



March 18, 2026

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. 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 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 website².

This work is not done alone or in isolation. Coming together with community partners helps us improve the vital conditions that give each member of our community the best opportunity for health and well-being. You can learn more about **Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being** through the Rippel foundation: <https://rippel.org/vital-conditions/>.

This year we are partnering with the Montezuma County Public Health Department to provide a community health fair offering education and access to at cost routine labs. 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.

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.

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

Kindly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Theine", is written over a horizontal line.

Joe Theine
Chief Executive Officer

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

² <https://www.swhealth.org/how-does-shs-address-needs-in-our-community/>