



Governor Polis Announces Action to Save People Money on Health Care and Support Health Care Workers

DENVER - Today, Governor Polis sent a letter to Chiquita Brooks-LaSure, Administrator for the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS), to improve the ability of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) to care for patients. Colorado joins more than 20 states that already have opted to ensure that patients can receive better care from a trained Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist. This change, which was already in place in rural Colorado for more than a decade, ensures access to care, saves people money on health care, improves the quality of care, supports health care workers, and provides an additional tool to help hospitals provide care efficiently and safely.

CRNAs have advanced training and skills that allow them to practice safely. These skills played a critical role in the response to COVID-19 and improved the quality of care patients received and were enforced throughout the pandemic. By allowing CRNAs to focus on patients rather than supervisors, the state can help hospitals be more efficient and ensure the skills of nurses are available to more patients who need care and assistance.

In 2010, Governor Bill Ritter partially opted out of Medicare's CRNA supervision requirement but limited the opt-out to rural and certain Critical Access Hospitals. The action was successful in these hospitals and received support from CRNAs, healthcare providers, and hospitals.

"In making this decision, I consulted with the Colorado Board of Medicine, the Colorado Board of Nursing, and the Colorado Nurse Physician Advisory Task Force for Colorado Healthcare on issues related to access and the quality of anesthesia services in Colorado and have determined that it is consistent with Colorado law and in the best interests of Colorado's citizens to improve the quality of healthcare to more fully opt out of the current federal supervision requirement," Governor Polis wrote.

Colorado state lawmakers, the Colorado Nurses Association, Healthier Colorado, Rural Hospital Center, UC Health, and the Colorado Hospital Association support this action taken by Governor Polis.

"I'm thrilled to see the governor has endorsed this option that will expand access to high-quality anesthesia care from CRNAs and help make that care more affordable in our communities," said Senator Rhonda Fields.

"Today's decision by Governor Polis to opt out of the CMS Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) supervision requirement marks a progressive step forward for our state. It underscores our trust in the capabilities and expertise of CRNAs. This move will not only ensure that our residents have greater access to essential anesthesia care, but it also acknowledges the high standards of safety and professionalism CRNAs bring to the table. We are committed to fostering a healthcare environment where trained professionals are empowered to serve our communities effectively and efficiently," said State Representative Mary Young.

"Colorado Nurses Association supports the action taken today by Governor Polis that recognizes that Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNA) have both the advanced education and proven clinical expertise in providing safe and effective quality anesthesia care for Coloradans. Standardizing the opt-out to be Statewide, expands equitable access to anesthesia care in all Colorado Communities," said Colleen Casper, DNP, RN, MS Executive Director, Colorado Nurses Association.

"This opt-out letter is an important step forward for Colorado's patients and the hospitals that serve them," said Jeff Tieman, President and CEO of the Colorado Hospital Association. **"In a time when hospitals are facing a severe workforce shortage, allowing CRNAs and other anesthesia professionals to practice to the full extent of their training is critical in meeting our patients' needs in a safe and affordable way. We are grateful to Governor Polis for this show of support for Colorado's health care workforce."**

"People in Colorado deserve access to excellent and safe medical care, and we appreciate CRNA's vital role in providing this care. Allowing regulatory flexibility fosters innovation and allows us to care for patients without sacrificing quality," said Dr. Margaret Reidy, UCHealth's chief medical officer.

"Ensuring access to health care for all Coloradans is a priority for Healthier Colorado, and this change will safely expand the provider network for high-quality anesthesia services across our state," added Christina Walker, Senior Director of Policy Healthier Colorado

Governor Polis, in partnership with the legislature, has taken action to address workforce shortages in Colorado including in the healthcare sector. Including:

- Opportunity Now, a grant program intended to help connect more Coloradans with in-demand, high-skill, high-wage occupations. A list of Phase 1 recipients is available here, including programs to support nursing students and other members of the healthcare workforce.
- Care Forward Colorado, which provides free community college to healthcare workers such EMTs, medical assistants, and Certified Nursing Assistants (CNAs)
- Career Advance Colorado, which provides free community college to aspiring nurses and other in-demand jobs.
- HB22-1298 sponsored by Rep. Mullica, Sen. Jaquez Lewis and Sen. Nick Hinrichsen of Pueblo to save healthcare workers, including nurses, nurse aids, and psychiatric technicians, money on licensure and certification fees.
- SB22-226 led by Rep. Mullica and Sen. Jacquez Lewis makes investments in the healthcare workforce by developing provider wellness and support programs, creating financial aid opportunities for in-demand credential programs including Certified Nursing Assistants, and expanding nurse preceptor and clinical opportunities. The law also provides flexibility for health care licensure and care provisions, while continuing to build and sustain Colorado's healthcare talent pool for the future.