

MONTEZUMA COUNTY COLORADO

2025 Community Health Assessment



Figure 1: Computer Generated Image of Montezuma County Landscape

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A NOTE ON ACCESSIBILITY

We are committed to ensuring accessibility for all individuals, and this document has been formatted with screen readers in mind. If you or someone you know needs assistance accessing this document or requires it in an alternative format, please contact Health Planner Katy Maxwell at 970-564-4785 or kmaxwell@co.montezuma.co.us.

Why a Health Assessment?

In Colorado, local public health agencies do a community health assessment, or CHA, every five years. Why? First, because it is required by the 2008 Public Health Act. Second, because it helps us serve our communities more effectively. As times change, so do the needs of our community. The health assessment process gathers input from community members to pinpoint areas of need based on their life experiences. We also review data on disease rates and behaviors from state and national databases that get their information from sources like hospitals, doctors, and coroners.

We've created this document to share our most recent findings. It is not a complete overview of every health issue, but a summary of the main topics identified during the CHA. It's designed to be a useful and easily referenced resource for community members, partner organizations, local leaders, or anyone who may be interested. This is part of an ongoing community conversation, and we aim to share the information you give us back with you.

What happens after the CHA? We, along with our partners, will use the results to create a 5-year Public Health Improvement Plan, or PHIP, so we can address the needs you identified. You can learn more about the PHIP in the Next Steps section on page 6.

ABOUT MONTEZUMA COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH

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, which is why the community health assessment is so important.

FIRST, A BIG THANK YOU!

The community health survey was a true team effort. While led by the Public Health Planner and supported by the entire Public Health Department, the survey's design and implementation were guided by an Advisory Committee of community partners with a broad understanding of local health needs. We deeply appreciate their time and expertise.

We also want to thank the many community partners who helped by hosting surveys and drop boxes at their locations, or by posting flyers with the QR code for easy access. We hope you all in turn find this information useful.

The Survey

We mentioned that the community health assessment process involves getting information from local residents on their life experiences, and from state and national health databases. Our main source of information is the community survey we conducted across Montezuma County in 2024, which we'll refer to as our **local survey** throughout this document.

SURVEY FRAMEWORK

A person's health is influenced by many factors throughout their life. Public health experts use the Social Determinants of Health model to understand how social, economic, and environmental factors impact health. These include access to education, safe housing, good jobs, and strong social connections. Studies show that 80% of health outcomes are influenced by these factors, rather than medical care [11]. Our CHA advisory committee used this model to focus the survey on six key areas:

- Health outcomes and behaviors
- Healthcare access and quality
- Neighborhood and built environment
- Social and community connections
- Economic stability
- Community strengths

HOW WE COLLECTED INFORMATION

The survey was open from August to October 2024, and participants could fill it out on paper or online using a QR code. We offered it in English and Spanish and shared it at over 75 locations, including libraries, clinics, restaurants, churches, and other local businesses. Flyers with QR codes were posted in public spaces and online. We received 800 responses, matching the number from our 2017 survey. We worked to reach all parts of our community, especially populations that can be underrepresented in surveys including men, Spanish-speakers, and local tribal members, ensuring good representation from subsets of the community.

In addition to the survey, we gathered secondary data, like disease rates, from state and national databases with the support of a state epidemiologist. This data helped support the survey results and give a clearer picture of our community's health, which will be covered on page 3.

OVERVIEW OF MONTEZUMA COUNTY

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.

As of April 1, 2020, Montezuma County had a population of 25,849, with an estimated population of 26,841 by 2024 [9]. The county has a diverse population: 81.6% White, 13.6% Native American, and 12.7% Hispanic or Latino [9].

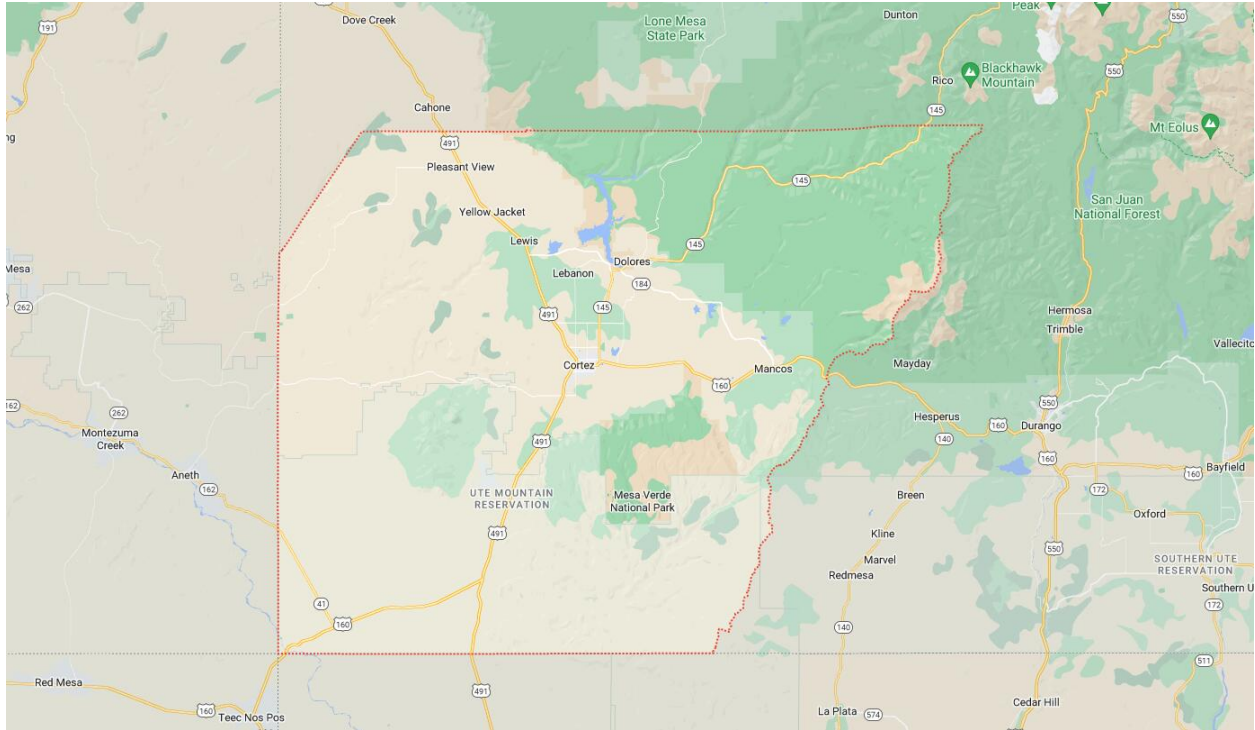


Figure 2. Map of Montezuma County, Colorado, showing county boundaries and key geographic features. [10]

Survey Results

Now for the fun part! Here are top 10 findings from the local survey:

- **84%** of Montezuma County survey respondents said **lower cost of food** is one of the greatest needs in the community related to food access
- **69%** said **lack of affordable quality housing** is a major concern
- **68%** identified **substance use (both illegal + legal)** as a top health issue
- **65%** said **mental health** is one of the top 3 health issues most important to them. This was the number one response for that question
- **63%** reported using **alcohol** in the last year

- **54%** identified **neighborhood safety** as a major concern
- **53%** said **child abuse and neglect prevention** is a top social issue
- **49%** said **no appointment being available or it taking too long** is what has prevented them from receiving healthcare or mental healthcare
- **46%** said **cost of food** is a barrier to eating healthy balanced meals
- **42%** said accessing healthcare in the community was **not too difficult**

LOOKING AT RELATED STATE AND NATIONAL DATA

800 local community members responded to our survey, but what can other data sources tell us? This section compares different data sources, but these comparisons are not statistical in nature. Instead, they highlight trends that help us understand our community’s health. Since local, state, and national data is collected in different ways, some sources have more recent data than others —sometimes it’s from 2021, sometimes it’s from 2024. We used the most relevant and up-to-date sources we could to provide a clearer picture of health in Montezuma County. This is not a complete review of all available data, but it focuses on key areas. You can find links to more detailed data dashboards at the end of this document.

Mental Health

In our previous assessment, Mental Health and Substance Use were grouped under Behavioral Health. These issues are closely connected, and many prevention strategies that address one also impact the other. For this report, we have separated them to provide clearer information.

In our local survey, mental health was ranked as the top concern out of 13 issues listed. The Colorado Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is a yearly statewide telephone survey. In 2023, it found that **20% of Montezuma County adults** reported experiencing poor mental health for more than 14 days in the past month [3]. The state average for the same measure was 16%.

From 2020 to 2023, Montezuma County had an age-adjusted suicide rate of **39 suicide deaths** per 100,000 people, which is nearly **double** the state rate of 22 [2]. These numbers support local survey responses, showing that mental health is a significant community issue.

Substance Use

In our survey, **44% of respondents** said illegal substance use was a major community concern, while **24%** said legal substance use (such as alcohol and tobacco) was a concern. That means **68%** of respondents felt substance use, in some form, was a top issue.

When asked about their own habits, **63% of local survey respondents** reported using alcohol in the past year. The state’s Substance Use Dashboard shows that **52% of Montezuma County adults** reported drinking alcohol in the past 30 days [4], which is a similar pattern.

From 2019 to 2021, **30% of fatal crashes** in Montezuma County involved a driver or motorcycle operator with a blood alcohol level of .08 or higher [5]. The county's death rate from alcohol-related liver disease from 2020 to 2023 was **3.6 times the state average** (55.15 per 100,000 in Montezuma County vs. 15.39 per 100,000 for the state) [5].

In our local survey, **33%** of respondents reported using cannabis in the past year, and **25%** reported using tobacco. The state's BRFSS survey found that **19%** of Montezuma County adults used tobacco in 2023, which is 9 percentage points higher than the state average [3].

Housing Costs and Basic Needs

69% of local survey respondents said a lack of affordable, quality housing is a major concern. For context, a national research initiative shows that **11% of Montezuma County households in 2022 lived in poverty**, meaning they struggled to afford basic needs [6]. Another **35% of households** earned more than the Federal Poverty Level but still didn't make enough to cover the county's cost of living [6]. As of 2023, **22%** of Montezuma County children live in poverty according to National County Health Rankings, which is **double** the state average [1].

Health Care Access

Our local survey results on healthcare access were mixed. While **49%** of respondents said they struggled to get care due to long wait times or a lack of available appointments, **42%** said that accessing care was not too difficult.

A shortage of healthcare and mental health providers makes it harder for people to get appointments. In 2021, County Health Rankings reports that Montezuma County had one primary care physician for every 970 people, which is better than the national average of 1,330 people per doctor. However, the county reportedly had only one mental health provider for every 420 people, compared to the national average of 300 per provider, potentially making mental health care more difficult to access [1].

The number of dentists in Montezuma County was estimated to be one for every 1,470 residents, slightly worse than the national average of 1,360 per dentist [1]. In our local survey, **26%** of respondents identified dental problems as a top concern.

Food Costs

A notable **84%** of local survey respondents identified lowering food costs as one of the greatest needs in the community, which was the highest percentage response to any question in the survey. Additionally, **46%** of respondents said the cost of food was a barrier to eating healthy, balanced meals. In the 2023 Colorado Healthy Kids survey, **13.7%** of high school students in our region reported that they sometimes, most of the time, or always went hungry in the past 30 days due to a lack of food at home [7]. Feeding America.org, which estimates food security rates by analyzing data from the USDA, Census

Bureau, and other national sources, estimated that **18.2%** of Montezuma County children were food insecure in 2022 [8].

Years of Life Lost

Lastly, Years of Potential Life Lost (YPLL) is a measure that looks at how many years of life are lost when people die before an expected age, like 75. This can help us understand the health challenges a community faces.

According to Colorado Vital Statistics, from 2021 to 2023, the top causes of early death in Montezuma County were:

1. Unintentional injuries (such as car accidents and falls)
2. Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis
3. Suicide



Figure 3. Treemap of Leading Cause of Potential Life Lost (YPLL; per 100,000 population) 2021-2023 [5] Bigger sections and darker shades represent higher values.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Now that we have a clearer picture of the current state of community health, the next step is to develop our 5-year Public Health Improvement Plan (PHIP), a process we will be working on throughout 2025 in partnership with multiple community organizations. Public health is shaped by collaboration across many sectors, and we will rely on these partnerships to guide and implement the PHIP. Once the PHIP is ready, we will share it with the community so you can see how we’re using the survey results to shape our vision for better health. The final step will be to implement the plan and monitor our progress over the next five years.

Further Information

For updates on the PHIP and other Health Department communications, check out the County Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/MontezumaCountyColorado>) or website (montezumacounty.org).

We also encourage you to look at the helpful resources listed at the end of this document. Many are interactive and let you explore specific data. You can spend a lot of time exploring them – data nerds you’ve been warned!

If you have any questions about the community survey or Health Department programs, please contact us at 970-565-3056 or visit us at 106 W. North St. in Cortez during business hours.

This report was compiled by Public Health Planner Katy Maxwell, who wants to thank State Epidemiologist Alison-Grace Bui, State Health Planner Kelsey Robinson, and other rural health planners across Colorado for their guidance and support in its creation.

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Some portions of this document were refined with assistance from OpenAI's ChatGPT to enhance clarity, readability, and ensure the language is accessible at an 8th-grade reading level.