we create for our world.

Our strengths sit at the bookends of the translational research arc: preclinical research in the fields of engineering, biomed and basic sciences; and practice, prevention and opportunity in the fields of population health, social sciences, mental health, health disparities, rural health and more.

We aim to forge new collaborations and innovations based on those strengths, focused around three pillars:

- Pillar 1 – Increasing Health Access and Equity: Transforming Systems of Care
- Pillar 2 – Promoting Health and Wellbeing: Trauma and Resilience Across the Lifespan
- Pillar 3 – Innovations in the Science of Health

Drawing on both our existing and potential strengths and fueled by philanthropic investment, Health@DU will create unparalleled community impact both locally and globally, creating a model for our state and our nation of dedication to the public good.

Pillar 1 – Increasing Health Access and Equity: Transforming Systems of Care

We recognize the systemic inequities that exist across the spectrum of health delivery – whether racial, geographic, socioeconomic, or otherwise. Our commitment to investing in the health of our communities includes a commitment to examining and correcting these inequities so all individuals will have greater access to the broad spectrum of information and services to enhance their experience of health. By partnering with community stakeholders, we can design innovative solutions to tackle the root causes of health disparities so that all people can live healthy lives. We will also address the barriers to care and work towards large-scale improvements in the health care system.

Points of strength:

- As a midsize private university DU has greater nimbleness than larger, more bureaucratic public universities
- DU doesn't have a medical school, which gives us the space to partner with medical institutions where we each provide value to one another (holistic health and equity)
- Efforts to address homelessness: Burns Center on Poverty and Homelessness - GSSW
- Work on redesigning rural mental health systems: Center for Rural School Health & Education (CRSHE) in MCE
- Efforts to address inequities in P-12 education: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in MCE, Positive Early Learning Experiences Center in MCE, and GSSW
- Data informatics: Use our economists to connect with multiple projects to define the unique areas that we can find in data to inform social determinants of health.
- Feedback loop to policy and our ability to demonstrate practical application

Elements necessary to create a bigger impact:

- Information technology professionals: to manage high levels of data
- Additional positions and training: professorships, post-docs, post-bacs, fellowships, scholarships. This will build and incentivize the workforce in a way that is unique to higher education.
- Scholarships that eliminate the barrier of tuition for underrepresented populations
- Physical space that is suited to the needs of this initiative

What that bigger impact will look like:

- Power to convene experts across the University
- Access to data insights that are more far-reaching than what we can produce now
- Interdisciplinary collaborations
- Vocational/Curricular focus on key areas

Pillar 2 – Promoting Health and Wellbeing: Trauma and Resilience Across the Lifespan

We will design, implement, and study a range of strategies to promote mental health and wellness, broadly defined. This includes primary prevention such as creating education and work contexts that foster interpersonal connection as well as secondary and tertiary approaches such as telehealth services to reduce the severity of mental health illness. We will draw from strengths across campus – in psychology, education, social work, business and other fields – recognizing the wealth of interdisciplinary knowledge that can inform and improve the ways that we enhance wellness for individuals and communities.

Points of strength:

- Substance use and abuse – GSSW, MCE, and GSPP
- Community-university partnerships to promote mental health for youth, educators, and families – MCE, CRSHE
- Community Clinics – GSPP, MCE, and CAHSS
- Work on trauma and adverse childhood experiences – CAHSS, MCE, and GSPP
- Climb Initiative – GSSW. Federal funding incentivizes students to go into behavioral health. Create internships in underserved communities, provide training for students. We provide social work students with psychopharmacology training, which they wouldn't get elsewhere and which better prepares them for the workforce.

- Relationship violence work by Anne DePrince – Psychology. Looking at domestic violence laws, interventions that are possible, with the goal of changing relationship trajectories.
- Online MBA program – Daniels. 4-course healthcare administration, course on health and wellbeing in the workforce. Individual wellbeing (financial, cognitive, physical) as well as organizational wellbeing.
- Interdisciplinary program on financial security and cognitive health – KIHA. Connection between finances, health, aging. Grad students from GSPP, GSSW, undergrads from Daniels, biology.

Elements necessary to create a bigger impact:

- Interdisciplinary programs – Envision more such programs, bridging professional divides. Solve bigger problems through collaboration. Create topics that are naturally interdisciplinary, develop centralized structure of office/staff/technology to ease the typical barriers to this type of work.
- Undergraduate internships – Internships with community partners, linked to classroom work, can help identify issues/patterns in mental health field.
- Central hub of wellbeing, a facility where this work can be done – Each department contributes the elements to support this effort. Reduce the cross-discipline work. Centralized process, awareness to interact with it – contributing to it and using the resources. Consider installing a dean of health and wellness, with several schools under them, with centralized support.

What that bigger impact will look like:

- Collaboration: Daily interaction among people from different departments would naturally spark more collaboration and reduce redundancies and inefficiencies across campus. The interdisciplinary nature, with research, education, community engagement, etc. would bolster this natural collaboration. Enhance the great work that's already being done in the community, build relationships with community partners.
- Community engagement: It would become a place that the community can easily access. Train professionals from the community, bring in groups for workshops, professional education center for faculty/staff/students.
- Nationwide model: The interdisciplinary, problem-solving nature of this hub can become a model for universities nationwide.
- Conduct implementation science research: Similar to what is happening at Morgridge and GSSW, studying what it takes to scale best practices. Put many minds together with key community partners to consider root problems that are experienced broadly, and try to move the needle on solutions.
- Three levels: 1: our own health and wellbeing of faculty/students. 2: Denver metro area, how we can be of service to community members, partnership with key agencies. 3: state of Colorado, rural Colorado and how we can serve them.
- Tell the stories of individuals who will interact with this hub, how their experience will be different from what it is now. Person who comes in for service, someone who's rural and this service is coming to them, faculty member who has resources that they didn't have previously.

Pillar 3: Innovations in the Science of Health

Basic science is at the heart of improving the field of health. We will conduct cutting-edge research across the bench-to-practice continuum to generate effective treatments, devices, and evidence-based practices. Our approaches will draw on strengths in specific fields as well as interdisciplinary approaches,

both examining and improving the basic components that contribute to the science of health. In this strategy, as with the two above, we will maximize the use of technology such as artificial intelligence and psychosocial metrics via iPhone data, etc.

Points of strength:

- Bench science, COVID study - NSM
- AI interface with adults/yoga & mindfulness, Concussion biomarkers study, Financial decision making & aging - Knobel Institute for Healthy Aging
- Joint replacement, biofeedback, work on Parkinson's - Engineering, Knobel
- Voice recordings to assess mental health issues – GSSW
- Partnership with National Jewish Health
- Community partnerships for field placements of graduate students

Elements necessary to create a bigger impact:

- Fundamental science research (with a focus on the human side) infused by strength of other units – emphasis of what experiential learning can do for fundamental science
- Specific areas of health (of concern to population) are holistically included (i.e., how the field of law can impact someone's health) – partnerships across campus and within the community create this
- Resource hub – empowering all faculty members to better message the impact of their research

What that bigger impact will look like:

- Set the standard as the top school focused on the science behind preventative medicine, establishing a reputation in the health sciences as a go-to place
- Strengthen basic science in order to make the application of health interventions more effective
- Maintaining individuals' health throughout the life cycle, an effort supported by multiple disciplines across DU