

MONTEZUMA COUNTY

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN

2026-2031



Our mission is to protect and improve the health of residents in our communities.

Introduction

The Montezuma County Public Health Department was established in 1976, and has been serving our Montezuma communities ever since. Our mission is to protect and improve the health of residents of our communities. We have run a wide array of programs over the years, including everything from nutrition education for parents to tobacco cessation support, to low cost immunizations, dental care, and much more. Our current programs and operations can be explored on our website at montezumacounty.org/publichealth/. Every program we offer is designed to meet the current needs of our community.

Montezuma County, located in the Four Corners region of southwest Colorado, covers 2,029 square miles that includes a mix of private, municipal, county, federal, and tribal lands. It is home to the Ute Mountain Ute Reservation, borders the Navajo Nation, and sits on the borders of Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. Once dependent on mining, the county's economy now focuses on agriculture, timber, and tourism. The county has three school districts serving the communities of Cortez, Mancos, and Dolores. The Montezuma County Public Health Department provides services to all residents.

Community Health Assessment and Community Health Improvement Planning

Under the 2008 Public Health Act, all local public health agencies are required to conduct a Community Health Assessment (CHA) and develop a Public Health Improvement Plan (PHIP) every five years. The recent Montezuma County CHA combined community input on lived experiences with analysis of disease rates and health behaviors using state and national data sources, including hospitals, providers, surveys, and coroners. The CHA provides health department staff, partners, stakeholders, and residents with a clear picture of local health and well-being—highlighting strengths, identifying gaps, and guiding opportunities to improve community health. The latest Montezuma County CHA is available at:

https://montezumacounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025_CHA_Montezuma.pdf.

This information, along with additional feedback and stakeholder engagement, was used to inform the development of this PHIP—the 5-year plan that the health department and its partners will advance in order to improve community conditions related to health, and in turn, improve overall community health.

This document outlines our Public Health Improvement Plan for improving the health and environment for the residents across Montezuma County in 2026 through 2031.

PHIP Process

After the CHA was completed, a stakeholder listening session was held with 14 community members in Montezuma County, primarily with lived experience and some professional experience, to inform the Public Health Improvement Plan (PHIP). The session shared highlights from the recent Community Health Assessment (CHA) and provided space for participants to discuss what is working well, challenges, gaps, and ideas for improving mental health and substance use supports. Through small-group discussions and guided activities, participants shared real-life experiences, hopes, and suggestions for solutions, emphasizing the need for accessible, coordinated, culturally appropriate, and compassionate services. Insights from this session directly guided PHIP strategies and priorities while fostering trust and connection between the community and public health staff.

Community members highlighted the need to reduce stigma, improve healthcare access—particularly for children and teens—and address the interconnected challenges of mental health,

substance use, and trauma. Key gaps include limited local treatment options, provider shortages and turnover, burnout, and challenges with service coordination. Substance use challenges include early exposure, family influence, and reliance on abstinence-based or faith-affiliated programs. Prevention priorities focused on school-based support, safe youth spaces, and shifting cultural norms around alcohol and cannabis use. Participants emphasized the Health Department’s role in strengthening infrastructure, fostering collaboration, supporting provider wellness, and sustaining education and resource-sharing initiatives. Proposed actions include establishing local residential treatment facilities, creating a centralized resource hub, expanding early intervention and harm-reduction programs, and developing safe, engaging community spaces for youth.

Together with the Board of Health, Montezuma County Health Department staff prioritized and streamlined PHIP goals to ensure feasibility, reduce duplication, and maximize impact through community partnerships and multi-solving. The resulting PHIP focuses on improving mental health, preventing substance use, and increasing food security and access.

Priority Goals, Areas, Objectives & Strategies

| Goal | Target Area | Objective | Strategies |
|--|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Goal 1: Reduce substance abuse and improve mental health in Montezuma County | Prevention & Early Intervention | Provide education to families on the risks of early exposure to substances and the importance of parental/guardian support and guidance around mental health and substance use | Communications and marketing campaign (social media, print flyers, movie theater ads, etc.) |
| | Cultural & Social Norms | Increase awareness of how social norms influence behavior, especially for children and youth, and promote healthy social norms | Partner with others in the community to (potentially plan and) promote healthy, safe local events and places/spaces Promote a youth-led platform (beginning at elementary age kids and up to young adults) to raise awareness, teach coping mechanisms, brain/body effects related to substance use, and peer pressure resistance skills. |

Priority Goals, Areas, Objectives & Strategies Continued

| Goal | Target Area | Objective | Strategies |
|--|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| Goal 1: Reduce substance abuse and improve mental health in Montezuma County | Cultural & Social Norms Continued | Provide community education on the interconnectedness of mental health, substance use, and trauma | Communications educational campaign (social media, print flyers, movie theater ads, etc.) |
| | Collaboration & Provider Support | Provide support for—and increase collaboration and communication among—local behavioral health peers, providers, mental/behavioral health professionals (e.g. Peers, counselors, therapists, substance use counselors, etc) | Support the workforce through coordination of an informal working group of stakeholders and create a regular space for networking and co-support among mental health and substance use prevention professionals Increase community knowledge and knowledge among mental health and substance use professionals of what resources do exist in the community; increase collaboration and streamline services to reduce duplication |

Priority Goals, Areas, Objectives & Strategies Continued

| Goal | Target Area | Objective | Strategies |
|--|--|--|---|
| Goal 2: Improve food security and access | Supporting local food resource providers and initiatives | Promote local food resources among current health department clients (e.g. WIC and NFP clients) to raise awareness | Attend local food security collaborative meetings to identify ways the health department might support Disseminate food-access services (e.g. summer feeding sites) and program information to WIC clients |
| | | Seek out funding opportunities (grants) to increase food access and food security | Research funding opportunities; apply for funding |

Conclusion and Progress Tracking

The Montezuma County Public Health Improvement Plan (PHIP) for 2026–2031 is intended to be a document that guides action, accountability, and continuous learning. To ensure transparency and progress, the Health Department will track implementation and outcomes annually and share an annual progress report that highlights key activities, accomplishments, challenges, and lessons learned. Findings and updates will be shared with community members, partners, stakeholders, and the Board of Health through accessible formats and communication channels. Ongoing stakeholder engagement will remain central to this work, with opportunities to gather feedback, strengthen partnerships, and align efforts as needed. As community conditions, resources, and needs evolve, the Health Department will adapt strategies and programming to remain relevant, effective, and community-centered—ensuring that this PHIP continues to support improved mental health, substance use prevention, and food security for all Montezuma County residents.