

# Chouteau County Community Health Improvement Plan



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

CHOUTEAU COUNTY 2015

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The Chouteau County Community Coalition, a dedicated group of community members representing a number of entities, developed this plan. Organizations participating in the process –

Benton Medical Center Rural Health Clinic

Chouteau County Emergency Management

Chouteau County Public Health

Fort Benton Schools

Missouri River Medical Center

Office of Public Assistance

Peace Hospice

# CHOUTEAU COUNTY HEALTH VISION

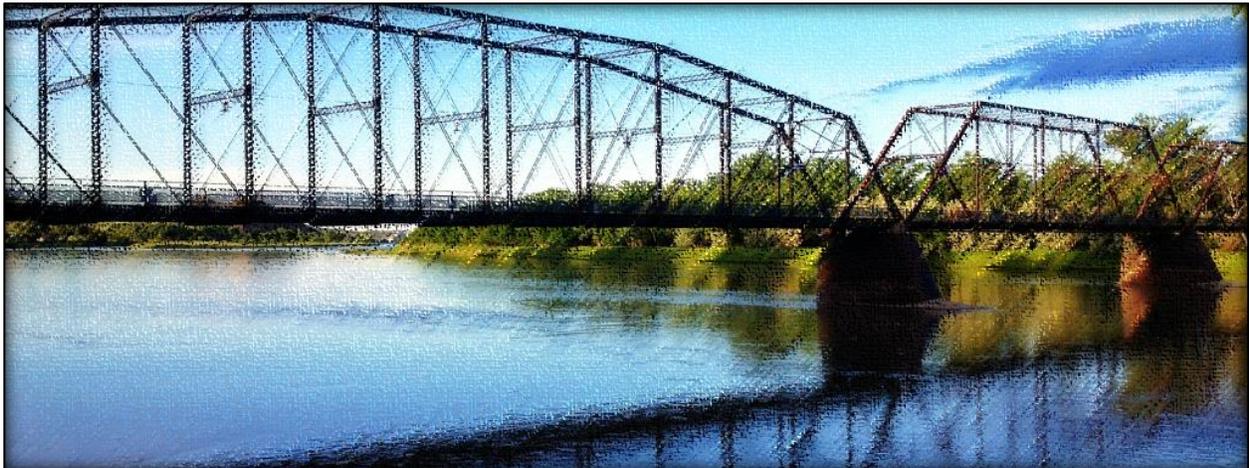
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*Chouteau County is home to a unified effort, through community-wide collaboration and communication, to promote and improve the quality of life and health of its residents.*

We will achieve this vision through the following goals and actions:

- Focus on a community-wide network and effective communication that will improve access to existing resources in Chouteau County
- Periodically assess the health status and needs of individuals living in Chouteau County
- Identify and prioritize shared objectives that will improve the health of Chouteau County residents, including long-term systems level change and short-term high impact projects
- Establish local partnerships and community problem solving capacity that will address the prioritized objectives

The Chouteau County Community Coalition formulated the vision and values, with input from community members, public health staff, local governmental officials, healthcare providers, and the Chouteau County Board of Health.



## INTRODUCTION

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The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) aligns with the community's health vision and serves as a road map to improve community health. It focuses on two strategic health issues – physical inactivity and limited access to health care.

Strategic health issues are key to achieving community health. They are upstream factors or root causes and represent a common thread among different outcomes or conditions. Addressing these issues enables the community to improve its health.

This plan outlines the goal, vision, barriers, strategies, and resources available for each issue and presents an action plan.

## COMMUNITY OVERVIEW

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Chouteau County is located in North Central Montana, less than 100 miles from the Canadian Border. Established in 1865 and one of the original nine counties, it was the largest county in the Montana Territory. It was subsequently subdivided repeatedly to form other counties until it reached its present size – 3,936 square miles.

Fort Benton, the county seat and named for Senator Thomas H. Benton of Missouri, was once an important port on the Missouri River. Fur traders, gold seekers, and settlers came via steamboats to Fort Benton. Today, it still retains much of its “steamboat days” character.

Chouteau County is home to the Chippewa-Cree tribe on the Rocky Boys Indian reservation in the Bear's Paw Mountains to the northeast. Fort Benton, Big Sandy, and Geraldine are the population centers with smaller communities in Loma, Carter, Floweree, Highwood, Shonkin, and Square Butte. The county is a rich agricultural area. There are vast prairie lands and many other natural resources including the Bears Paw, the Little Rockies, and the Highwood Mountains, as well as the Teton, Marias, and Missouri Rivers.

As a frontier county, with a total population of 5,813 residents, Chouteau County faces a number of challenges when it comes to the health of its residents such as population shifts, poverty, few transportation options, and limited access to health care services

Population projections for Chouteau County show the total population continuing to decrease over the coming decades. Nearly 30% of the population will be 65 or older by 2035. This will create a greater need for services with fewer resources.

## METHODOLOGY

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The Community Coalition utilized the Community Health Profile, which is a synthesis of the Community Health Assessment, Forces of Change Assessment, and Local Public Health System Assessment, to identify strategic issues. The coalition chose two of the most salient issues – inactivity and access to care.

Criteria for choosing these issues included feasibility (time and resources) and future sustainability. The goal is to implement programs that community members or groups – beyond the coalition – can nurture, grow, and sustain.

## STRATEGIC ISSUE 1: INACTIVITY

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Residents noted on the Community Health Survey a healthy community has many opportunities for residents to get active and stay active.

Goals: Increase activity levels and reduce obesity.

Vision: Community members will engage in physical activity and access fitness options leading to better health.

Contributing Factors and Barriers: The communities located within Chouteau County, with the exception of Fort Benton, are generally considered not very walkable. Other barriers include convenience, cultural perceptions, inclement weather, unsafe walkways, and no bike lanes.

Proposed Interventions and Strategies:

- Promote gym use and other venues for increasing activity – awareness through advertisement
  - Schools
  - Businesses
- Create safe walkways
  - Community Improvement Association
- Increase step awareness – (e.g. signage, pedometers, and step programs)
  - FBHS health and art classes
  - County Extension
- Implement a bike loan program

- Local outfitters, city government, and community groups

Available Resources:

- School athletic fields, tracks, and gyms
- School physical education and athletic programs
- Health care system
- Community parks and pools
- Fort Benton – walking path, yoga studio, fitness club, and bowling alley
- Fair grounds
- Missouri River
- Bike racks
- Sidewalks
- Local outfitters and businesses
- Community groups – Scouts, 4-H, Lyons Club, Women’s Club, Improvement Association, and Chamber of Commerce
- Law Enforcement recovered property sale
- Thrift store

## STRATEGIC ISSUE 2: ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

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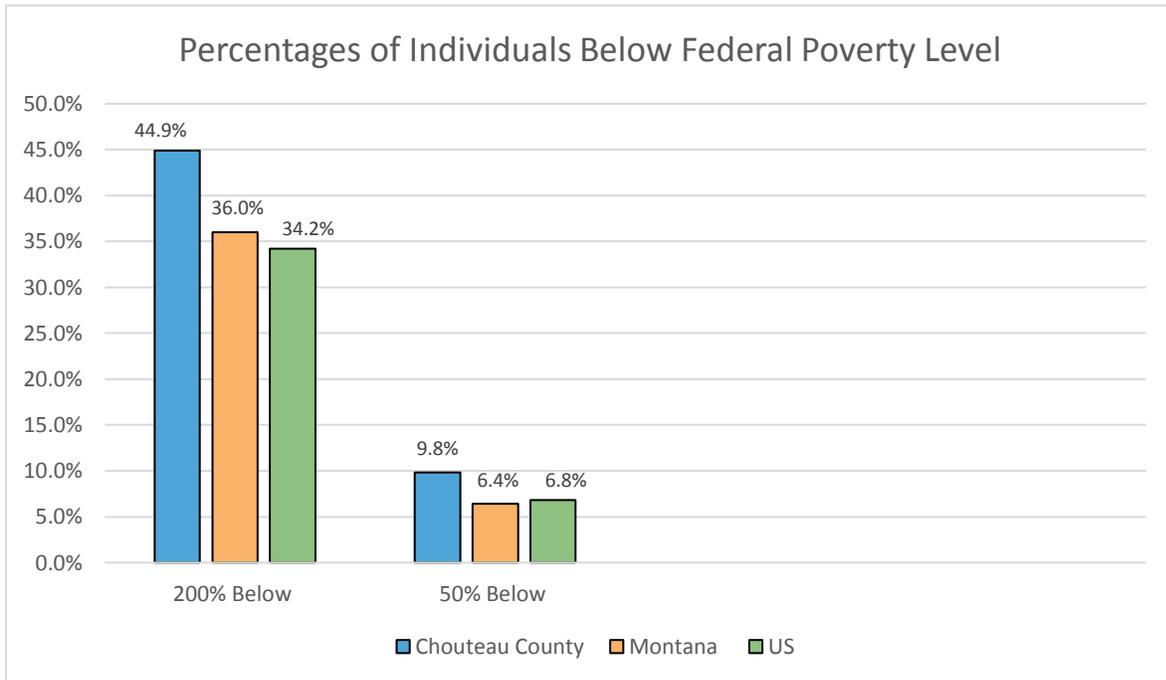
Residents cited access to primary care, specialty care, preventative services, and mental health services as an essential component of a healthy community.

Goal: Increase access to care.

Vision: All community members will have access to affordable, high quality services positively impacting their health and well-being.

Contributing Factors and Barriers: Limited specialized care, no public transportation system, limited walkability, large geographic distances, poverty, and inclement weather can all create barriers to accessing care.

Figures indicate higher rates of moderate and extreme poverty for Chouteau County.



Results from the Community Health Assessment consistently show people who live at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level are more likely to experience poor health, less likely to have health insurance, and less likely to access medical and dental care.

The health care system within the county is equipped to provide wellness and preventative services, basic emergency care, and manage uncomplicated acute and stable chronic cases.

Proposed Interventions and Strategies:

- Investigate options and develop a transportation program – options include, but not limited to a van service and senior companion program
  - Public health
  - Senior centers
  - Faith-based groups
- Promote health resource awareness through such venues as advertisements and brochures
  - Hospitals and clinics
  - Public health
  - EMS

- County Extension

Available Resources:

- 2 Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) – ER, acute care, lab, x-ray, and physical therapy
- 2 family practice rural health clinics – visiting nurse services
- Lactation specialist
- Limited telemedicine
- 2 long term care units
- Hospice care
- 1 public health department – WIC, foot clinics, immunizations, prevention education
- Monthly mammogram testing and cardiology clinic

## ACTION PLAN

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The coalition will partner with other community members or groups to move into the action phase of the plan.

The interventions are measurable through the set objectives. The coalition will track progress on the objectives through existing surveys and reports or implement mechanisms. This allows the plan to exist as a living document, meaning it can and should be modified. This makes the plan flexible and responsive to the community's needs.

Sustainability beyond the coalition is an important component in the plan. This promotes more community involvement and allows the coalition to branch out and address other needs.

Ultimately this will exert a greater influence on the community's health.

The Community Coalition invites all community members and organizations to participate in these efforts. Please contact the Chouteau County Health Department (622-3771) for more information.

## RESOURCES

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Community Health Assessment, Chouteau County – February 24, 2015

Community Profile – Fall 2015

Forces of Change Assessment – Spring 2015

Local Public Health System Assessment – Spring 2015

Prairie County Community Health Improvement Plan – Megan Olson, 2011