



Moffat County

COLORADO'S GREAT NORTHWEST

EST. 1911

2024 - 2029

**MOFFAT COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH
IMPROVEMENT PLAN**



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Executive Summary

Moffat County is the Elk Hunting Capital of the World, and for many, it represents what the west is all about, hunting, hiking, skiing and camping. It is home for wide vistas and rugged individuals. Recently it has also become home for more than its share of victims of substance use disorder, suicides and other behavioral health issues. The department's mission statement acknowledges some of those issues as "unique obstacles in Colorado's Great Northwest," and has pledged to focus on those as interconnected and crucially important to promoting and improving the health, wellbeing, safety and opportunity for its residents. This plan recognizes the challenges the department faces and outlines strategies to meet them head-on.

Acknowledgements

The Moffat County Public Health Department wishes to acknowledge and thank a number of stakeholders who agreed to support the department's planning process; **Kari Ladrow**, former director of the department, who has graciously provided encouragement and guidance to her successors, **Lauren Bryan**, Infection Control Nurse at UCHHealth - Yampa Valley Medical Center, **Kyle Miller**, Chief Operating Officer, Memorial Regional Health, **Meghan Francone**, executive director, Memorial Regional Health and **Jamie Fraipont-Daszkiewicz**, Trauma, Crisis and Victim Advocate, Memorial Regional Health, and **Kelsey Robinson**, Public Health Planner, Office of Public Health Practice, Planning, & Local Partnerships, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment.

Their support and counsel was priceless!

Introduction

The 2024-2029 Public Health Improvement Plan (PHIP) for Moffat County is a guide for public health and its partners to improve the health and wellbeing of the county's residents and visitors.

This plan is a strategic, living, document designed to address public health and environmental health issues and to efficiently carry out core public health services and capabilities.

The PHIP fulfills a keystone requirement of the Colorado Public Health Act, Colorado Revised Statutes Section 25-1-501 through Section 25-1-520 last revised in December of 2021.

The act requires:

- The use of assessments to determine the health status of communities and to identify system-wide capacity issues,
- Development of five-year state and local public health improvement plans that are based on assessment results, and
- Engagement of local communities in health improvement efforts

The overarching goal of these efforts is to increase the availability and quality of public health services and ultimately improve health outcomes. This plan addresses that goal, by:

- Reviewing and analyzing data about health status and risk factors in the community;
- Assessing the capacity and performance of the county's public health system;
- Identifying goals and strategies for improving the health of the community;
- Describing how representatives of the county developed and expect implement the plan;
- Addressing how the county public health department coordinates with the state department in the comprehensive, statewide public health improvement plan;
- Identifying financial resources available to meet identified public health needs and to meet requirements for the provision of core public health services; and
- Remaining consistent with the statewide public health improvement plan.

The PHIP includes strategy action plans based on prioritized health issues from key leader input and the 2022 Community Health Needs Assessment prepared by the Health Partnership for the Yampa Valley community.



County Profile

Moffat County is a rural county in the northwest corner of Colorado, which includes 4,751 square miles of which all except 7.6 miles is land, making it the second largest county in the state. The 2023 population of 13,142 positions it as one of the least dense counties, with only three people per square mile. Per capita income is \$18,540, significantly less than neighboring Routt County at \$28,792, Sweetwater County, WY at \$30,961, Carbon County, WY at \$26,122 and Daggett County, UT at \$22,485; on par with Rio Blanco County at 17,344; but greater than Uintah County, UT at \$13,571.

Economic Summary

As was reported by Dr. Nathan Perry, Associate Professor of Economics at the Colorado Mesa University's Davis School of Business in his semi-annual economic report covering the third quarter of 2022:

- The Moffat County labor market continued its horizontal trend, averaging 6,974 jobs in Q2 2022 compared to 6,929 in Q2 of 2021. Despite no real changes in employment, unemployment numbers have fallen, from 372 to 207 in the same time period.
- Most industries in Moffat have fully recovered from the 2020 recession. However, arts, entertainment, and recreation, as well as oil, gas, and mining continue to lag down 47% and 18%, respectively.
- Moffat County sales and use taxes increased 3.5% from the same time last year, while Craig's sales/use taxes were up by 10.3%.



Mining in the region makes up a very large portion of GDP and wages. Total coal production was up 1.9%, and coal jobs were up 4.8% from an average of 549 through June of 2021 to 572 through June of 2022. Foidel Creek Mine saw an increase in mining jobs.

As was reported by the Associated Press in early 2022. Moffat County is made up of millions of acres of public lands, and its mineral deposits of high-volatility and low-sulfur coal brought the industry to the community and sustained families for decades.

But there is a possibility that will be changing over the coming years. The owners of the Craig Station coal-fired 1,285-megawatt, three-unit electric-generating plant have said they are considering plans to close the facility's three units over the next eight years. Such a move could adversely affect the county's tax income and limit resources for services such as healthcare, public health, fire departments, infrastructure and upkeep for neighborhoods and roadways, although county leaders have begun considering other steps to mitigate the negative effects.

Additionally, the population of the county has been relatively static, and the potential loss of high-paying mining and electricity-generating jobs may exacerbate the loss of residents to other counties, further suppressing Moffat County's per capita income.

As was pointed out by one stakeholder who was interviewed, this potential loss of jobs is a gradual one, and not at a drastic rate, allowing for Moffat County to better prepare for the losses.

Tourism has recently shown an uptick in the region, and the county's position as a leading elk-hunting venue has led to additional outdoor activities as the nation recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Leeds Business Confidence Index, which measures business confidence in Colorado, continues to fall from its Q3 2021 peak, indicating that businesses are more pessimistic about the economy and their prospects. The index is primarily being pulled down by poor expectations for the national economy.

Most standard of living and growth data is released in the winter months, but population data has been released, and showed that Moffat County slightly lost population from 2020, falling from 13,267 to 13,185.



Public Health Department Background

The past five years have been a time of growth and change for Moffat County Public Health. In April of 2019 the program, which had been housed at Northwest Colorado Health became a department of the county and joined with neighboring Routt County to create a partnership, with Kari Ladrow serving as executive director and Dr. Brian Harrington serving as Medical Director.

One year later, in July of 2020, the two county departments separated into individual departments, and Ms. Ladrow continued as executive director of the new independent Moffat County Public Health, with registered nurse Olivia Scheele (hired in 2019). In August of 2020, Sarah “Becky” Copeland RN, BSN, accepted a position with Moffat County Public Health, rounding off the team of three.

In the Summer of 2021, Dr. Harrington resigned as the Medical Director and was replaced by Dr. Allen Reishus as volunteer Medical Director. Also, that year two administrative assistants were engaged, but neither remained on the job for more than a few months. At the end of the year Olivia Scheele resigned her position there.

In March of 2022 Registered Nurse Selene Cooper and administrative assistant Amanda Pipher joined the department.

August of 2022 Dr. Rieshus resigned as Medical Director, and Dr. Kevin Fitzgerald from Mesa County accepted the position and Medical Director for both counties and in January of 2023 Ms. Ladrow resigned and was replaced by Sarah “Becky” Copeland as Executive Director, creating a three-person full-time staff, with Ms. Pipher, Ms. Cooper, Mrs. Copeland and the remote Medical Director. The history of staff turnover and lack of staff experience were noted as weaknesses in the department’s SWOT analysis, but the ability to share a Medical Director with Mesa County was seen as a strength.

Another strength is the staff’s willingness and ability to embrace flexibility in their service as was exemplified recently when the county’s first recent case of Tuberculosis was diagnosed. Staffers had never

experienced it, since such cases were normally handled by the state and are routinely found more in urban jurisdictions. By shifting work schedules to provide seven day a week coverage, the staff was able to meet the patient’s needs and expand their knowledge. Tuberculosis is not common in rural communities such as Moffat County, and staff members recognized there was an opportunity to use what they learned and share it with other rural departments, providing a step-by-step guide for them in case they encounter a case of TB in their communities.

This five-year plan envisions continued growth of services to the people of Moffat County while the department continues to benefit from the ability to share the Medical Director

The department has historically been a valuable partner in the community, playing key roles in a number of programs to support the residents there including more than a dozen services offered at no cost. (These range from COVID-19 tests and vaccinations, first aid kits, youth bike helmets, gun trigger locks and pistol lockboxes and mail in STI testing kids.) It enjoys an excellent reputation with stakeholders interviewed as part of this planning process. The department has adopted an impressive and forward-looking mission statement:

“Moffat County Public Health addresses unique obstacles in Colorado’s Great Northwest, through the promotion and improvement of the health, wellbeing, safety and opportunity for every resident.”

Department staff has enthusiastically embraced the planning process and has demonstrated a commitment to seeking out ways the department can overcome any weaknesses and defend against threats it has identified as part of its SWOT analysis detailed below.



Foundational Capabilities & Functions and Foundational Services & Functions

Working with Bio-Defense Network, the staff reviewed the seven public health foundational capabilities and functions and five foundational services and functions recognized by the state of Colorado and identified two capabilities:

Partnerships and Health Equity and the Social Determinants of Health, and two services: **Maternal, Child, Adolescent, and Family Health and Access to and Linkage with Health Care** where there were existing strengths. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, each was given a priority of 5.

The State of Colorado recognizes the specific elements of the two capabilities and two services upon which the county will focus:



Partnerships:

Colorado's governmental public health system will create, convene, and support strategic partnerships, engage community members and cross-sectoral partners, agencies, and organizations to achieve public health goals."



Health Equity and the Social Determinants of Health:

"Colorado's governmental public health system will intentionally focus on improving systems and institutions that create or perpetuate socioeconomic disadvantage, social exclusion, racism, historical injustice, or other forms of oppression so that all people and communities in Colorado can achieve the highest level of health possible."

"Governmental public health will have the requisite skills, competencies, and capacities to play an essential role in creating comprehensive strategies needed to address health inequities, and social and environmental determinants of health."



Maternal, Child, Adolescent and Family Health:

"Colorado's governmental public health system will develop, implement and evaluate state-wide, regional and local strategies related to maternal, child, adolescent and family health to increase health and wellbeing, reduce adverse health outcomes and advance health equity across the life course."

"Strategies may include but are not limited to identifying and providing information, promoting evidence-informed and multi-generational approaches, identifying community assets, advocating for needed initiatives, and convening partners."



Access to and Linkage with Health Care:

"All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care."

"All Coloradans should be connected with and have access to needed personal health care services that include primary care, maternal and child health care, oral health care, specialty care, and mental health care."

The health department expects to focus much of its attention on those four areas.



SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis

Working with Bio-Defense Network and former Public Health Director Kari Ladrow, the staff conducted an extensive departmental SWOT analysis in early January, with the following results:

	HELPFUL (Positive Impact)	HARMFUL (Negative Impact)
Internal	Strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none">History of Positive Community PartnershipsInspiring Mission StatementEager StaffHealth Equity and Social Determinants of HealthMaternal, Child, Adolescent, and Family HealthAccess to and Linkages with Health Care ProvidersEmergency Preparedness and Response Provided Community SupportActive Membership in Community Partnership ProgramsAbility to Share Medical Director with Mesa County	Weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Recent History of Staff TurnoverOccasional Difficulty Obtaining Data for PlanningLack of Staff Experience in Policy DevelopmentNeed to Outsource Environmental PHLack of Experience in Social MediaLack of Spanish Speaking StaffLack of Staff for Communicable Disease Prevention and Control
External	Opportunities: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Strong Partnership with Mesa CountyStrong Relationship with Community Leaders (Healthcare etc.)Willingness to Engage Planning Support	Threats <ul style="list-style-type: none">Potential for Community Resistance to ChangePossible Limits to Future FundingPossible Pandemic FatiguePotential Funding Limits for Maternal, Child, Adolescent, and Family HealthShortage of Providers for Chronic Disease, Injury Prevention, and Behavioral Health Promotion in County

The department boasts a significant number of strengths, most of which are supported by community members interviewed as part of the planning process; especially a strong history of positive community partnerships with groups and health care providers as demonstrated by the staff’s active membership in community partnership programs. This includes a strong partnership with nearby Mesa County, with which the department shares a medical director.

Recent staff turnover and lack of staff experience in policy development, social media and communicable disease prevention were listed as weaknesses while the potential for community resistance to change, possible pandemic fatigue and potential limits to overall funding, especially for maternal, child and adolescents were seen as threats to remain aware of and for which it must prepare. Also seen as a threat is the shortage of healthcare providers for chronic disease, injury prevention, and behavioral health promotion.

Working with its consultant, the staff used Colorado Health Assessment and Planning System Prioritization Scoring Tool to rate the 12 functions and services on four criteria from a low of one to a high of three:

- Significance to Public Health
- Ability to Impact the Issue
- Capacity to Address the Issue, and
- Prior Priority for the County

Based on the review of functions and services, this analysis and the experience of the former and current staff, the focus of the 2024-2029 PHIP will be on four prioritized health issues. Based on a varying weight assigned by the team, the highest score would be 57.

- Substance Use Disorder, with a score of 50
- Behavioral Health, with a score of 47
- Suicide Prevention, with a score of 41, and
- Affordable Housing, also with a score of 41

(See the Appendix for an explanation of how these scores were determined.)

Public Health Priorities

As was made clear by several stakeholders, and understood by the department, the four issues are intertwined and solutions to them cannot be undertaken separately, but rather wholistically, which is what the department plans to do for the next half decade.

The shortage of affordable housing in the county feeds into behavioral health matters, including substance use disorder and suicidal ideation and actions. Rather than address these areas of concern individually this plan will, instead, identify the functional steps the Moffat County Public Health will take to be able to identify, mitigate, respond to and improve on those issues as a group.



PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITIES



1 Identify, or confirm, the most significant issues facing the county and construct plans to deal with each.

Current and recent former staff members did a thorough job of establishing partnerships with healthcare providers and others in the region to assure they have a comprehensive understanding of the county's major public health issues. Interviews with regional stakeholders have confirmed the importance (and interconnection) of the four focus areas.

The department currently offers more than a dozen free services to its residents and expects to increase the number in the future. Among the services currently offered are:

- COVID testing (in-clinic and at home) and vaccines
- VFC/317/Private AICP recommended vaccinations
- Backpack/School supplies, Youth bike helmets and life jackets
- First aid Kits
- Medication Lockboxes
- Carbon Monoxide/Smoke detector
- Gun Trigger Locks and pistol lockboxes
- Narcan/Fentanyl test strips/ Harm reduction kits
- Condoms
- Mail in STI testing Kits and Sharps Disposal
- Diapers/ Wipes/ Diaper Creams

An ancillary issue the staff has identified is the need to provide information on these and other services that are available to the community and the plan is to work with community members to assemble a comprehensive collection of available services and make that list widely and easily available. One possibility is to work with the United Way or other community group to make information on resources more easily and widely available. Such a system is available statewide, but the department hopes to further localize the information and provide the access necessary.

Moffat County is very sparsely populated, limiting residents' physical access to healthcare providers. The shortage of broadband service further exacerbates the challenges of accessing proper care, so the department plans to focus on identifying and ensuring access to venues that will provide confidential and secure telehealth service to residents. Possible venues include the public library, healthcare clinics and places of worship.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offers special support for healthcare providers and patients to take advantage of telehealth services including a listing of services generally available, including for physical health:

- General health care, like wellness visits
- Prescriptions for medicines
- Dermatology (skincare)
- Nutrition counseling
- Urgent care (to address common conditions like sinus infections, back pain, urinary tract infections, rashes)
- Remote monitoring services (where patients use a device that sends information to their provider about vital signs, for example.)

Behavioral Health services include:

- Mental health counseling
- Follow up on care plans
- Services for substance use disorders, including opioid use disorder

A formal community risk assessment has yet to be conducted, but such an activity will play a significant role in the department's self-evaluation to address Area 1 and will be undertaken in 2023. Staff members are actively involved in several community groups, including leading the Overdose Fatality and Review committee, which reviews unintentional overdose deaths in the county and a part of the Regional Governance Committee, which is overseeing distribution of opioid settlement funds for Region 1 and will work with members of those groups to confirm the most important areas of focus are those which it identified, all of which are closely tied to low income, limited career opportunities and lack of community support.

The county recognizes that just as cardiovascular disease damages the heart and diabetes impairs the pancreas, addiction hijacks the brain. Department staff and leadership understands that addiction is a disease and not a choice. Just like with any disease, getting the right treatment is vital to recovery. Substance use disorder treatment programs help patients put active addiction into remission. And that is why the staff has identified Substance Use Disorder as the primary focus of its efforts.



2 Embrace and expand on the strengths that were identified during the SWOT analysis and take steps to address the identified weaknesses.

The SWOT analysis provided significant insight to staff and others of the inherent and earned advantages the department enjoys, including a strong history of positive community partnerships (begun under previous department leadership and continued under the current staff.) Community involvement has become a trademark of the department, one that has been recognized by stakeholders and staff, who have eagerly embraced the planning effort and committed to continue participation in regional healthcare groups. Such involvement has allowed for easy access and linkages to healthcare providers and the development of trust among leading community members.

Staffing issues were identified as weaknesses, with a recent history of turnovers, lack of staff experiences in policy development, social media and communicable disease prevention and control specifically noted. The staff has embraced support from a consultant to develop this five year plan and expects to learn more about overall policy development.

The department has a strong partnership with Mesa County and is able to share the cost of a medical director, allowing both counties to more fully serve their communities.





3 Build on the opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis and take steps to mitigate any negative effects of the identified threats where possible.

The department's partnership with Mesa County allows for opportunities beyond the sharing of a medical director, including access to updated policies and procedures and community resources. And the staff expects to continue to expand its involvement with community leaders, many of whom have eagerly welcomed their involvement.

One specific area of focus will be to provide greater access to telehealth to Moffat County residents, and the staff already has begun to strategize on how to locate and secure venues where community members without broadband access may gain easy access to such services. There are examples nationally of systems that have used innovative kiosks or other physical spaces that residents may use, and staff has committed to exploring potential spaces for that use.



4 Evaluation of the department planning effort to provide continual opportunities to improve on the quality of its service to the community.

The staff believe an annual review will be helpful to understand the value of the services it has offered and will work with stakeholders and others to make any changes in programs, an idea called "midcourse corrections."

Such reviews will not be time-bound, but are expected to be conducted on a regular basis to assess the progress being made and make informed changes to its programs.



Appendix

The Colorado Health Assessment and Planning System

Prioritization Scoring Tool was used to prioritize areas the Moffat County Health Department staff had identified.

Initially seven criteria were listed, and staff was asked to assign a score of 1 to 3, with 1 being low, 2 medium and 3 being high.

The criteria and the scores assigned were:

- **Does the issue impact a large number or high percentage of people in our community? (Scored 3)**
- **Do health disparities exist? (Are sub-populations more affected than the general public? (Scored 3)**
- **Do strategies exist that can be implemented locally and produce the desired outcome? (Scored 3)**
- **Does community support for change exist, including political will? (Scored 3)**
- **Is a local organization prepared to take the lead on the issue? (Scored 3)**
- **Are sufficient resources (funding, staff, expertise) available or obtainable? (Scored 3)**
- **Was the issue a priority in your last public health improvement plan? (Scored 1)**



Annex

Partnerships the County has established:

Northwest Colorado Health
Memorial Regional Health
Providence Recovery
The Health Partnership

Moffat County Shirreffs Office
Craig Police Department
Local Faith Based Organizations
United Way

The Pregnancy Center
Boys and Girls Club
Moffat School District
Open Heart Advocates

Then the four focus areas were listed and individually assigned scores determined by the staff. Each grade, from 1 to 3, was then multiplied by either 1 or 3, with the results totaled, as shown:

	Significance to Public Health		Ability to Impact the Issue		Capacity to Address the Issue		Prior Priority	Totals
	Does the issue impact a large number or high percentage of people in our community?	Do health disparities exist? (Are sub-populations more affected than the general public?)	Do strategies exist that can be implemented locally and produce the desired outcome?	Does community support for change exist, including political will?	Is a local organization prepared to take the lead on the issue?	Are sufficient resources (funding, staff, expertise) available or obtainable?	Is a local organization prepared to take the lead on the issue?	
Criteria Weight	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	
Substance Use Disorder	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	57
Behavioral Health	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	50
Suicide Prevention	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	41
Affordable Housing	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	41

From the Director,

Thank you for reviewing the Moffat County Public Health Department's first strategic plan, and a special thank you to those who provided insight and advice in our planning process.

I am very proud to serve as the county's public health director and am especially pleased with the results of this plan for our next five years! No plan is perfect, but the effort we have undertaken to create this document has allowed us to think ahead for a half decade and imagine where we hope the department will be in five years. We know that national preparedness leaders have outlined nearly a dozen steps they encourage local health departments to undertake in the future, including enhancing partnerships with federal and non-governmental organizations, building workforce capacity and prioritizing community recovery efforts, and we fully expect to embrace those efforts over the coming years. We will need the support of all of Moffat County, and I hope we can count on the entire community to guide us.

So I ask you to reach out to us. You may call me at (970)291-8742, email me at sarahcopeland@moffatcounty.net or stop by our new offices at 1198 West Victory Way, suite 110 and let us know how we are doing and how we can serve you even better.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'SAC', with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Sarah "Becky" Copeland