

2024 State of the Campus Address

Delivered by Chancellor Don Elliman, Oct. 29, 2024

Introduction: Driving Discovery, Inspiring Hope

Welcome to State of the Campus 2024. It's great to see so many here and joining online.

I've thought a lot about what I might say today, and I realized that what might be most meaningful would be to tell a story – not so much in an effort to review our strategic priorities – though perhaps a more in-depth refreshment of that discussion should start soon. But, rather, a story about where we are as a campus today, and how we got there.

We have many visitors from other academic institutions come to campus every year, and what strikes me the most about meeting with them is a literally uniform sense of marvel that they express when they look out at this campus and see what has been accomplished. Not just in bricks and mortar but in the totality of what they see, and in the undeniable energy and spirit that permeate this campus.

That's because of this story, and it's a story about you. What you – the faculty, staff, students and our partners at our affiliate hospitals – have created to get us where we are today.

In the Business of Hope

On this campus, I believe we are in the business of hope. We inspire hope by training outstanding future leaders, exploring new frontiers and setting the standard for quality care. By thinking big, dreaming bigger and working together to turn what could be into what is.

Our story as a campus started as an idea – a dream to become a destination known for the latest science and research, and the highest quality healthcare. But more than anything: a dream to inspire hope through new approaches and new solutions. Today, we can be proud to count ourselves among the country's leading academic medical institutions and we continue to advance.

Onward & Upward

Highlights

As we've grown, we've made tremendous progress by nearly every measure. Let's look at some highlights.

- Our faculty attracted \$910 million in total new research funding last year. That's an astonishing achievement.
- One highlight was a \$2.3 million National Institutes of Health grant in support of our Head & Neck Cancer Specialized Program of Research Excellence (SPORE) led by Antonio Jimeno, MD, PhD, and XJ Wang, MD, PhD. We are home to one of just four SPOREs in the country for these cancers and leading the way in developing novel therapies.

- Another, among the many, was a \$3 million Department of Defense grant to Ian Stanley, PhD, at the Firearm Injury Prevention Initiative for a study examining firearm safety in populations with post-traumatic stress disorder. Led by Emmy Betz, MD, MPH, the initiative itself was launched last year with a \$4.5 million commitment from the University of Colorado School of Medicine. It has become a trusted resource for research and solutions, and there's never been a time when those were needed more.
- And we're off to an amazing start this year. Just one example of that: This summer, researchers at the Colorado School of Public Health's Lifecourse Epidemiology of Adiposity and Diabetes (LEAD) Center, led by Dana Dabelea, MD, PhD, were awarded a \$17.8 million grant from the National Institutes of Health. It's part of a national program studying environmental exposures during pregnancy and influences on the health of children.
- Our robust research enterprise has not gone unnoticed. We are ranked #19 in the world and #12 in the U.S. for health sciences research according to Nature's 2024 Index report.
- In terms of total revenue, CU Anschutz topped \$3 billion last year, up by over 40% in the last five years.
- Our economic impact as a campus, including our hospital partners, now tops \$11.5 billion (a bit larger than the ski industry in the state of Colorado).

We continue to draw outstanding people to our ranks.

- Our faculty has grown to 6,572, staff to 5,930 and our student enrollments are steady at 4,553.
- Speaking of our students, Yesenia Maddaford, a first-year student in our nationally ranked Physical Therapy Program, is a shining example of the kind of people we attract. Hailing from a tight-knit community in El Paso, Texas, Yesenia's passion for helping others led her to pursue nursing. But, after witnessing her mother's journey to recovery from a stroke, Yesenia found herself drawn in a new direction. She was inspired to apply for physical therapy training after seeing her mom at her most hopeful when learning to walk again. Today, Yesenia is not only thriving in our Physical Therapy Program but also inspiring others to consider careers in the field.

In the area of clinical care:

- CU School of Medicine faculty alone treated nearly 775,000 unique patients from every one of Colorado's 64 counties last year (nearly 13% of the population of the state of Colorado).
- With our hospital partners, Children's Hospital Colorado and UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital, we had more than 2.6 million patient visits on campus last year.

I'd like to again recognize our partners – Jena Hausmann, Children's Hospital Colorado President & CEO; Tom Gronow, UCHealth University of Colorado Hospital President & CEO; and Liz Concordia, UCHealth President & CEO. Organizations rise and fall on leadership, and we are very lucky to have those three at the helm.

Rising in the Rankings

We continue to rise in the rankings and elevate our reputation.

- Our hospital affiliates again rank #1 in Colorado – University of Colorado Hospital for the 13th consecutive year. Children's Hospital Colorado is again ranked among the top 10 pediatric hospitals in the United States.
- The latest U.S. News & World Report rankings have the CU School of Medicine as one of 16 top-tier research institutions.
- The Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences is ranked at #15, which is in the top 10% of pharmacy schools nationwide.

- The Colorado School of Public Health is ranked at #16 out of 213, which is an amazing trajectory for a school that itself is only 16 years old.
- The CU College of Nursing is #1 in our state for both its bachelor's and master's nursing programs.
- The School of Dental Medicine was named an Apple Distinguished School for technology and innovation in education.
- The Graduate School has served as a foundation of our strengths, recruiting and supporting outstanding scientific trainees.

Philanthropy

Philanthropy was another bright spot last year. Vice Chancellor of Advancement Scott Arthur and his team, with the faculty, have really done amazing work. That work inspired \$243 million in philanthropic support, taking us to over \$2.2 billion raised since 2015.

Some high-profile news came this June with a \$2 million gift from the Céline Dion Foundation to advance progress in autoimmune neurologic diseases like Stiff Person Syndrome – the rare disease Ms. Dion has been treated for on our campus under the care of Amanda Piquet, MD.

The Grammy-winning singer thanked Dr. Piquet at the world premiere of her documentary in June. [Here's a clip.](#)

I said at the beginning that we're in the business of hope. Dr. Piquet couldn't be with us here today. But I would like to thank her, on behalf of all of us, for delivering on that promise.

Our Experts in Demand

Dr. Piquet is only one of many of our experts called on for their knowledge and insights.

- This summer, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden visited the Ludeman Center for Women's Health Research as part of the White House Initiative on Women's Health Research.
- Jacci Bainbridge, PharmD, FCCP, testified at the United Nations on cannabis education and clinical trials.

Our faculty are regularly tapped by national media.

- Last month, Joel Stoddard, MD, appeared in a CBS News segment on the impacts of social media on kids.
- Dan Pastula, MD, MHS, was interviewed by the TODAY Show this fall on West Nile and by a number of media outlets in the last week following the recent E. coli outbreak.
- Christopher Lieu, MD, contributed to NBC and the Wall Street Journal stories on rising colorectal cancer rates.

New Leadership, New Vision

Speaking of experts, we were delighted to welcome another expert and leader this past July. John Sampson, MD, PhD, MBA, joined us as Vice Chancellor for Health Affairs and Dean of the CU School of Medicine from Duke University.

He brings tremendous vision to the role and opportunities to build even more positive relationships with our hospital partners. A neurosurgeon by training, Dr. Sampson has vast experience in academic medicine, and a passion for fostering the next generation of medical providers.

Campus & Community

When it comes to education and training, we are creating new ways to expand our reach.

- The CU School of Medicine celebrated a partnership of the U.S Air Force Academy and the Center for Combat Medicine and Battlefield (COMBAT) Center last April.
- Through a partnership with Bloom Healthcare, CU College of Nursing students can try out careers in geriatric care.
- In the CU Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, a Rocky Mountain Remote Pathway makes our PharmD curriculum accessible to students in rural Colorado and beyond.
- At the Colorado School of Public Health, the inaugural cohort began our first-of-its-kind Climate & Human Health PhD program.
- A new Senior and Special Care Clinic at the CU School of Dental Medicine is making oral healthcare easier for people with disabilities and older adults.
- The Graduate School is mentoring early-career scientists through a partnership with the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experience in Research (CIMER) and has begun building a centralized training grant office.

Elevating the CU Anschutz Experience

All across our campus, we remain committed to elevating the student, faculty and staff experience by investing in our people.

That's why we're working on improving onboarding and orientation, enhancing professional development, and working to make CU Anschutz a top place to work and learn. We were encouraged to be recognized by Forbes as one of America's Best Large Employers for 2024, and among Best Employers for New Grads.

We're focused on building a vibrant and connected environment. Many of you took part in recent survey efforts assessing our culture. We were heartened to see that we made progress in key areas, but the data also show very clearly that we have more work to do – and we will continue our efforts to create a welcoming, inclusive campus environment.

We also continue to add resources to support your mental health and well-being – like a new program that offers tools to improve sleep and 24/7 counseling for CU Health Plan members through LiveHealth Online.

You make this campus the special place that it is, and we want you to feel that you are part of a community. A campuswide connection initiative launched last month is one way we're working on that. You may have seen messaging around *A Place To Connect* at the Block Party, and there's much more to look forward to.

Community Connections & Care

Our work doesn't stop at our campus boundaries, as we continue to make strides in the community.

Through our Resident Leadership Council program at the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Community Engagement we are collaborating with North Aurora and Montbello to address social determinants of health. This fall, our Department of Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Colorado led a youth mental health academy, connecting community members with resources and care for kids.

A permanent clinical facility for the Aurora Wellness Community opened in August, just a few miles south of campus. In its first six weeks, the clinic saw nearly 300 patients – the majority looking to establish care with a primary care provider.

We'll reach more Coloradans statewide through our rural track program with passage of a bipartisan health bill that supports expansion of the rural healthcare workforce.

Challenges & the Innovation Imperative

When you add all that up, I think it's safe to say we have come a long way. But as we look ahead, we know we face some challenges.

Our country takes to the polls one week from today and it's no understatement to say that the outcome of this presidential election could pose an existential threat to the future of academic medical centers as we know them today – and, ultimately, to our ability to treat the patients that we serve.

Legislative threats from both the federal and state sides are equally concerning. From attempts to intercede in the physician-patient relationship at the federal level, to redefinition of community benefit and facility fee accounting at the state level – these and other factors combine to create a set of economic concerns that are significant, not only to our university but also to our partner institutions.

We should be very clear that the economic health of our hospital affiliates has a direct bearing on the economic health of the university. We are in this together. We are partners.

The three major elements that allow us to invest in incremental gains in the academic mission continue to be the clinical revenue margins of our practice plan, support from our affiliate hospitals and philanthropy.

The first two of those three are under pressure for the simple reason that everyone is making attempts to lower the cost of healthcare, as they should. The issue is how that is accomplished. We'd be naive to think that this pressure, on us and on our partners, doesn't represent a challenge going forward.

Which leads me to the topic of our innovation imperative. It's very clear that we need to find new ways to generate growth. That growth will only come through innovation. Innovation and its companion, which is risk tolerance, these are areas where we need to excel. They are what set us apart and what can draw good people here, and where we will keep the accelerator down as we head into our next stage.

Hope Through Innovation

It's also because of our focus on innovation that we're able to turn what is one day a dream into a discovery the very next. We will continue to invest in areas we know will shape health and medicine in a fundamental capacity.

Artificial Intelligence

Like artificial intelligence, which is advancing at a breakneck pace. While there are reasons to be wary, the wonders of AI for health and medicine offer amazing opportunities to embrace.

From early Alzheimer's detection to sepsis prevention and real-time clinical decision-making – the possibilities are seemingly endless. We have exceptional teams and highly connected resources in place, and we're going full speed ahead.

Novel Therapeutics

Novel therapeutics is another such area for us, and that includes cell and gene therapies. With the launch of the Gates Institute in 2023, and our capabilities at the Gates Biomanufacturing Facility, our faculty are blazing new trails in therapeutic development. They're driving research and clinical trials, including five first-in-human trials of CAR T-cell therapies manufactured right here on this campus.

The latest trial opened last week, in partnership with Children's Hospital Colorado. It's a CAR T-cell construct called CD19x22 – a white blood cell that's engineered to target receptors on the cancer cell surface. Developed by Gates Institute Executive Director Terry Fry, MD, the therapy has shown promise in adult patients with aggressive lymphomas. Now, Vanessa Fabrizio, MD, MS, is leading the pediatric trial, enrolling patients with a subtype of leukemia who have either relapsed or whose disease has not responded to traditional treatments.

Last Tuesday, a patient with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL) became the first to receive this therapy as part of the Children's Hospital Colorado trial. Here behind me you've been seeing a demonstration of how that process unfolded. This moment marks a major step forward in cancer care and gives cause for new hope for those living with serious diseases – and there's much more on the way.

CU Innovations & Strategic Investments

As developments like these move to clinic and to market, external partnerships are essential, and CU Innovations is at the center of those partnerships. Just look at your achievements since 2016: 44 new companies launched, 1,833 patents filed and 1,220 inventions developed.

We've been listed among the Top 20 in the World for Tech Transfer, named a Top 5 Innovation Hub by the National Institutes of Health, and ranked #4 Leading Academic Institution by Nature's Innovation Index.

As a campus, we remain focused on strategic investments in new therapies, interventions and devices that can benefit patients and fulfill unmet needs.

Our largest investment in this area is one I highlighted last year called RefinedScience. It's a partnership between the university and UCHHealth, and it's using big data and basic science to speed novel drug development. The effort includes a joint venture with argenx called Oncoverity that is advancing precision medicine to treat acute myeloid leukemia (AML). Earlier this year, Oncoverity launched its first Phase 2 multicenter trial and is actively enrolling patients now, and three new data suites are under development at RefinedScience with promise for saving more lives.

Last year at this time, we'd just finished reviewing applications through the Anschutz Acceleration Initiative, made possible with a \$50 million gift from The Anschutz Foundation. The winning teams have made incredible progress – speeding healthcare solutions ready to make a direct impact on patient care. Here are two examples.

- Eduardo Davila, PhD, and his team are addressing gaps in cancer treatment by developing personalized cellular immunotherapies to treat solid tumor cancers, which make up about 90% of all cancers.
- Jayashree Kalpathy-Cramer, PhD, is leading a team focused on AI-assisted imaging. They are using the human eye as a window to assess overall health, and advancing the growing field of oculosomics.

An Inflection Point

So, that's the story. We've come a long way, we face challenges ahead, and we're committed to innovation.

But what does it all add up to? What's the next chapter?

I think we are at an inflection point in the history of our campus. We are a *great* academic medical center. But we aspire to be a truly *exceptional* academic medical campus, and the energy is here to do that.

University of Colorado Hospital CEO Tom Gronow has a goal to see the hospital in the top decile in three years, and Dean Sampson is prioritizing taking the CU School of Medicine to the top 10 in the country.

We can do both. We will do both, and do both soon, because of the very people in this room and on our campus. We will do it because you aren't afraid to dream big – to do what has never been done before. You aren't daunted by the unknown – aren't slowed by "what ifs" but driven forward by them.

Your work is inspiring, and we look forward to telling your story far and wide with a new advertising campaign beginning in January. In preparation for it, our new advertising agency visited people at all levels, in all the organizations, across this campus. The overwhelming sentiment – what came through loud and undeniably clear from you – is that, at the CU Anschutz Medical Campus, you're only limited by what you can dream.

It's your dreams, your discoveries that have brought us to where we are – and your dreams and your discoveries that will take us to where we want to go.

If ever you need a reminder, it's evident in the care we provide here – in the lives transformed and the lives saved.

Above & Beyond in Patient Care

Every day, people like Doug Scanlon, his wife Kendra, and their three kids gain new hope in the face of illness and disease.

Doug was just 48 years old when he learned he had Stage 4 colon cancer that had spread to his liver. While he began a treatment plan at a community hospital, he was looking for options beyond the standard chemo and radiation regimen.

Unwilling to accept a prognosis of "control not cure" – with an estimate of 18-24 months to live – Doug sought out our experts at the University of Colorado Cancer Center, where the multidisciplinary team worked with him on a new path forward.

[*\[Doug Scanlon: A Story of Hope\]*](#)

Closing: A Place Where Dreams Live

We're honored to have the Scanlons here with us today, along with some of Doug's care team members. Let's give them a hand.

As we close this afternoon, we have one simple wish: We ask you to keep dreaming big – to keep your sights on what's next.

Because it's your ideas, your passion and your hard work that bring new horizons into view for people like Doug.

Together, I believe, we can make CU Anschutz a beacon of hope and a place where dreams come to life.

Thank you.

###