



**Overview:**

Governors hold a unique capacity to help promote a culture of health using the tools of their state governments in purchasing, regulating, and policymaking. Governors in 48 states made State of the State or inaugural addresses in 2015, laying out their priorities for the year ahead.

In these addresses, 40 governors referenced health issues such as Medicaid, behavioral health, insurance exchanges, health care costs, infant mortality, rural health, and improving services for seniors and persons with disabilities. A number spoke to the importance of early child development, and many governors are developing policy agendas to make their states healthier. The National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) developed a [summary](#) of health policy issues addressed in the 2015 State of the States.

Governors, along with other state leaders, recognizing the need for policies to focus on more than just medical care and access to it are helping to create a nation in which one's ethnicity, income or ZIP code does not hamper their ability to eat fresh food, live on safe streets, sustain emotional and mental well-being, or find and afford health care.

The State of the State and inaugural addresses provide a snapshot of the activities underway across the nation to promote a culture of health.

**Cross Sector Collaboration to End Silos of Care and Focus on the Whole Person**

State officials are taking a cross cutting, more coordinated approach to create a culture of health by partnering across state agencies and sectors to look at health from a more holistic perspective. For example, Governor Steve Beshear of [Kentucky](#) notes, "Not every Kentuckian who wants a job has one, not every family has financial security, good health is a luxury some people still can't afford. You can't fix weaknesses like these overnight. Nor can a single initiative, piece of legislation, program, or executive order. It's long hard work"

[Michigan](#) Governor Rick Snyder proposes combining the state's health and human services departments to achieve more coordinated processes across state agencies and create "people focused" policies. In [Nebraska](#), Governor Pete Ricketts seeks a "transformational" HHS leader to reform the state government's culture, noting that the "people who need our help do not fit neatly into the silos we have created...we need a system that cares for the entire person." In [New York](#), Governor Andrew Cuomo heralded his "roadmap to create a healthier New York including creating a continuum of care that links physicians and community based resources to care for the whole person." Stating "a critical component to improving health and containing health care costs is to ensure that housing needs are met"

Governor Jack Markell of [Delaware](#) highlighted a number of critical investments the state has made across sectors for improving the lives of its most vulnerable citizens, from low-income families to individuals in addiction treatment and ex-offenders, noting that “a lack of opportunity for anyone in [Delaware] is a missed opportunity for all of us.”

[Ohio](#) Governor John Kasich calls for greater coordination of care and a more holistic, less siloed approach to providing social services to individuals and families in poverty. In his speech, he noted “we've got somebody on public assistance and we're running them around. All too often we never say to them, ‘Why are you here? What's your problem? Why are you in poverty?’” Additionally, the governor notes the state plans to address health issues through action involving other sectors. In addressing mental health and addiction issues through interventions within the community Kasich notes, “We need to be in our schools. We need to be in our communities. We need to be in our synagogues. We need to be in our churches. We need to be everywhere.”

Governor of [Oklahoma](#) Mary Fallin recognizes the importance of state level action to promote a culture of health saying there are “things we can do here at the capitol.” She proposes a cross sector approach, giving the example of “going smoke-free at all K-12 schools.” To address infant mortality in [South Dakota](#), Governor Dennis Daugaard and First Lady Linda Daugaard have worked across sectors with “doctors, nurses, tribal health care workers, nurse midwives, social workers, and Department of Health officials to understand the causes of the problem.” In [Colorado](#), Governor John Hickenlooper is looking at community design and the intersection between the environment and health. Asserting that Colorado “cannot become the healthiest state for people if it is not the healthiest state for our natural environment,” the governor is seeking improved bike and hiking trails and outdoor programs.

### **Early Childhood Interventions**

Several governors called for a comprehensive approach to caring for children through early childhood interventions. Access to education, quality nutrition, and strategies to reduce infant mortality in states are contributing to efforts to achieve health equity and a culture of health.

Nathan Deal, Governor of [Georgia](#), is focusing on education as a means to break the cycle of poverty, which is inextricably [linked to poor health](#). Governor Deal states that investing in providing quality education “leads to a good job, a stable family, and the stairway to the future,” all of which contribute to a culture of health. He calls on state legislators to “do your part” so that “Georgians can assure that a child’s hopes of success aren’t determined by his or her ZIP Code. Our places of learning should be where a child learns triumph, not defeat.” Delaware Governor Markell noted, “Students bring significant challenges to school each day, challenges of poverty, of homelessness, of unstable family situations. These are tragic problems that we are fully focused on addressing through economic development, housing, and other initiatives across state government.” To address these issues in [Virginia](#), Governor Terry McAuliffe’s budget plan includes funding to help schools expand their breakfast programs “so that every Virginia student can start his or her day ready to learn.” The governor recognized that quality nutrition is essential for good health and is “a key element of increasing student achievement.” In Montana, Governor Steve Bullock touted a public-private partnership that “assures children start each day ready to learn, knowing they will have a healthy breakfast at school.” Governor Bullock quoted a teacher who decries the fact that so many children who enter kindergarten “already have barely a chance” as he called for a state block grant to support pre school programs.

Governor Beshear celebrated Kentucky's progress in giving every child opportunities through early educational and health care interventions.

*"Too many Kentucky children were getting a poor start in life. Too many children were entering school with preventable health problems, undeveloped minds and little engagement in life around them. And as we all know, kids who start out behind rarely catch up. So we worked to create an environment where every child – regardless of whether he or she is born in the inner city, in a mountain hollow, on a farm, or in the suburbs – every child is given the opportunity to succeed. To do this, we dramatically improved access to health care for children in low-income families. We targeted dental problems. We increased enrollment in preschool programs. And we developed a screener to gauge whether early education programs were preparing our kids to hit the ground running on day one of kindergarten."*

**-Steve Beshear, Governor of Kentucky**

Governor Beshear wants to continue the state's momentum in early childhood interventions by seeking legislation to implement the goals of the Accelerating Learning Statewide Through an Advanced Rating System or the [All-STARS plan](#). This program aims to ensure all children have access to high-quality early care and education programs.

Three governors highlighted infant mortality reduction efforts including [Indiana](#), where the day after delivering the State of the State address, Governor Mike Pence launched the "Labor of Love campaign to educate new and expecting moms". [Oklahoma's](#) Governor Fallin set a goal of "decreasing the rate of infant deaths by 13 percent in 2018." In [South Dakota](#), Governor Dugaard reviewed the

state's progress in reducing infant mortality, highlighting initiatives such as the distribution of "Safe Sleep Kits to low-income families without a safe sleep option." Made possible by collaboration between private donors and South Dakota's Department of Health, "the kit includes a portable crib, crib sheet, sleep sack, informational DVD, children's book and pacifier." The state is also running a successful "media campaign – "For Baby's Sake" – focused on safe sleep, early signs of pregnancy, the importance of prenatal care, and the importance of immunizations for babies.

### **Access to Health Care**

Access to affordable and equitable healthcare is a critical piece of achieving a culture of health, and many states are working hard to ensure that all individuals and communities have the care they need to be healthy and productive citizens. The expansion of health care coverage through the health insurance exchanges and Medicaid programs of the Affordable Care Act provide opportunities for many individuals to access health care for the first time. Fifteen governors including David Ige (HI), Mike Pence (IN), Steve Beshear (KY), Rick Snyder (MI), Maggie Hassan (NH), Susana Martinez (NM), and Tom Wolf (PA) addressed Medicaid expansion, while seven mentioned insurance exchanges. In addition to these coverage expansions, states are also improving access to health care and other health services through programs to assist specific populations.

In [Texas](#), Governor Greg Abbot outlined budget priorities that included a commitment to improving military service members and veterans access to mental health screenings, improving women's access to screening and treatment for cancer and postpartum depression, and increasing the availability of in-home care attendants to care for people with disabilities and seniors. Governor Kasich also prioritized improved access and availability for in-home care for individuals with developmental disabilities in Ohio.

[Alabama's](#) Governor, Robert J. Bentley acknowledged the link between health issues and “access to quality healthcare.” States with large rural populations face unique challenges in ensuring access to care. Governor Dugaard highlighted efforts to expand the healthcare workforce and incentivize practice in rural areas in South Dakota.

### **Employment Opportunities and Support**

Stable [employment](#) in safe working conditions leads to better health, enabling individuals to provide their families with nutritious foods, quality childcare, educational opportunities and healthier homes- all of which contribute to building a culture of health. Governors across the country are focusing on improved access to employment opportunities and support to improve the health of the residents in their states. [Virginia's](#) Governor McAuliffe recognizes that “a healthy economy needs healthy citizens,” while Governor Bill Walker of [Alaska](#) observed “People cannot work, hunt, or fish unless they are healthy.”

In [Kentucky](#), Governor Beshear spoke to the importance of an educated, well-trained, and healthy workforce. Governor Kasich discussed the work Ohio is doing to create jobs and provide opportunities to help all residents of the state.

*“No one's being left out. No one. If you're poor, if you're sick, if you're addicted, we want to help you. If you're in prison—(we) will give you a path so you can have a second chance. But it all starts with a strong economy. If we're not creating jobs, ladies and gentlemen, all the other good things don't happen. They just don't happen.”*

**-John Kasich, Governor of Ohio**

Governors are increasingly focused on fostering a culture of health in their state through purchasing, regulating, and policymaking as evidenced in their 2015 State of the State addresses. Kentucky's Governor Beshear, along with many others, recognizes the “direct line from population health to almost every challenge Kentucky faces – poverty, unemployment, low educational attainment, substance abuse, and crime.” Governors are focused on working across sectors with other state leaders to develop

policies to make their states healthier by improving access to health care, education and early child development, behavioral health, affordable housing and employment opportunities.

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*The National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) is an independent academy of state health policymakers. We are dedicated to helping states achieve excellence in health policy and practice. A non-profit and non-partisan organization, NASHP provides a forum for constructive work across branches and agencies of state government on critical health issues.*