

2024–2028 Routt County

Public Health Improvement Plan





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Letter from the Director of Public Health

Routt County Public Health is pleased to present the 2024-2028 Public Health Improvement Plan. The effort in putting this report together was collaborative and was built on the foundation of the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) that was conducted in 2022 by Northwest Colorado Health and UHealth. The assessment conducted by Routt County Public Health was modeled after the Colorado Health Assessment and Planning System (CHAPS).

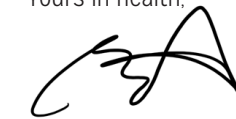
This collaborative effort was a true reflection of the dedication and value our Routt County community organizations has for its residents. The Community Health Assessment (CHA) is composed of secondary data as well as community input collected via key informant interviews. The input received during these discussions and the valuable insight gained have truly framed a picture of the current state of population health for Routt County. As a community, we are still recovering from the 2020 SARS-CoV-2 pandemic and we appreciate the resilience Routt County organizations showed us during this process.

This plan will help guide the future programming and actions of how Routt County Public Health can continue to advance our community in equity, improve health and safety and reduce disparities. The plan identifies the following areas of focus:

- Adult behavioral health
- Youth behavioral health
- Healthy housing
- Access to healthy and affordable food

Although many other health needs are important in Routt County, the above areas of focus are supported by data analysis and were identified by the community as issues they could relate to. This plan has goals and objectives to guide the work in these areas and will serve as the indicators for success. The community and our community partner organizations cannot be thanked enough for their time and input to this process. We will continue to engage these same and any future organizations to help achieve our Public Health outcomes and reduce health disparities. Together we can make a difference in making life in Routt County a healthy one.

Yours in health,



Roberta Smith, RN, MSPH, CIC, CIH
Director, Routt County Public Health





Introduction

The 2008 Colorado Public Health Act assures that all Coloradans have access to critical public health services. This Act requires state and local public health departments to conduct community health assessments, gauge system capacity, develop public health improvement plans, and engage their respective communities throughout the process every five years. Routine countywide assessment and planning results in identifying county-specific strengths, needs, and priorities to be addressed. This recurring process allows public health departments to continuously identify and adapt to their community's specific needs as these needs change over time.

Through the 2023 Community Health Assessment process, Routt County Public Health identified and prioritized four key health and environmental issues. Routt County Public Health, in collaboration with community partners, will utilize this Public Health Improvement Plan to guide efforts in addressing the priorities throughout the next five years. The intent of this plan is to continue to improve the health and well-being of communities in Routt County.



2019-2023 Public Health Improvement Plan Update

In December of 2019, the Moffat and Routt County Public Health departments and Boards of Health collaborated to develop the 2019-2023 Public Health Improvement Plan based on the 2019 UCHealth Yampa Valley Medical Center Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). This Plan identified two public health priorities and four regional capacity building strategies to collectively focus on, as a region, during the five-year period. Mental health and physical safety were the priority areas identified and the four strategies included in the plan were:

- Improve coordination and collaboration of health-related organizations within the Yampa Valley;
- Improve organizational communication and referral processes;
- Develop a central and accessible public health data site; and
- Improve community connectedness.

In 2020, just after the 2019-2023 Public Health Improvement Plan was released local, state, and federal agencies shifted their focus to the COVID-19 pandemic. Local public health departments, including Moffat and Routt County's were tasked with pandemic response as well as addressing the emerging public health needs resulting from the pandemic. Therefore, progress on the 2019-2023 plan was limited.

Nevertheless, the Moffat and Routt County Public Health departments worked to implement the strategies within the pandemic response. For example, the Yampa Valley Well-Being Consortium was created shortly before the 2019-2023 Regional Public Health Improvement Plan was released and was intended to be a partner in plan implementation alongside the Moffat and Routt County Public Health departments. This Consortium is now convened by The Health Partnership Serving Northwest Colorado and is a regional network of individuals, community service agencies, and health care organizations that work to implement strategies to make a difference in the health of the region including the health departments. Routt County Public Health improved coordination and collaboration of health-related organizations when Routt County's Office of Emergency Management and several health care organizations coordinated on ongoing COVID-19 contact tracing, testing, and vaccine administration. Additionally, Routt County hired a Public Information Officer which, was an action step in the 2019-2023 Public Health Improvement Plan. The previous plan also noted a key action step of hiring a data specialist. This was also achieved and the Routt County Public Health Department continues to employ a data specialist.

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- Improve coordination and collaboration of health-related organizations within the Yampa Valley;
- Improve organizational communication and referral processes;
- Develop a central and accessible public health data site; and
- Improve community connectedness.

Leadership and Acknowledgements

A Colorado Health Assessment and Planning System (CHAPS) planning team was convened by Routt County Public Health to inform and advise the implementation of the Community Health Assessment and the development of the 2024-2028 Public Health Improvement Plan. The CHAPS planning team included individuals from various sectors within the county who met monthly to provide their perspectives and insight. Partnerships are integral to the effectiveness and quality of the work, and we extend our sincere gratitude to these colleagues and organizations.

The CHAPS planning team consisted of the following members:

- Meghan Barrett, Former Community Impact Manager at The Health Partnership Serving Northwest Colorado
- Timothy Corrigan, Routt County Commissioner and Board of Health Representative
- Scott Cowman, Director of Routt County Environmental Health
- Arin Daigneau, Prevention Services Director at Northwest Colorado Health
- Tegan Ebbert, Community Development Director at The Town of Hayden
- Brian Harrington, Medical Director of Routt County Public Health
- Kelly Kissling, Director of Routt County Human Services
- Madysen Linsacum, Public Health Educator at Routt County Public Health
- Susan Madigan, Public Health Nurse at Routt County Public Health
- Beth Melton, Former Routt County Commissioner and Board of Health Representative
- Fritha Morrison, Epidemiologist at Routt County Public Health
- Nelly Navarro, Executive Director of Integrated Community
- Keaton Skudneski, Public Health Office Technician at Routt County Public Health
- Roberta Smith, Director of Routt County Public Health
- Erin Wallace, Former Community Impact Manager at The Health Partnership Serving Northwest Colorado
- Brittney Wilburn, Executive Director of The Health Partnership Serving Northwest Colorado

We would also like to express our gratitude to the Routt County Board of Health for their support and approval of the 2024-2028 Routt County Public Health Improvement Plan.

- Commissioner Timothy Corrigan, District I
- Commissioner Tim Redmond, District II
- Commissioner Sonja Macys, District III

In addition to the key partnerships listed above, Gina Febbraro, Principal Consultant and Founder of Summit Cove Consultants LLC was a vital asset in the development, planning, and implementation of the Community Health Assessment process and Public Health Improvement Plan. Gina's expertise, support, and detail-driven work were fundamental throughout this process and we extend a heartfelt appreciation to Summit Cove Consultants LLC.



Guiding Framework



Vision, Mission and Values

Routt County Public Health is firmly rooted in its vision, mission, and values. These guiding principles were considered through every aspect of the Community Health Assessment process and in the development of the Public Health Improvement Plan.

The **vision** of the Routt County Public Health department is that by working together, the Routt County community is safe, healthy, and vibrant.

The **mission** of Routt County Public Health is to promote and protect optimal community health through leadership, prevention, response, and partnerships. Strategies include:

- Creatively enhancing knowledge and cultivating behavior which contributes to a healthy community
- Providing services to prevent the spread of communicable diseases
- Planning and coordinating public health services in emergencies
- Assessing the community's health status and making continuous proactive improvement to assure that health needs are met in the most effective and efficient way
- Acting as an expert resource on communicable disease, prevention education, and population health
- Supporting policies that make the places we live, learn, work and play healthy, safe, and vibrant

The Routt County Public Health team was also careful to reflect the agency's values throughout the assessment and planning process. The values include:

- **Leadership:** We are a trusted community leader and partner.
- **Collaboration:** We believe we are stronger working together.
- **Equity:** We believe in developing an environment of trust, respect and inclusivity.
- **Impact:** We act as a catalyst to make lasting and positive impacts.
- **Integrity:** We believe in honoring commitments and providing evidence-based practices.
- **Adaptability:** We rise to new challenges and create innovative solutions.

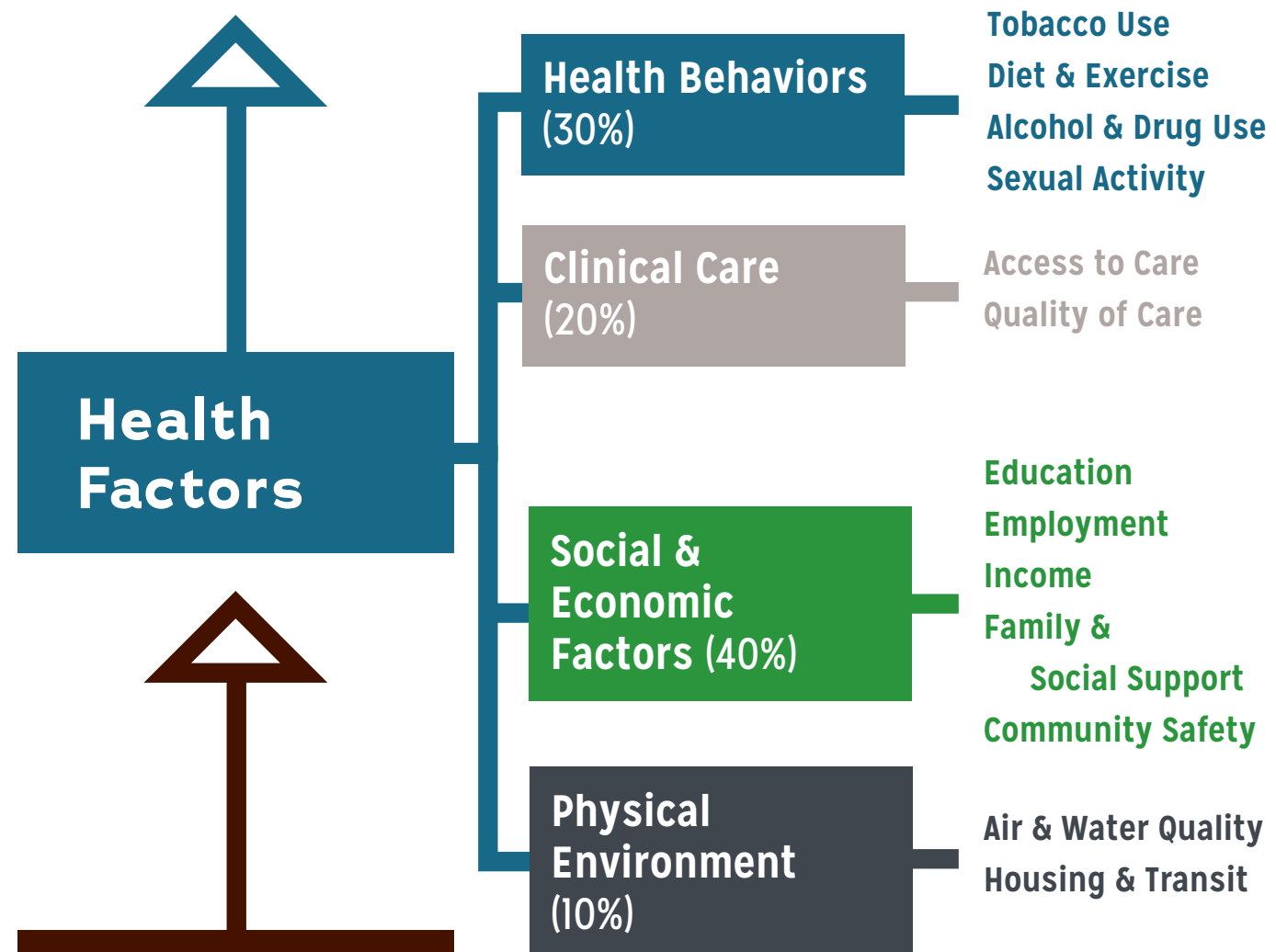
Social Determinants of Health²

As defined by Healthy People 2030, the social determinants of health are the conditions in environments where people live, learn, work, play, worship and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. We know that medical care contributes to only a piece of an individual's health with the social determinants of health also having a significant impact. Healthy People 2030 highlights five domains deemed social determinants of health. These domains include:

- Economic stability
- Education access and quality
- Health care access and quality
- Neighborhood and built environment; and
- Social and community context

Healthy People 2030 cites economic stability as one of the five important indicators of long-term health. Individuals with steady employment are less likely to live in poverty and more likely to lead healthy lives. This may be attributable to having the ability to afford nutritious foods, quality health care, safe housing and more. Neighborhoods and the built environment that individuals live in also impact health outcomes. Violence, unsafe air or

water, and other health risks resulting from an individual's environment can contribute to health outcomes. These are only a few examples cited in the Healthy People 2030 framework. Routt County Public Health aimed to explore the social determinants of health in Routt County when conducting the Community Health Assessment to better understand the health of our communities.



The County Health Rankings Model above depicts the social determinants of health and their potential impact on health outcomes.³

Methods

Quantitative Data Collection

Collecting, analyzing and reviewing data about health and environmental issues, and the social determinants of health is an essential activity in conducting a community health assessment. The Public Health team leveraged the data collection efforts put forth during the 2022 Yampa Valley Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) process. Robust quantitative data were gathered and used as a basis for review during the Colorado Health Assessment and Planning System (CHAPS) process. The CHNA included data from a community survey, community meetings to gather feedback from community members, and multiple secondary data sources.

In addition to the data gathered in the CHNA, Routt County Public Health independently gathered data from:

- The American Community Survey
- Salud America
- Colorado Environmental Public Health Tracking Database
- County Health Rankings and more

It is important to note that the quantitative data collected in the Community Health Assessment was, in some instances, limited by the small population size of Routt County resulting in suppressed or unavailable data. Additionally, numerous data sources were utilized in data collection throughout this process. Each data source may have limitations that include data aggregation, response limitations, data extrapolation, and the amount of time it takes to see real trends in data due to numerous factors. Therefore, qualitative data collection was important during this process to supplement and better understand the quantitative data collected.

Quantitative Data Review and Phase One Prioritization

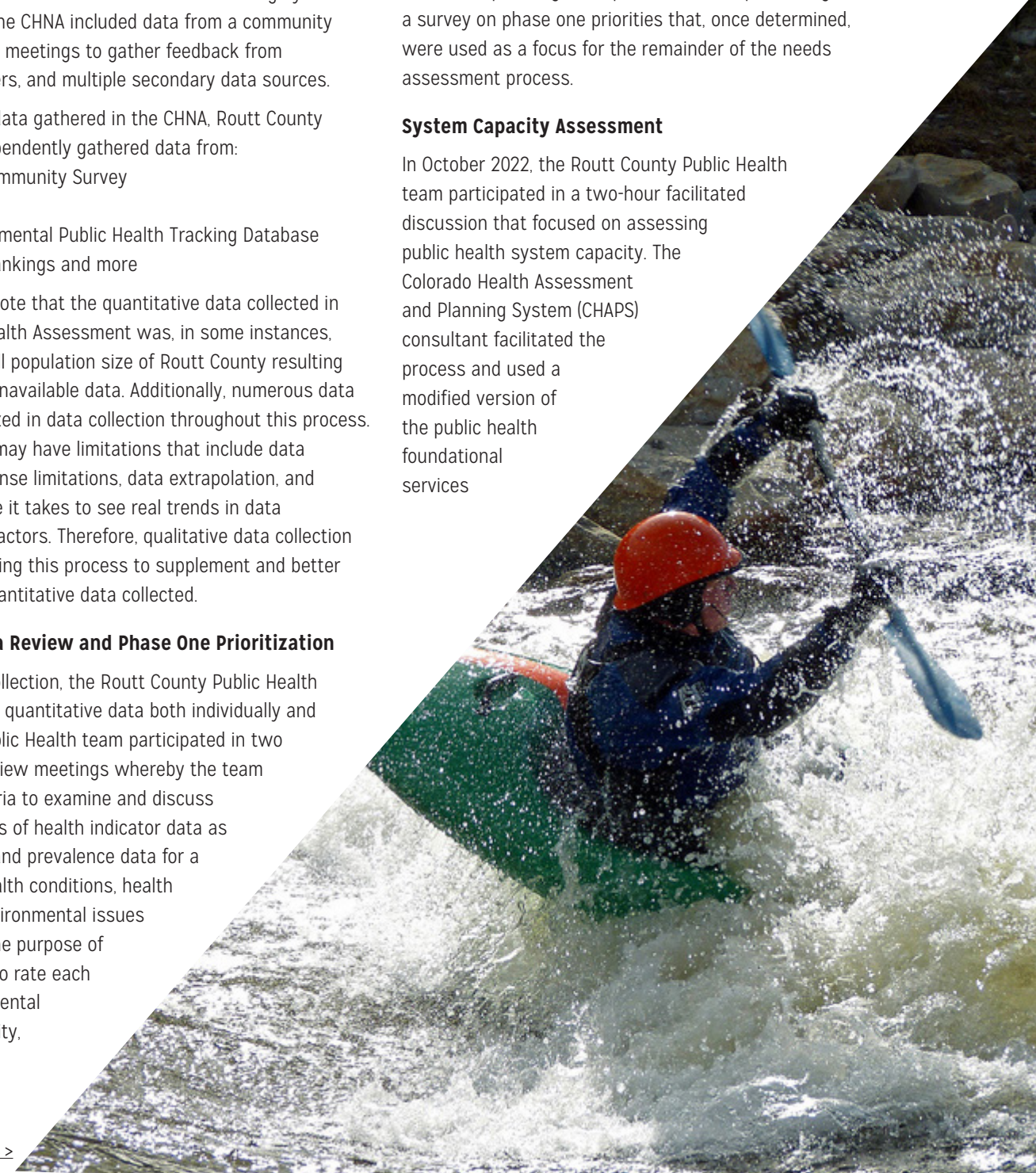
After initial data collection, the Routt County Public Health team reviewed the quantitative data both individually and as a team. The Public Health team participated in two facilitated data review meetings whereby the team used a set of criteria to examine and discuss social determinants of health indicator data as well as incidence and prevalence data for a wide variety of health conditions, health outcomes, and environmental issues in Routt County. The purpose of this process was to rate each health or environmental issue as high priority, medium priority, or

low priority. The Public Health team also identified data gaps and next steps for data collection. Collectively, the Public Health team invested more than 40 hours in reviewing Routt County public health, environmental, and social determinants of health data.

Following the Public Health team's thorough data review, they presented the process and results of the review to the Routt County CHAPS planning team for their consideration and evaluation. The CHAPS planning team participated in a facilitated discussion where they provided observations about the data and valuable context based on their experience and perspectives. Members also asked clarifying questions. Following the meeting, the CHAPS planning team provided their input through a survey on phase one priorities that, once determined, were used as a focus for the remainder of the needs assessment process.

System Capacity Assessment

In October 2022, the Routt County Public Health team participated in a two-hour facilitated discussion that focused on assessing public health system capacity. The Colorado Health Assessment and Planning System (CHAPS) consultant facilitated the process and used a modified version of the public health foundational services



assessment tool, developed by the Office of Planning, Partnerships, and Public Health Practice at the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, as a guide. Through this capacity assessment, the Public Health team explored Routt County Public Health's capacity to implement mandated and core public health services, reflected on the strengths and gaps in their capacity, and considered their potential role in addressing the phase one priorities. Financial resources, staffing, and current Public Health programs and activities were discussed and considered through the assessment process. The Routt County Environmental Health Director also contributed to the assessment in relation to potential environmental health priorities.

In November 2022, the Routt County CHAPS planning team participated in a community capacity assessment to identify and discuss current countywide efforts focused on the phase one priority issues. This assessment assisted Routt County Public Health in understanding current community programs and resources, avoiding duplication of services, and determining how to thoughtfully utilize resources when finalizing health and environmental priorities and creating the health department's Public Health Improvement Plan.

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data provides rich contextual information about the health and environmental data collected through a community health assessment. The Public Health team therefore conducted both key informant interviews and discussion groups with key collaborators throughout Routt County to gain greater insight into the phase one priority issues and to inform final prioritization for the Public Health Improvement Plan. Routt County Public Health conducted 12 key informant interviews and four discussion groups between November 2022 and February 2023 capturing perspectives and insight from 29 people. Key informant interviews and discussion groups were completed with representatives from the following sectors:

- Law enforcement
- Youth-serving agencies
- Health care providers
- Aging services representatives
- Veteran-serving agencies
- Local government
- Child care providers
- Local non-profits

Interviews were conducted throughout different geographic areas of the county including Steamboat Springs, Hayden and Oak Creek.

Key informant interview and discussion group data was themed, coded, and summarized. The Public Health team presented the results to the CHAPS planning team, and the results were used to inform final prioritization.

Final Prioritization

A proposed set of four priorities for the 2024-2028 Public Health Improvement Plan were presented to and approved by the CHAPS planning team in March 2023. Quantitative data, qualitative data, system capacity, and the planning team's input were all considered when finalizing priorities.

Ultimately, the following four priorities were selected for the 2024-2028 Public Health Improvement Plan:

- Adult behavioral health
- Youth behavioral health
- Healthy housing
- Access to healthy and affordable food

In addition to providing and ensuring the core public health services are delivered in Routt County, the Public Health team will focus additional efforts on and leverage partnerships within these areas over the next five years.

For more information about the Community Health Assessment findings, see [this summary](#) that includes quantitative data and other key takeaways.





Community Description

Routt County is a rural county located in the Rocky Mountains and the Northwest region of Colorado. Municipalities within Routt County include Steamboat Springs, Hayden, Oak Creek, and Yampa with additional unincorporated areas. Routt County is often recognized for its inherent beauty, serene mountain landscapes, and outdoor recreation opportunities. Steamboat Springs boasts Steamboat Ski Resort and is a hub for tourism year-round. Hayden, Oak Creek and Yampa are rural areas of the county that also provide a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. The county spans an estimated 2,362 square miles of land area and agricultural acreage accounts for 47% of the county's area.^{4,5}

Routt County is home to 24,829 people with an estimated one million visitors each year.^{4,6} Tourists travel to Routt County from throughout the United States and around the world.

Demographics

The median age of community members in Routt County is 41.5 years old, and 16.5% of the population is aged 65 years or older.⁴ Almost 86% of the population in Routt County identifies as non-Hispanic white.⁷ Nearly 6% of the population in Routt County speaks a language other than English at home.⁴ Poverty rates in Routt County are noted to be slightly lower than the state with 8.6% of the population living in poverty compared to 9.7% in Colorado.⁴ The median household income in Routt County is \$93,800.⁸

85.6%⁷

White alone, not Hispanic or Latino

8.9%

Hispanic or Latino

3.5%

Two or More Races, not Hispanic or Latino

0.6% Black or African American alone, not Hispanic or Latino

0.7% Asian alone, not Hispanic or Latino

0.4% Some Other Race alone, not Hispanic or Latino

0.3% American Indian and Alaska Native alone, not Hispanic or Latino

0.1% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone, not Hispanic or Latino

Employment

The unemployment rate in Routt County is 4.2%.⁹ Top employment industries include tourism, education, healthcare, and social assistance.⁴ In 2021, the tourism industry contributed 4,400 jobs and \$244 million in direct earnings for Routt County.⁹

Education

There are three school districts and two independent schools that provide students with kindergarten through 12th grade education in Routt County. Additionally, there is a local community college that provides post-secondary education. The high school completion rate in Routt County is 97% which is higher than the state of Colorado's 92%.⁸ School enrollment in Routt County is 72.6%, and 50.8% of the population possess a Bachelor's degree or higher.⁴

Access to Services and Supports

Routt County has a strong network of primary care providers serving the area. UCHealth Yampa Valley Medical Center, Northwest Colorado Health, and various privately owned medical clinics are located in Steamboat Springs. South Routt Medical Center is located in the town of Oak Creek. Solandt Medical Clinic is located in the town of Hayden and acts as a shared clinic space for various primary care providers to provide services throughout the week. Ten percent of Routt County's population under the age of 65 does not have health insurance.¹⁰ It is

important to note that assessing community members' access to services is complex. Factors such as insurance coverage limitations, lack of access to culturally appropriate care and proximity of services, to name a few, may all have an impact on one's ability to access various services and supports despite these services being perceived as available.

The ratio of the population to primary care providers in Routt County is 800:1. This ratio is much lower than the state's population to primary care provider ratio of 1,200:1. Access to mental health providers is slightly more challenging in Routt County with a population to provider ratio of 290:1 compared to 230:1 in Colorado. The population to provider ratio for dentists in Routt County is 930:1; much lower than that of Colorado at 1,180:1.⁸

Built Environment

Similar to many other Colorado counties, affordable housing is a challenge in Routt County. According to the 2023 County Health Rankings data, 15% of households in Routt County experience at least one of four of the following issues: overcrowding, high housing costs, lack of kitchen facilities, or lack of plumbing facilities.⁸ This same metric for the state of Colorado is 16%.⁹ Routt County's crime rate of 159 violent crimes per 100,000 people is lower than the state rate of 326 violent crimes per 100,000 people.⁸

The average commute time to work in Routt County is 19.5 minutes, and 69.6% of the population drives alone to work.⁴ Public transportation options within Routt County are limited to Steamboat Springs Transit. Steamboat Springs Transit has regional routes to and from Craig, in neighboring Moffat County. Steamboat Springs Transit also offers the Yellow Zone serving Steamboat Springs. A larger regional transportation service is also available with options to and from the Front Range.

County Strengths

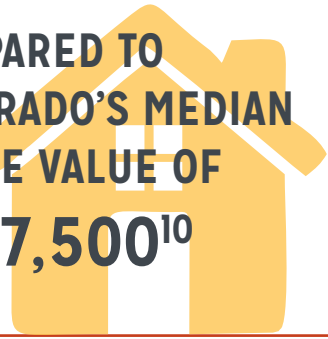
Numerous county strengths were noted when conducting key informant interviews and discussion groups throughout the qualitative data collection process. Interviewees identified countywide cohesiveness and collaboration, the availability of resources, and shared goals among community partners as strengths of the county. Interviewees also noted the propensity of Routt County community members to support ongoing efforts and offer assistance as needed in the event of a countywide crisis. Routt County was identified by many as a very generous and connected county.



THE MEDIAN VALUE OF OWNER-OCCUPIED HOUSING UNITS IN ROUTT COUNTY IS

\$570,600¹⁰

COMPARED TO COLORADO'S MEDIAN HOUSE VALUE OF \$397,500¹⁰





ADULT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Behavioral health is recognized at the local, state and national level as a pressing health issue that requires attention. The term behavioral health refers to both mental health and substance use disorders.¹¹ It is estimated that more than one in five Americans suffer from mental health conditions and that one in seven Americans aged 12 years and older have experienced substance use disorder.^{12,13} The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's 2024 Public Health Improvement Plan also prioritizes behavioral and mental health. The state plan aims to:¹⁴

- Improve access to mental and behavioral health care.
- Address mental health stressors by strengthening the social determinants of health.
- Expand evidence-based prevention strategies for health care systems.
- Increase prevention, intervention and post-intervention efforts for populations disproportionately impacted by numerous behavioral and mental health-related needs.

Similar to the state of Colorado, behavioral health concerns were identified in Routt County through the Community Health Assessment process. The average number of mentally unhealthy days reported by Routt County adults in the past 30 days (age-adjusted) was 4.4, similar to Colorado's 4.3 days.⁸ Based on 2018-2020 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data, 11% of adults in Routt County have ever been told they had depressive disorder compared to 17.1% in Colorado.¹⁵ The percentage of women in Routt County who experienced postpartum depression was higher than the state rate with Routt County recording 14% of women experiencing postpartum depression compared to 11.5% in Colorado in general.¹⁶ It is noted that wide confidence intervals are associated with less reliable estimates in respect to this data point.

Age-adjusted suicide rates per 100,000 people in 2016-2021 were 15.04 in Routt County and 21.37 in Colorado.¹⁶ In 2021 alone, the age-adjusted rate of suicide as cause of death was 29.7 in Routt County; higher than Colorado's rate of 22.5.¹⁶ Also in 2021, the age-adjusted rate of suicide by firearm was 24.86; double that of Colorado's 12.¹⁶ Based on suicide trend data, the number of suicides per year have been increasing since 2016.¹⁶

The percentage of adults who smoke cigarettes in Routt County is the same as in Colorado, both at 13%.⁸ However, the percentage of adults in Routt County who are considered heavy [alcohol] drinkers is almost double the state rate. In Routt County, 13.2% of adults are considered heavy alcohol drinkers compared to Colorado's 7.2%.¹⁶ Routt County's percentage of driving deaths with alcohol involvement is 58% which, is higher than Colorado's percentage of driving deaths with alcohol involvement of 34%.⁸ It is recommended however, that this metric be interpreted with caution as, again,

Priorities and Plans



a smaller population in Routt County can certainly contribute to significant changes in this value. Marijuana use in Routt County is also higher than use in Colorado as a whole. The percentage of adults who have used marijuana one or more days in the past 30 days in Routt County is 32.8% compared to Colorado's value of 18.3%.¹⁶

During key informant interviews and discussion groups hosted throughout the qualitative data collection process, interviewees consistently noted a perceived high prevalence of behavioral health concerns throughout the county. Community members noted that if an individual is not directly experiencing mental illness or substance use, it is likely that someone within their close circle is. Residents also felt that substance use is somewhat normalized within the county as a result of a local "party culture" and/or family members and peers normalizing substance use. Stigma surrounding mental health conditions was also noted frequently during key informant interviews and discussion groups. Stigma was identified as a barrier for some in relation to accessing mental healthcare services and for others, stigma impacted talking about mental health concerns with trusted peers. It was also noted that in many cases inadequate social determinants of health such as lack of stable, healthy housing and lack of economic stability play a role in both substance use and mental health. Substances are often relied on to cope with stresses and emotional struggles, and one's mental health can be impacted by those same factors.

Routt County Public Health recognizes its limited capacity and expertise to make an impact on behavioral health among adults in the county, and multiple partners throughout the county are already working on this priority. Therefore, in an

IN ROUTT COUNTY, 13.2% OF ADULTS ARE CONSIDERED HEAVY ALCOHOL DRINKERS COMPARED TO COLORADO'S 7.2%.¹⁶

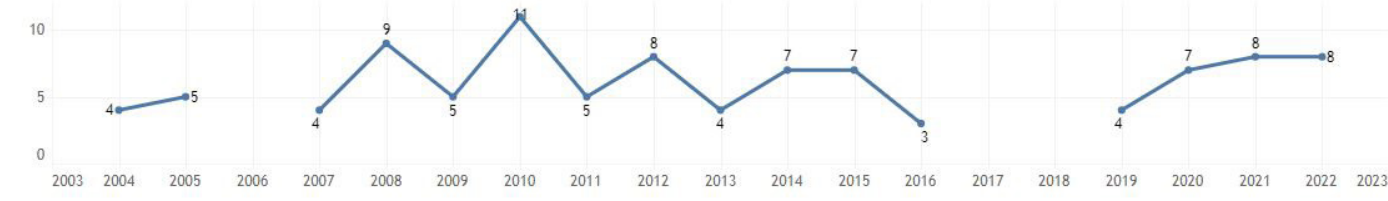
THE PERCENTAGE OF ADULTS WHO HAVE USED MARIJUANA ONE OR MORE DAYS IN THE PAST 30 DAYS IN ROUTT COUNTY IS 32.8% COMPARED TO COLORADO'S VALUE OF 18.3%.¹⁶

attempt to avoid the duplication of efforts and to optimally utilize resources, Routt County Public Health will elevate and support ongoing partners' efforts as outlined in the following pages. At the same time, Public Health will strive to expand its departmental capacity to develop and implement health education, community engagement, and systems building efforts that address behavioral health in the months and years to come.

Selected population for all charts on this page

Age: All, Sex: All, Ethnicity: 0, Race: 0, Marital status: All, Veteran status: All, Method: All methods, County: Routt

Number of suicides over time



*Counts of less than three are suppressed

**Rates/data on this page will differ slightly from Colorado Violent Death Reporting System data, due to the inclusion of out of state resident deaths



Note. This graph shows the number of suicide deaths for Routt County, CO from 2004-2022 and was taken from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's Colorado Health Indicators database. Data was accessed on August 28, 2023. <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/colorado-suicide-statistics>

ADULT BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

GOALS

- Improve the mental health and well-being of Routt County community members.
- Decrease the excessive use of substances including alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco among Routt County community members.



STRATEGIES

- Promote media messages that aim to destigmatize seeking help for substance use disorder (SUD), help community members get treatment, and provide education on the facts of SUD by elevating the work of the Solving SUD Together campaign in partnership with the Rural Alliance Addressing Substance Use Disorder-Colorado (RAS-Col).
- Utilize the behavioral health landscape analysis conducted by The Health Partnership Serving Northwest Colorado to understand the assets and gaps in behavioral health programs and services, and to help identify evidence-based prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies for the county in partnership with The Health Partnership Serving Northwest Colorado.
- Support and elevate the work of local organizations in countywide efforts related to behavioral health and partner on these efforts when appropriate.
- Develop public health readiness and infrastructure including staff expertise, funding, evidence-based program plans, and community partnerships to apply public health strategies in Routt County.
- Raise awareness about the importance of screening and early identification of mental health challenges through health education and community engagement.

MEASURES

- To stall or decrease the age-adjusted suicide rate per 100,000 population in 2028 with baseline age-adjusted suicide rate data from 2016-2021 of 15.04 per 100,000 population.
- To decrease the number of poor mental health days reported among people living in Routt County from 4.4 in 2020 to 3.5 in 2028.
- To decrease the number of adults who report excessive drinking (binge drinking or heavy drinking) in the past 30 days from 24% in 2020 to 21% in 2028.
- To increase the number of harm reduction kits distributed annually and countywide by Routt County partners from 134 in 2023 to 268 in 2028.



YOUTH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Similar to adult behavioral health, youth behavioral health in the state and the region is also an area of importance. In fact, youth mental health is such a concern throughout the state that Children’s Hospital Colorado has declared a youth mental health crisis. Children’s Hospital Colorado notes that the rates of anxiety and depression in Colorado youth have doubled during the pandemic years.¹⁷ They also note that suicide is currently a leading cause of death in youth aged 10 to 24 years old in Colorado.¹⁷

In the Northwest Colorado region, similar concerns were identified through secondary data collection. The 2021 Healthy Kids Colorado survey was used to explore data related to youth behavioral health. Healthy Kids Colorado is a survey administered in partnership with local school districts. In Routt County, 619 high school students completed the survey.¹⁸ Data is released by Health Statistics Regions (HSR) with Routt County included in HSR 11 with Moffat, Jackson, and Rio Blanco counties. Routt County Public Health was also able to obtain county-level Healthy Kids Colorado data to supplement the regional data.

Regional data reveals that approximately 58% of high school youth in HSR 11 reported the ability to most of the time or always talk to a friend about feelings during their life compared to 54.7% in Colorado.¹⁹ The percentage of high school students who agree or strongly agree that their stress level is manageable most days in HSR 11 was 56.6%, slightly higher than the state’s percentage of 53.2%.¹⁹

Data for Routt County demonstrated that 19% of high school youth in Routt County seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months.¹⁸ The result of this same metric for Colorado was 17.1%.¹⁹ Thirty-four percent of high school youth in the county felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row during the last 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities.¹⁸ This value for the state as a whole was 39.6% of youth.¹⁹ The percentage of high school youth who purposely hurt themselves without wanting to die in the past 12 months was 24.9% in Routt County and 20.3% in Colorado.^{18, 19} The percentage of high school students who reported having an adult to go to for help with a serious problem was approximately 75.5% in Routt County and 73.5% in the state.^{18, 19}

Youth substance use in Routt County was also examined. **In Routt County, 18.8% of high school students reported binge drinking (5+ [alcoholic] drinks within a couple of hours) on one or more of the last 30 days compared to 12.5% of Colorado’s youth in general.^{18,19} The percentage of**

high school students who reported having at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days was 35.3% in Routt County, compared to 23.6% in Colorado.^{18,19} Approximately 62.2% of high school students in Routt County reported thinking it is wrong or very wrong for someone the same age to drink alcohol regularly compared to 65.3% of Colorado’s youth.^{18, 19}

Vaping rates in Routt County were also slightly higher than Colorado. The percentage of high school students who have ever used an electronic vapor product in Routt County was 33.3% compared to the state’s percentage of 30.4%.^{18, 19} Approximately 18% of high school youth in Routt County reported using an electronic vapor product in the last 30 days compared to 16.1% in Colorado in general.^{18, 19} Fifty-three percent of high school students in Routt County felt it would be sort of easy or very easy to get electronic vapor products if they wanted.¹⁸

The percentage of high school youth in Routt County who have used marijuana one or more times during the past 30 days was 15.8% compared to Colorado’s rate of 13.3%.^{18, 19} Nearly 30% percent of high school students in Routt County reported using marijuana one or more times during their life, higher than Colorado’s 26.1%.^{18, 19} Forty-four percent of high school youth in Routt County reported they felt it would be sort of easy or very easy to get marijuana if they wanted.¹⁸ The percentage of high school youth who have ever smoked a cigarette, even one or two puffs, in their lifetime in the county was 21.8% compared to 20.8% in Colorado.^{18, 19}

During key informant interviews and discussion groups, many interviewees cited youth mental health as a pressing concern in the county. Several community members described how pervasive the concern is by sharing that even if youth have not experienced poor mental health or substance use disorders directly, they likely know someone within their close circle who has. When asked about the contributing factors for poor mental health in the county, interviewees suggested that social media contributes to the experience of youth. Finally, interviewees discussed limited access to youth mental health and substance use disorder services in the county.

Many strengths were also noted by community members when discussing youth behavioral health. These strengths included Routt County organizations and community members being supportive and collaborative. Additionally, it was noted that there are numerous agencies in Routt County passionate about serving the youth in our community; and, youth seem to be aware of the harms of substance use and the breadth of the issue.

Similar to adult behavioral health, Routt County Public Health will promote and support work of partner organizations in the county focused on youth behavioral health in recognition of

our limited departmental capacity. Routt County Public Health will lead efforts in policy development, health education, and community engagement.

YOUTH BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

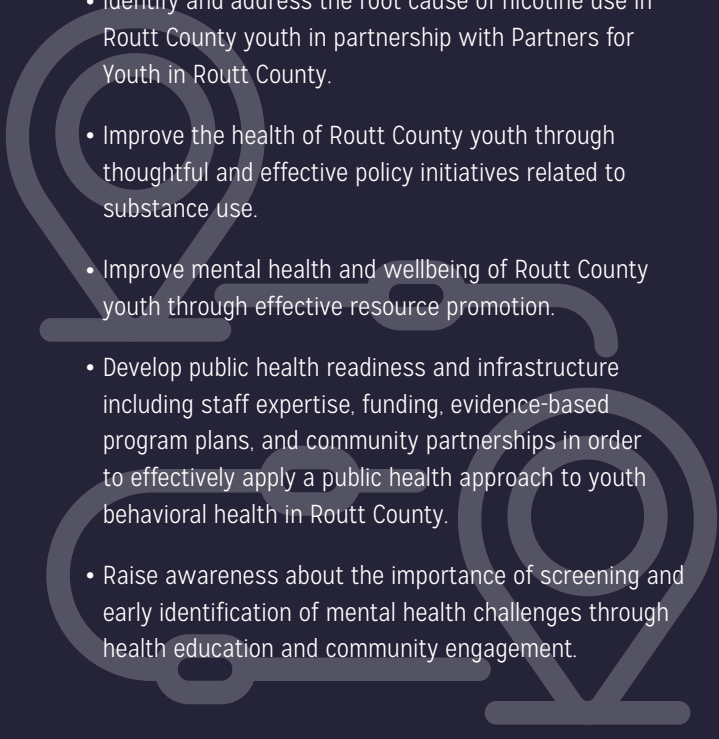
GOALS

- Improve mental health and well-being among youth in Routt County.
- Decrease tobacco, marijuana, and alcohol use among youth in Routt County.



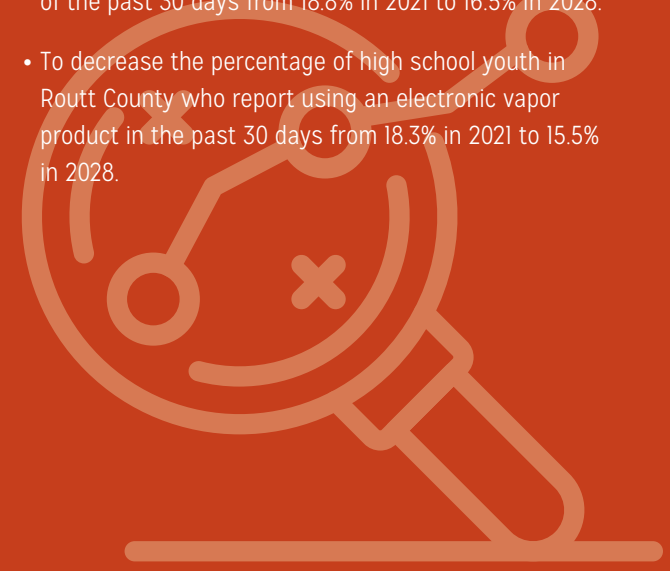
STRATEGIES

- Provide tobacco education while supporting and elevating youth voice in partnership with Partners for Youth in Routt County.
- Identify and address the root cause of nicotine use in Routt County youth in partnership with Partners for Youth in Routt County.
- Improve the health of Routt County youth through thoughtful and effective policy initiatives related to substance use.
- Improve mental health and wellbeing of Routt County youth through effective resource promotion.
- Develop public health readiness and infrastructure including staff expertise, funding, evidence-based program plans, and community partnerships in order to effectively apply a public health approach to youth behavioral health in Routt County.
- Raise awareness about the importance of screening and early identification of mental health challenges through health education and community engagement.



MEASURES

- To decrease the percentage of high school youth living in Routt County who felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row during the past 12 months that they stopped doing some usual activities from 34% in 2021 to 30.6% in 2028.
- To decrease the percentage of high school youth in Routt County who report binge drinking on one or more of the past 30 days from 18.8% in 2021 to 16.5% in 2028.
- To decrease the percentage of high school youth in Routt County who report using an electronic vapor product in the past 30 days from 18.3% in 2021 to 15.5% in 2028.



HEALTHY HOUSING

As with many Colorado communities, housing is a priority concern in Routt County. Several factors related to housing were identified and discussed during the Community Health Assessment process. The National Center for Healthy Housing defines the principles of a healthy home as dry, clean, pest-free, ventilated, safe, contaminant-free, maintained, thermally controlled, accessible and affordable.²⁰ Routt County Public Health and the planning team gathered and reviewed data on many of these dimensions including housing costs, housing conditions, and actions taken to promote healthy housing.

County Health Rankings notes that 16% of individuals living in Routt County are spending 50% or more of their household income on housing compared to 14% of individuals in Colorado as a whole.⁸ Spending 50% or more of one's household income on housing alone is considered a severe housing cost burden. Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies uses a home price-to-income ratio to determine housing affordability. In Routt County, the home price-to-income ratio was estimated to be 6.9-8.7 indicating that the median cost of purchasing a home in Routt County is 6.9-8.7 times that of the annual median household income for a person in the county.²¹ Data also demonstrates that in order for an individual who earns an average wage to afford a 2-bedroom home in Routt County, they would need to work approximately 66 hours per week.²² In comparison, an individual would need to work approximately 54 hours per week in Colorado in general.²²

From an environmental health perspective, both lead and radon were explored as part of healthy housing in Routt County. Lead is a naturally occurring metal that is found in the environment.²³ It is toxic to humans. Pregnant people and children under the age of three are at the highest risk of suffering from negative impacts of lead exposure.²³ The majority of Routt County falls within the moderate risk category for lead exposure with West Routt County falling within the high risk category based on data from the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.²⁴ One hundred percent of the Routt County census tracts have lower than average childhood lead testing rates.²⁵

Radon was considered for Routt County's Public Health Improvement Plan because it is the second leading cause of lung cancer after cigarette smoking in the United States.²⁶ Radon is a naturally occurring radioactive gas that can enter your house through cracks in the foundation. It can build up in any home or building and there is no known safe level.²⁶ The action limit set by the Environmental Protection Agency is 4 pCi/L.²⁶ Approximately 52% of radon tests administered in Routt County returned higher than the action limit. This is similar to

DATA ALSO DEMONSTRATES THAT IN ORDER FOR AN INDIVIDUAL WHO EARNS AN AVERAGE WAGE TO AFFORD A 2-BEDROOM HOME IN ROUTT COUNTY, THEY WOULD NEED TO WORK APPROXIMATELY 66 HOURS PER WEEK.²² IN COMPARISON, AN INDIVIDUAL WOULD NEED TO WORK APPROXIMATELY 54 HOURS PER WEEK IN COLORADO IN GENERAL.²²

Colorado's 48.3% of tests resulting above the radon action limit.²⁷ In 2018, the Routt County Regional Building Department adopted a requirement for new construction to include a passive radon-resistant system and prepare the home for post-construction radon mitigation if needed.²⁸

Qualitative data collection reinforced concerns identified in the quantitative data collection for Routt County. Many interviewees described how the lack of affordable housing contributes to the inability of employers to retain and/or hire staff. For those community members who do have housing, interviewees noted that many of them are spending much of their income on

APPROXIMATELY 52% OF RADON TESTS ADMINISTERED IN ROUTT COUNTY RETURNED HIGHER THAN THE ACTION LIMIT. THIS IS SIMILAR TO COLORADO'S 48.3% OF TESTS RESULTING ABOVE THE RADON ACTION LIMIT.²⁷

housing alone, which leaves little room for other necessities. Poor and unsafe housing conditions such as overcrowding and a lack of complete utilities were also mentioned by interviewees. Interviewees reported positive ongoing efforts in Routt County to increase access to affordable housing but did note the lack of immediate housing assistance.

As a result of this assessment process, Routt County Public Health will focus its Public Health Improvement Plan on a few key principles of healthy housing including safety, contaminant-

free, accessibility and affordability. Due to limited public health capacity, community partnerships and collaboration will be essential in pursuing healthy housing for all in Routt County.

Routt County Public Health will prioritize acting as a subject matter expert in planning processes that address accessibility and affordability to inform how housing impacts health and equity issues. Routt County Public Health will also lead efforts focused on education related to lead and radon in partnership with Routt County Environmental Health.

HEALTHY HOUSING

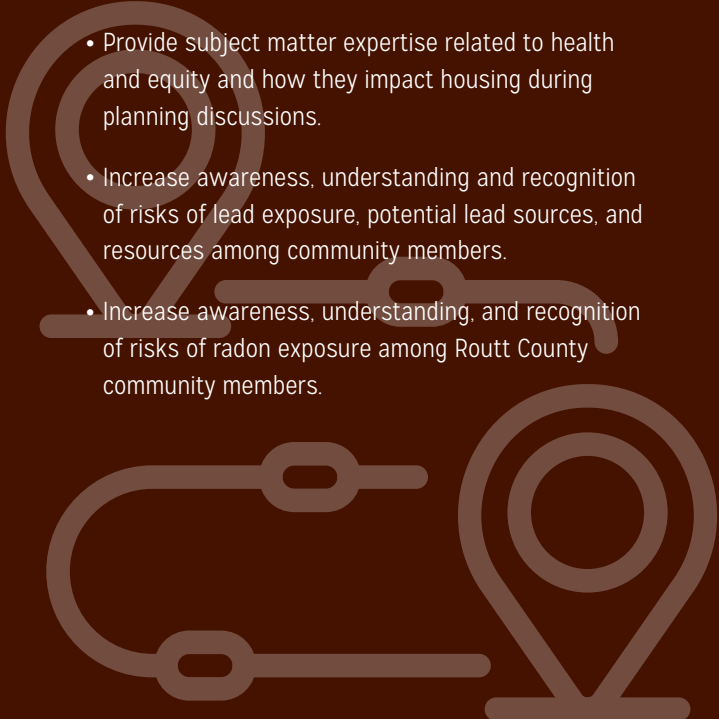
GOAL

- Promote healthy housing in Routt County to contribute to overall health and wellbeing of Routt County community members.



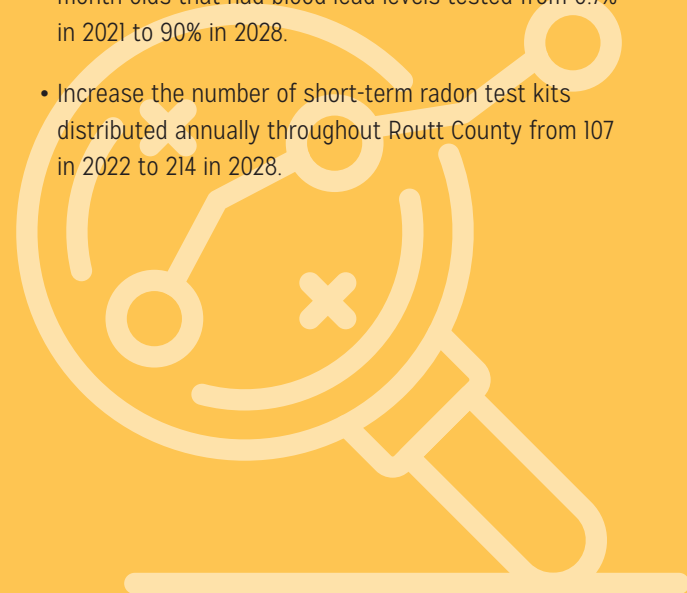
STRATEGIES

- Provide subject matter expertise related to health and equity and how they impact housing during planning discussions.
- Increase awareness, understanding and recognition of risks of lead exposure, potential lead sources, and resources among community members.
- Increase awareness, understanding, and recognition of risks of radon exposure among Routt County community members.



MEASURES

- Increase the percentage of Medicaid-eligible 12- and 24-month olds that had blood lead levels tested from 0.7% in 2021 to 90% in 2028.
- Increase the number of short-term radon test kits distributed annually throughout Routt County from 107 in 2022 to 214 in 2028.



ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND AFFORDABLE FOOD

Food insecurity refers to an individual's lack of access to sufficient or quality food to meet one's basic needs. It is associated with an increased risk of certain chronic diseases so can have a significant impact on individual and community health and longevity.^{29,30} The community identified the challenge and importance of having access to healthy and affordable food in Routt County. When individuals have access to healthy and affordable food, they have the ability to acquire fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein, dairy and/or dairy alternatives, and heart-healthy fats that they need to live healthy and active lifestyles. Access to healthy foods can be negatively affected by a rise in food costs, proximity to grocery stores, and/or lack of or limited food supply in certain geographic areas. Additionally, limitations in knowledge surrounding food preparation can affect access as well as a lack of complete kitchen facilities at home.

When comparing the Routt County data to Colorado data, the food access rates appeared to be fairly similar. In Routt County the percentage of the population who are low income and do not live close to a grocery store was 2% when compared to 5% of Colorado's population.⁸ Of note, living close to a grocery store in rural areas is defined as living less than 10 miles from a grocery

store. The percentage of the population lacking a reliable source of food was 10% in Routt County, slightly higher than Colorado's 8%.⁸ The percentage of high school students who sometimes, most of the time, or always went hungry in the past 30 days because of lack of food at home was 11.1% in Routt County and 12.4% in the state of Colorado in general.^{18,19} The cost of food in Routt County was a notable variable that was quite different from the state of Colorado. The average cost per meal is \$4.66 in Routt County which is 25% higher than the \$3.72 average cost per meal in Colorado.²⁹

Prioritization of access to healthy and affordable food was primarily driven by the qualitative data collection conducted through discussion groups and key informant interviews throughout Routt County. Community members noted inadequate access to healthy and affordable foods due to limited or lack of transportation in more rural areas of the county and also due to food costs. During interviews and discussion groups, efforts of multiple local agencies were recognized as strengths within this space. Routt County Public Health aims to support and elevate ongoing efforts within the county. In addition, Routt County Public Health plans to explore this priority in further detail to better understand the root causes of inadequate access to healthy and affordable food and to identify potential approaches to address the issue in Routt County.

THE AVERAGE COST PER MEAL IS
\$4.66 IN ROUTT COUNTY
 WHICH IS **25% HIGHER**
 THAN THE **\$3.72** AVERAGE COST
 PER MEAL IN COLORADO.²⁹

ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND AFFORDABLE FOOD

GOALS

- Improve access to healthy and affordable food for all people living in Routt County.



STRATEGIES

- Establish and implement an evidence-based cooking curriculum throughout Routt County.
- Increase awareness of healthy and affordable food options for those living in Routt County.
- Address county wide gaps in access to healthy and affordable food.

MEASURES

- Decrease the percentage of high school students in Routt County who sometimes, most of the time, or always went hungry in the last 30 days because of lack of food at home from 11.1% in 2021 to 9.7% by 2028.
- Offer one evidence-based cooking curriculum in Routt County annually.



Conclusion

The intention of this plan is to improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities living within Routt County. In addition to providing the core public health services, Routt County Public Health will utilize this Public Health Improvement Plan to guide additional efforts related to behavioral health, healthy housing, and access to healthy and affordable food during the next five years. Partnerships and collaboration will be integral in achieving the countywide health goals set forth. Fortunately, important work is already being implemented

throughout the county by numerous local organizations. Therefore, Routt County Public Health will work to support and highlight community partners' efforts within each of the priority areas while leading additional efforts that rely on a public health approach such as prevention, population health and policy. Routt County Public Health will also monitor and evaluate Public Health Improvement Plan efforts, as capacity and resources allow, and aim to make an impact with this community-wide effort in the months and years to come.



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2024–2028
Routt County
Public Health
Improvement Plan

