

2022 State of the Campus Address

Delivered by Don Elliman, Oct. 19, 2022

[VIDEO: Limitless Possibilities](#)

Good afternoon, everyone. It's great to be doing this in person. It's great to be here, and I can't thank you enough for coming.

The State of the Campus Address is a chance to tell the story of not only where we've been but also to think about our next chapter. For the last several years, that story has been largely dominated – in some ways, totally dominated – by COVID-19 and a whole host of challenges that came along with it. Throughout that time, we have stood as a force for good, a beacon of light and a reason for hope.

At last year's address, I focused on the endless possibilities and boundless potential when bright minds come together and spark innovative new ideas. While many great challenges are still with us, and we'll undoubtedly face new and deepening ones, this year I want to take an opportunity to tell a different story: your story.

Telling Your Story

I'd like to shine a spotlight on you, and share some of the thousands of stories of creativity, healing and service that only happen at CU Anschutz. Through these stories, we see faculty, students and staff turning possibilities into reality for the benefit of health and medicine, and for those we serve.

Our story as a campus is one of leaders, problem-solvers, innovators, heroes, changemakers and mentors. It's one of dreaming big, taking leaps, taking risks, delivering hope and working toward a bright future. Each of us is part of something special here – something powered by extraordinary people and ambitious ideas. I hope, as we share some of your stories, you take great pride in being a part of that.

None of us are the same people we were a year ago, or two or three. Neither is CU Anschutz the same place. In fact, we are even stronger, even more resolute in our mission and more united in our common purpose.

In preparing for today, I was struck by the sheer volume of opportunities to spotlight your incredible work. What shone through them all is proof that our spirit of collaboration is alive and well, and a sense that, if you can dream it here, it's possible.

Brain Health

Take brain health for example. From advancing discovery in Alzheimer's disease and dementia, to treating anxiety and depression, our people are at the forefront.

Huntington Potter, PhD, has demonstrated the game-changing power of asking a different question. He made waves recently, showing that two commonly-used psychiatric drugs may improve cognition in patients with Alzheimer's disease, potentially giving new hope to the 6 million Americans living with this devastating illness today.

In the arena of mental and behavioral health, our leadership is profound. Take Spero Manson, PhD. He has partnered with hundreds of American Indian and Alaska Native communities over four decades to break down cultural barriers and harmful stigma related to mental health care. It's no exaggeration to say he has become our country's go-to expert for solutions to health issues facing American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Through a first-of-its-kind partnership, C. Neill Epperson, MD, and the Department of Psychiatry team – along with Children's Hospital – are opening a mental health day-treatment program for students in Cherry Creek Schools. Together, they're helping address what's been called a pediatric mental health "state of emergency" in Colorado.

That's just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the work taking place here in mental health.

Let's turn to the powerful story of School of Medicine Assistant Professor Moksha Patel, MD's journey of recovery from a severe brain disorder and the life-changing impact of the care he received here.

[VIDEO: A Life Transformed](#)

Dr. Patel's story illustrates the power of the possibilities available on this campus, and the transformational care we deliver.

Personalized Medicine

On the frontier of personalized medicine, we are blazing trails. Last year, we talked about leveraging big data and increasing investments in bioinformatics to drive innovation. We've wasted no time getting started.

Since Melissa Haendel, PhD, joined us as our first chief research informatics officer, her team has built valuable connections among our many data sources. They've worked at lightning speed to unlock some of the mysteries of Long COVID – developing the largest publicly available dataset in U.S. history and using machine-learning to identify potential Long COVID in patients before they're even diagnosed.

This summer, the School of Medicine launched a new Department of Biomedical Informatics to connect basic science and medicine with clinical and translational scientists. Founding department chair Casey Greene, PhD, is leading the search for new healthcare solutions, using big data to improve patient outcomes and address disparities.

Whether by solving the puzzles of rare diseases, or using patients' own genetic information to inform their treatment, examples of harnessing data for optimizing care abound.

Talk to the team at the Colorado Center for Personalized Medicine, and you'll learn about possibilities already at our fingertips. By examining drug-gene interactions, Christina Aquilante, PharmD, David Kao, MD, and team help ensure the right drugs get to the right people – and help providers prevent those with certain genetic variations from receiving drugs that could have life-threatening effects. At the population level, Kristy Crooks, PhD, and her team of genetic counselors are using biobank data to screen for life-altering genetic variants, like BRCA gene mutations that may indicate high risk for breast or ovarian cancers.

Patient-Centered Care

It is our rich network of multidisciplinary talent and resources that enables us to deliver highly tailored, patient-centered care. Together with our two top-ranked hospital affiliates, we are bringing the latest and best that modern medicine has to offer to those we serve, and we're fueling a virtuous cycle of research – from bench to bedside and back again.

The ability to apply the latest research and cutting-edge clinical trials to the care our patients receive here every day is in fact the hallmark of our academic medical campus.

Let's hear from one of our patients now. Mark Koenig has benefited from the next-generation therapies tested right here – new treatments that are changing the standard of care and changing lives for the better.

[VIDEO: A Journey of Healing & Hope](#)

Transformational Research

When we look to what's next in modern medicine, cellular, regenerative and genetic therapies hold tremendous promise – and we are uniquely equipped to lead at the forefront of innovation in these areas. With the Gates Center and Gates Biomanufacturing Facility right here, top talent in the field, and an unrivaled innovation ecosystem, we are already at the forefront.

Earlier this year, a transformational gift from the Gates Frontiers Fund created the Gates Institute to take this work to greater heights. Terry Fry, MD, a world leader in CAR T-cell therapies, is its first executive director. He's working to launch the institute early next year, on the strong foundation built by longtime Gates Center Director Dennis Roop, PhD, and team. Dr. Fry calls this a "pivotal moment" and one that will "change the face of medicine as we know it."

We heard from Manali Kamdar, MD, a moment ago. Her work in CAR T-cell therapies offers a glimpse of what's possible in this burgeoning field. Her involvement in a global clinical trial recently led to fast-tracked FDA approval of a new CAR T-cell therapy for large B-cell lymphoma. One of the most aggressive lymphomas, it evades standard chemotherapy and stem cell transplantation in many patients. This new therapy, called "liso-cel," was previously available to patients only after they'd failed two treatments. Now it's a safe, non-toxic option for more people with lymphoma sooner.

Innovation & Impact

The Gates Institute, along with Bioscience 5 and state-of-the-art facilities in this very building, are among the latest pieces of our innovation ecosystem. We continue to draw industry partners, attracted by our world-class assets, our entrepreneurial spirit and our limitless potential.

Last year, I told you we are building a healthcare innovation institute to further accelerate breakthroughs and spur partnerships. That effort is bearing fruit. Our first project is a company called Oncoverity – launched in August, it is a joint venture with us, UCHHealth and a major Belgian pharmaceutical company. Thanks to Clay Smith, MD, Craig Jordan, PhD, and the CU Innovations team led by Kim Muller, Esq., we're using our sophisticated data on acute myeloid leukemia to help hone novel therapeutics for patients who can most benefit from new, targeted therapies.

Furthering drug development is our Center for Drug Discovery in the Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, where Daniel LaBarbera, PhD, and team are using a custom robotic system that cuts screening time in half for thousands of potential new and repurposed drugs for a host of diseases. Together with academic and industry partners, they're speeding next-generation drugs from research bench to clinic and to market.

Academics

Our academics are also home to innovation and creativity – you can see it among our faculty and the bright future leaders who choose CU Anschutz for their education.

- The School of Dental Medicine is leading in high-tech simulation, with Dean Denise Kassebaum, DDS, MS's, focus on preparing students with hands-on experience. With a 6:1 student to faculty ratio, our dental trainees have the privilege of working closely alongside faculty leaders, and benefit from state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.

- The School of Medicine drew nearly 11,000 applicants for 184 slots in the first-year class. Our branch campus at CSU welcomed its second cohort of students, continuing the program's strong start. Dean John J. Reilly, Jr., MD, welcomed three exceptional faculty as department chairs – Heide Ford, PhD, in pharmacology; Vineet Chopra, MBBS, MD, MSc, in the department of medicine; and Myra Muramoto, MD, MPH, in family medicine.
- Speaking of leadership transitions, Colorado School of Public Health Dean Jonathan Samet, MD, MS, announced in June that he'll be stepping away from his role as dean, while remaining on the faculty. Our third and longest-serving dean of public health, Dr. Samet elevated our school to the top 20 graduate schools of public health in the country, and grew research to over \$31 million annually. We commend him for tireless leadership throughout the pandemic, which has spotlighted the Colorado School of Public Health as a state asset, and public health as an essential field.
- Graduate School Dean David Engelke, PhD, announced his plans to retire early next year, after leading our cross-campus school for nearly seven years. Over his tenure, applications to our graduate programs doubled, with emphasis on increasing trainee diversity and building our faculty. We thank him for aligning our offerings with the needs of the scientific community and increasing our national standing.
- The Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences is leading in research and innovation. In addition to launching the Center for Drug Discovery and speeding progress in pharmacogenomics, Dean Ralph Altieri, PhD, and team completed the final stages of the Research Pharmacy this spring. Located here in this building, the Research Pharmacy centralizes support services and regulatory compliance for outpatient clinical trials on our campus.
- In the College of Nursing, Dean Eli Provencio-Vasquez, PhD, RN, FAAN, FAANP, is making progress on plans to double in size, to fulfill the need for skilled nurses in Colorado and around the country. A new partnership with Fort Lewis College in Southern Colorado is a part of that progress, and I'll tell you about it shortly.

Driven Students

In each of our schools and programs, we are attracting driven students with a passion for making an impact. As I mentioned last year, we're working to enhance the student experience to better serve the best and brightest, and help them make the most of their training here.

Students like Raiza Deyto, an Army veteran, Colorado Air National Guard captain and certified nurse, who is the first CU Nursing student accepted in the Center for COMBAT Research Scholar Program. As she works toward her master's degree in our Veteran and Military Healthcare Program, Deyto will collaborate with renowned clinician-researchers focused on caring for military populations. In particular, she'll focus on suicide prevention - a growing problem in the military and in our society.

Students like Byron Irish, DDS '22. While a fourth-year student, he put his training to work at the Dental Team Care Clinic, with patient Ronnie Chavez. Ronnie had endured a lifetime of dental problems and

embarrassment before finding his way to our clinic and an affordable treatment plan. Over six months, Irish transformed Ronnie's smile, fitting him with dentures and addressing his pain. Ronnie is now a proud advocate for our dental clinic, crediting our campus with life-changing care.

It's clear, our students are courageous and driven. Like Cameron Bean, MD '22, who we'll learn about now.

[VIDEO: Meet Cameron Bean](#)

Campus & Community Impact

Our students are inspiring; along with our faculty and staff, they're making an impact on our campus and community.

Just talk to Aimee Bernard, PhD, whose nonprofit after-school program, Think Like a Scientist, reaches area elementary school kids with hands-on STEM activities. Run by our student volunteers, the program brings the wonder of science to schools in need. And to great acclaim: One of the 4th grade participants said, "On a scale of 1-10, I rate this class a 1,000!"

A campus group called CU Street Medicine, launched by students Rebecca Henkind and Kiera Connelly, BSN '21, connects CU Anschutz students with community partners who offer medical and non-clinical services to people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity. Together with faculty mentors, they are removing barriers to quality care.

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Dave Young, MD, felt called to help. The emergency medicine professor flew to Krakow, Poland, as part of a medical team last April, eventually crossing into Ukraine. For three weeks, the team provided care for displaced citizens out of backpacks and bins full of medicine and equipment. They treated everything from sprains to pulmonary disease, and trained others with the help of an interpreter – a truly selfless dedication to medicine.

Dedication to making an impact is evident in Eduardo Davila, PhD's, pathway programs, designed to reach students at different phases of their education to ignite their passions and support their progress. PIKE-PREP is one of those programs. Co-directed by Carlos Catalano, PharmD, PhD, it helps aspiring PhDs and MD-PhDs from underrepresented backgrounds pursue graduate-level training by pairing them with mentors and providing research experience.

[VIDEO: The Power of Mentorship](#)

For all of our students and employees, we are committed to making our campus the most welcoming and inclusive place it can be.

Last fall, Steven Burton, MPH '21, and volunteers opened the CU Anschutz LGBTQ+ Hub. The Hub organizes Pride events in June and October, including Spirit Day activities on campus tomorrow, and is our first campuswide organization serving the LGBTQ+ community.

We recognize that CU Anschutz is such a special community because of these and so many other hardworking faculty and staff. And among our top initiatives is investing in our people. To that end, we're bolstering career pathway programs like one pioneered in our advancement office and overseen by Maria Hernandez. A CU alumna, Maria started as an assistant here 8 years ago, quickly rising through the ranks to administrative manager. Today, she shepherds others through the program that she helped develop through her own journey, ensuring assistants gain training to bring new roles into reach. It's a proven model, and one we'll be emulating across campus.

Health Equity

We are proud of these efforts, as we are of the progress we're making in the vital area of health equity.

Last year, I told you we were launching a Center for Health Equity. We are actively engaged in the search for its inaugural director. We have Regina Richards, PhD, MSW, and Mark Earnest, MD, to thank for leading the effort to bring the center to fruition. It's one of many complementary efforts focused on diversity, equity and inclusion on our campus and outreach to our community.

The Aurora Wellness Community is another such effort. Headed by longtime Colorado innovation leader Lisa Neal-Graves, JD, ME, MS, the partnership will focus on improving access to care and services like housing, food security, and community entrepreneurship for people and families in the ZIP codes around our campus. Thanks to Dean John J. Reilly, Jr., MD, and Anne Fuhlbrigge, MD, MS, who led the effort to create this vision.

These are just some of the many community-serving initiatives and partnerships underway from CU Anschutz.

We are expanding our reach through a partnership of CU Nursing and Fort Lewis College in Durango. Dean Eli Provencio-Vasquez, PhD, RN, FAAN, FAANP, and Amy Barton, PhD, RN, FAAN, are leading the effort, aimed at tackling the nursing shortage in our state, and boosting rural and Indigenous healthcare. Next fall, students – many, first-generation – can earn a four-year, culturally competent CU Nursing degree at Fort Lewis. This collaboration promises to begin to reduce inequities, improve access and diversify the nursing workforce, particularly in the Four Corners region. It was made possible with support from CU Nursing alumna Karen Zink, MD '87, and her family, and a grant from the Colorado Health Foundation.

Future-Ready

Our expertise spans the scope of human health and medicine, and it's essential that we focus on being future-ready in a world full of challenges. We have a role to play in contributing knowledge, and serving as voices for evidence-based science.

Whether the issue at hand is gun violence, our changing climate, the opioid epidemic, or access to reproductive healthcare, we are committed to bringing all we can to help shape the future.

Consider Emmy Betz, MD, MPH's, work to curb the gun violence epidemic through the Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative. She is out in our communities sharing practical ways to stem alarming numbers of gun-related deaths and injuries in Colorado and the West. One example is her "Safety in Dementia" program, which helps people in cognitive decline and their caregivers make decisions about gun safety and storage.

We know climate change has profound implications for human health, equity and access, and the practice of medicine. Our faculty are spearheading new approaches to climate-informed care. In the School of Medicine, Jay Lemery, MD, and Rosemary Rochford, PhD, co-founded a first-of-its-kind Climate & Health Program to educate health professionals on urgent global crises impacting human health. Lemery was named the inaugural Endowed Chair in Climate Medicine last month, which will further propel our leadership in this fast-growing area.

Financial Strength

On these and so many other complex challenges, you are making an impact. Your work keeps CU Anschutz on an upward trajectory, attracting research funding and inspiring philanthropy to advance our mission.

Financially, we are in a position of stability and strength. We owe a debt of gratitude to Executive Vice Chancellor for Administration & Finance and Chief Financial Officer Terri C. Carrothers and the dedicated teams across our campus who have kept our institution moving forward. Let's hear from Terri now.

[VIDEO: CU Anschutz Together](#)

We'd also like to give a special thanks to the CU Anschutz COVID-19 taskforce – a group of 55 faculty and staff spanning many offices and departments – which has met countless times behind the scenes to keep our campus moving forward over these past two-and-a-half years.

Challenges

While our financial picture is bright, we face some very real challenges that we must not lose sight of.

While we have learned a great deal throughout the pandemic, there is much still to be done – both to understand its long-term effects, and to address the disparities COVID-19 laid bare. We have a role to play on both fronts.

As the cost of care continues to increase to unsustainable levels, we have an obligation to find ways to decrease costs and increase access. The explosion in telehealth, e-consults, remote patient monitoring and other creative solutions has laid the foundation for continued innovation. This is a sweet spot for us, and we have to capitalize on it for the benefit of those we serve.

On campus, we continue our return to a pre-pandemic state of affairs, which comes with some adjustment and it isn't always easy. It's wonderful to host so many of you here together today. Know that we continue to build on the lessons we've learned to enrich our connected and collaborative working and learning environment.

I have every confidence we'll get through our current challenges – and unforeseen challenges yet to come – and wind up stronger for it. We've proven as much again and again.

Closing: The Credit for Our Amazing Story Goes to You

This afternoon, we've shared just a fraction of the amazing efforts happening here every day. While different in focus, these stories speak to the vital role you *all* have in making possibilities realities. It is by dreaming big, forging connections and supporting one another that you make bold breakthroughs happen. By welcoming diverse perspectives and courageously exploring new frontiers, you enrich our community and advance our progress.

I started today by telling you that our story at CU Anschutz is one of extraordinary people doing remarkable things. I hope you felt that, and leave here knowing you are *the* essential part of our history and our future.

Make no mistake, our story has not unfolded by chance. It takes vision, hard work, commitment and resilience. Indeed, it takes an uncommon determination to turn possibilities into reality, and to bring new ideas into reach.

The credit for our amazing story goes to *you*. Thank you for all you do to keep CU Anschutz at the forefront as we head into our next chapter together.

We can all imagine what comes next, and we have much to look forward to.