



March 10, 2025

RE: Addressing Health Disparities at Southwest Health System

Southwest Health System (SHS) provides health care to those who live, work and travel through Montezuma County, Colorado. Montezuma County is a rural community. Consistent with the mission, vision and values, the purpose of SHS is to improve the health of people who are part of the communities we serve.

One characteristic of rural communities includes disparities in health status, regardless of other contributing factors¹. Working to improve health care delivery in rural Southwest Colorado by itself is an effort to reduce health disparities when compared to more urban health care delivery systems. Yet this is not enough. Other disparities in health exist in beyond the rural nature of our service area.

Southwest Health System is committed to understanding other disparities in health and working with our community and other healthcare providers to reduce disparities where they exist. Some of the foundations that support our work include our Community Health Needs Assessment, which we make available on our website.

Our hospital also participates in both state and federal quality improvement programs including Colorado's Health Transformation Program, Colorado's Health Quality Incentive Program, the Medicare Merit-Based Incentive Payment System and others which contain measurements of reducing health disparities. In addition to formal programs, SHS also works with local community partners to improve the health of unhoused and other marginalized community members who are likely to have health disparities beyond those of other members of our community.

The work to reduce health disparities is never done. Our work is not to reach a destination but to improve the health of people every day, with every interaction we have with our patients and members of our community. As a local, community hospital we exist to serve those who live, work and travel through our region.

I'm proud to lead our caregivers in this effort and for our work every day.

Kindly,

Joe Theine
Chief Executive Officer

¹ <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/topics/rural-health-disparities>