

2026-2028

STRATEGIC PLAN

For Behavioral Health Priorities in Teton County



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INTRODUCTION

The physical geography of Teton County, Montana, is marked by the glaciated plains of the Golden Triangle standing at the foot of abruptly rising mountains comprising the Rocky Mountain Front. Home to several rural communities, the 2,293 square mile expanse is home to just over 6,000 residents. The rural geography provides a unique quality of life, but it also produces unique economic and social challenges for its residents. As in many parts of rural America, mental health challenges and substance use disorders are of special concern.

Teton County C.A.R.E.S., A History

Behavioral health challenges have been highlighted in the 2017, 2020, and 2024 Teton County Community Health Assessments. The most recent CHA, over 60% of those surveyed felt that mental health and substance use disorders are a top health priority for Teton County.

In response to the concerns identified in the 2017 assessment, in October 2017 the Teton County Community Alliance for Resiliency and Educational Support (C.A.R.E.S.; formerly called the Teton County Addictions Taskforce) was launched. Teton County C.A.R.E.S. quickly began to focus on the broader behavioral health of Teton County, and has continued to grow in participants, capacity, and achievements since that time. The mission of Teton County C.A.R.E.S. is to confront Teton County's behavioral health challenges through comprehensive and evidence-based strategies that focus on resilience, education, prevention, access to treatment and reducing drug, alcohol and mental health related consequences.

Teton County C.A.R.E.S., seeks to accomplish these goals:

- 1.Engage a broad spectrum of community partners to best understand the complexities of behavioral health.
- 2.Facilitate a cultural shift in how behavioral health challenges are perceived and addressed in Teton County.
- 3.Use the Strategic Prevention Framework developed by SAMHSA to assess needs, build capacity, plan, implement and evaluate effective interventions that are culturally competent and sustainable to address behavioral health challenges in Teton County.
- 4.Consider and incorporate The Science Of The Positive into the development of coalition activities and messaging
- 5.Implement proven strategies that are evidence-based to address behavioral health challenges in Teton County through community partnerships.
- 6.Facilitate accurate and timely communications with BHAC and SAA.

STRATEGIC PLAN METHODOLOGY

The 2025 Strategic Planning process was facilitated using technical assistance from the Montana Public Health Institute. The process included reviewing existing behavioral health data in Teton County as published in the the most recent Community Health Assessment; identifying concerns and priorities from coalition members through an online survey; aligning priorities and objectives with those identified in the most recent Community Health Improvement Plan; and setting objectives and activities during in-person meetings. Twenty individuals provided input in the online survey, and 15 coalition members participated in in-person discussions.

The Montana Public Health Institute incorporated elements of the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF), Science of the Positive Framework, state-wide behavioral health priorities, and current and historical Teton County behavioral health priorities in the strategic planning process to ensure appropriate alignment and lenses for this plan.

THE STRATEGIC PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

Teton County C.A.R.E.S. follows the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF).

The SPF includes five steps designed to produce sound community-based actions to address behavioral health issues and produce optimal public health outcomes:



- 1. Assessment:** Identify local prevention needs based on data
- 2. Capacity:** Build local resources and readiness to address prevention needs
- 3. Planning:** Find out what works to address prevention needs and how to do it well
- 4. Implementation:** Deliver evidence-based programs and practices as intended
- 5. Evaluation:** Examine the process and outcomes of programs and practices

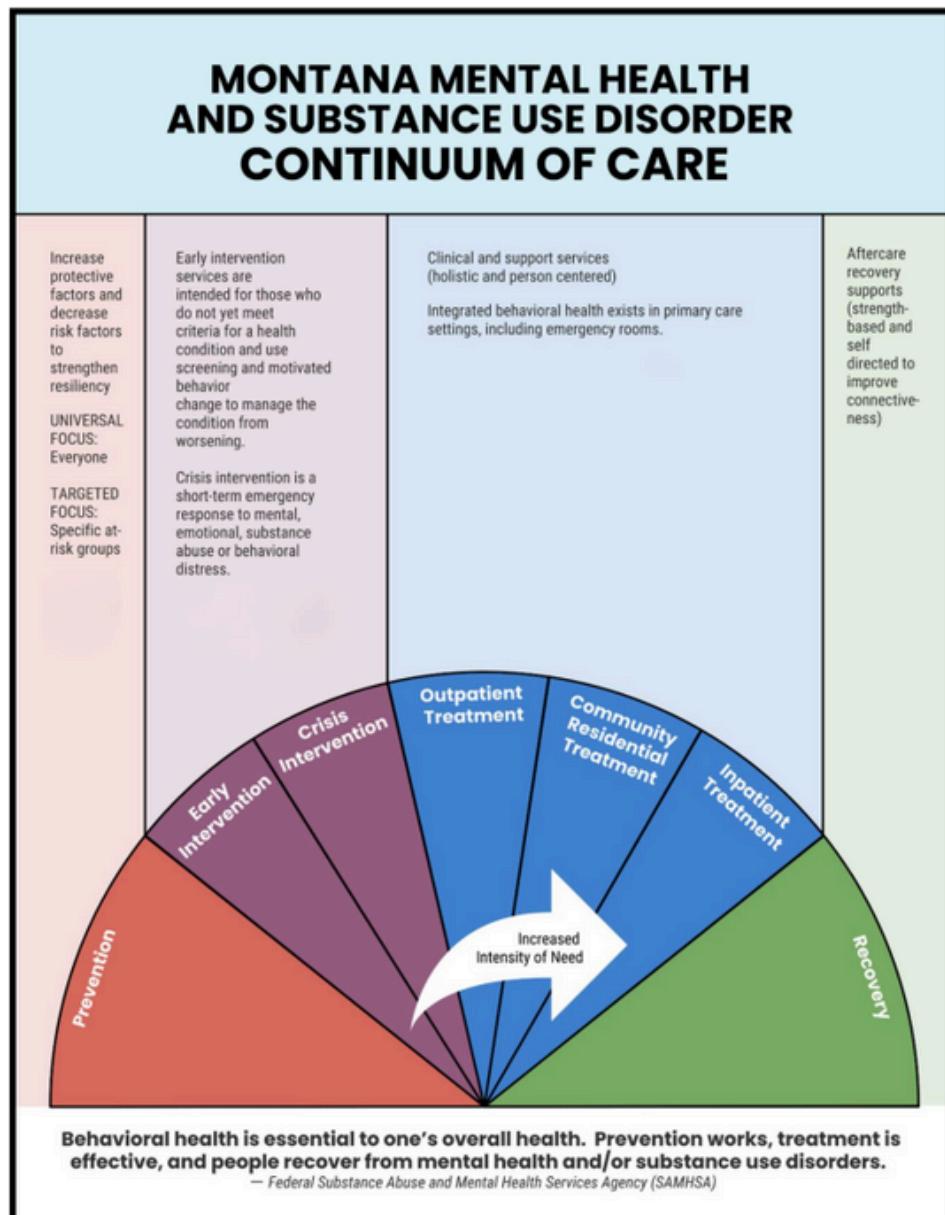
The SPF includes two principles that are to be integrated within each step:

- 1. Cultural Competence:** The ability of an individual or organization to understand and interact effectively with people who have different values, lifestyles, and traditions based on their distinctive heritage and social relationships
- 2. Sustainability:** The process of building an adaptive and effective system that achieves and maintains desired long-term results

Teton County is home to behavioral health challenges which are difficult to overcome and are compounded by its rural geography; however, each community faces anthropological, cultural, and economic challenges that contribute—both positively and negatively—towards behavioral health. The SPF is different than other strategic planning processes in that it is dynamic and iterative, data driven, and reliant on and encourages a team approach. These defining features allow local teams to follow a circular, as opposed to linear, planning process that changes with time in order to achieve the best possible long-term outcomes.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CONTINUUM OF CARE

First introduced in 1997, the behavioral health intervention spectrum is a modification of public health intervention wheels that graphically depict different types of intervention and the roles they play. The version below has been adopted by the State of Montana and includes, Prevention, Intervention, Treatment, and Recovery. Teton County CARES focuses much of its time and resources in the realm of Prevention, but makes a concerted effort to work across the Continuum, supporting activities related to Crisis Intervention, access to treatment services, and ongoing community support processes as well.



RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Many factors influence the likelihood that an individual will develop a substance abuse or related behavioral health problem. Effective prevention focuses on reducing the factors that put people at risk of behavioral health issues and strengthening those factors that protect people from the problem.

According to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine's 2009 Report, Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders among Young People: Progress and Possibilities, risk factors are certain biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural characteristics that precede and are associated with higher likelihood of behavioral health problems. Protective factors are characteristics at the individual, family, or community level that are associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes.

The study of risk and protective factors is evolving. What we know to-date is important for prevention:

- Different age groups have different risk and protective factors.
- Some risk and protective factors overlap between age groups.
- Risk and protective factors tend to be correlated and have cumulative effects and are predictive of multiple issues.

One person or agency cannot adequately impact a problem alone, so it makes sense to look for opportunities to work with other disciplines to address shared risk and protective factors. While there is value in addressing both risk and protective factors, Teton County CARES has focused efforts more recently on increasing Protective Factors, as aligned with the science of the positive.

THE SCIENCE OF THE POSITIVE

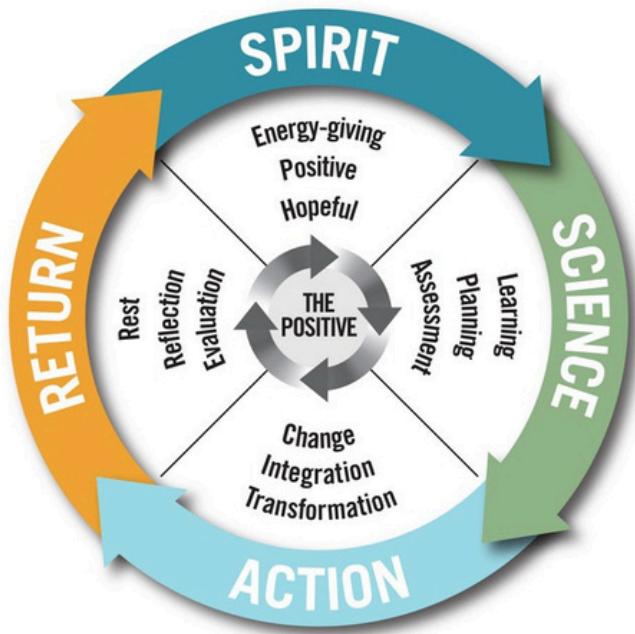
The Science of the Positive is the study of how positive factors impact culture and experience. It focuses on how to measure and grow the positive, and has been applied over decades with agencies, communities, and businesses. It is based on the core assumption that the positive is real and is worth growing – in ourselves, our families, our workplaces, and our communities (Linkenbach, 2007).

Jeff Linkenbach has a masters in counseling and a doctorate of education. He is developer of the Science of the Positive and Positive Community Norms frameworks, and a coinvestigator of the HOPE (Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences) study.

The Science of the Positive should not be confused with simple “positive thinking.” It is a rigorous process that works across entire cultures. And while the Science of the Positive is based on the core assumption that the positive exists in every community and culture, it recognizes that suffering, pain, and harm are very real. One of its principal outcomes is to reduce suffering in our families, our communities, and ourselves.

Four essential domains – Spirit, Science, Action, and Return – make up the transformational process of the Science of the Positive. These stages, when fully engaged, work together to create a synergistic Cycle of Transformation.

In 2025, the members of the Teton County CARES Coalition participated in the Montana Summer Institute training for the science of the positive framework. This framework has been incorporated into the 2025 CARES Strategic Plan in conjugation with the Strategic Prevention Framework.



One Key Assumption: The Positive exists, its is real, and it is worth growing.

SPIRIT	Refers to the “why” behind what we do, the underlying beliefs and values within our community. This piece is also about understanding the core purpose or value behind our actions. Spirit must come first.
SCIENCE	Using data, research and evidence-based approaches to identify hazards, assess risks and measure effectiveness. Looking into our perceptions of our community and what the data actually shows.
ACTION	Must be last, practical steps using the data collected to increase Positive Community Norms. We flip the script.
RETURNS	Positive outcomes and benefits gained from the previous 3 parts; by using Science of the Positive we increase our Positive Community Norms which in turn leads to healthier/better behaviors within the community.

“If we want HEALTH, we must promote HEALTH”

What we focus on becomes our reality.



THE NORM

The actual behavior or attitude of the majority (>51%) of the population; what **most people** do or believe.

The Gap

THE PERCEIVED NORM

The perceived behavior or perceived attitude of most people; what **we think** most people do or believe.

References & Resources

<https://www.montanainstitute.com/the-science-of-the-positive>

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6609af5f22534614fd7ddf99/t/6625964bbdcb1c544e3ffda4/1713739340736/Applying+SOTP+to+Health+%26+Safety+FINAL+%281%29.pdf>

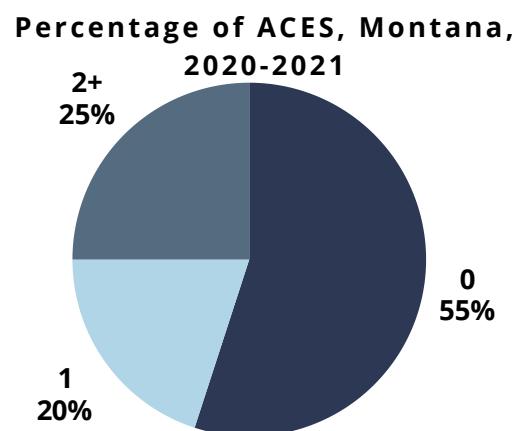
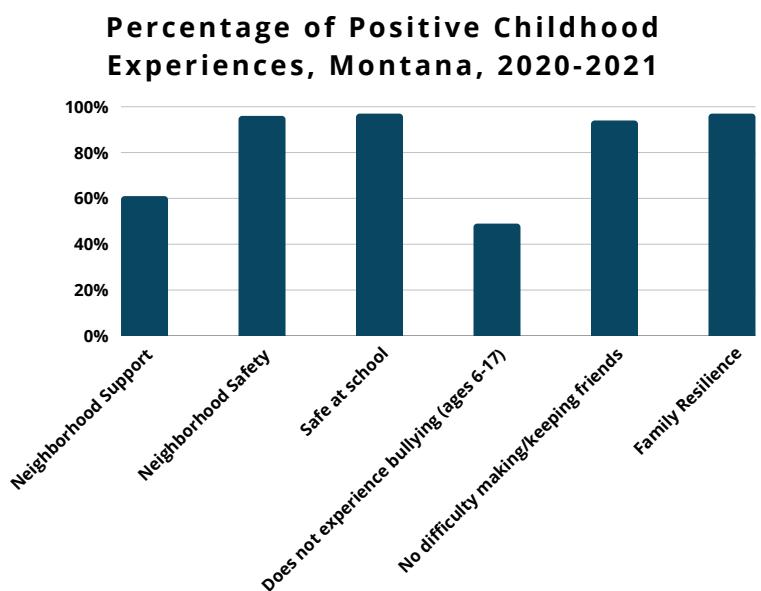
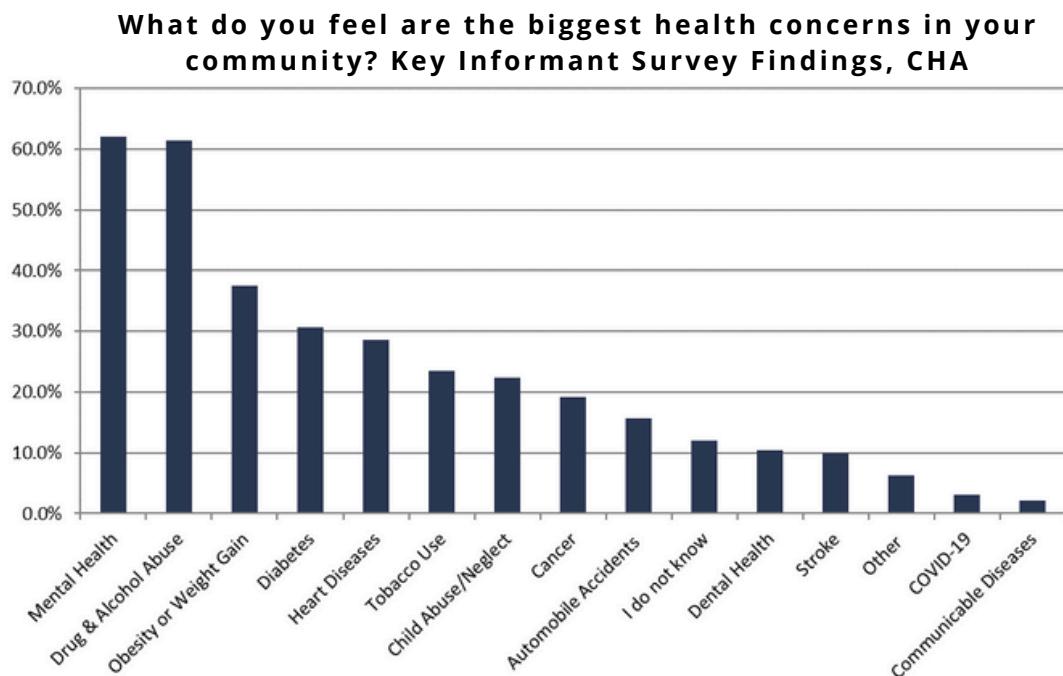
CARES MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

While we continuously strive to bring in new members to Teton County Cares, these organizations had committed representation during our most recent Strategic Planning process.

- Benefis Teton Medical Center
- Bynum Schools
- Choteau Public Schools
- Choteau United Methodist Church
- Choteau Youth Alliance
- Community members at large
- Dutton Public Schools
- Fairfield Public Schools
- Great Falls NAMI
- Many Rivers Whole Health
- MSU Extension
- Neighbors Helping Neighbors
- North Central Crisis Coalition
- Pondera Health Department
- Power Public Schools
- Teton County Commissioners
- Teton County EMS
- Teton County Health Department
- Teton County Superintendent of Schools
- Teton Food Pantry

SITUATION SNAPSHOT

This section provides a brief summary of the behavioral health data collected during the most recent 2024 Community Health Assessment, to describe the scope of concern about behavioral health in Teton County.



SITUATION SNAPSHOT

Mental Health in Adults

- 14.6% reported mental health not good for \geq 14 days among Teton County adults aged \geq 18 years | U.S. = 14.7%
- 22.4% reported depression among Teton County Adults age \geq 18 years. | U.S. = 19.5%

"THERES A STIGMA IN OUR COMMUNITY WHERE YOU INVESTING IN YOU IS A LITTLE SELFISH. WE'RE A VERY GIVING COMMUNITY, WHERE ASKING FOR HELP IS FROWNED UPON BUT NOT HELPING IS FROWNED UPON. SO, PEOPLE HELP AT THEIR OWN EXPENSE."

-TETON COUNTY RESIDENT

Mental Health in Youth

- 14.1% pf Teton County youth have made a plan for how they would attempt suicide in the past 12 month | MT = 21.4%
- 19.4% of Teton County youth have seriouslt considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months | MT = 27.9%
- 77.8% of Teton County youth ask their Mom or Dad for help if they have a personal problem | MT = 79.8%

"THIS YOUNGER GENERATION, I'M SEEING THAT THEY NEED MORE HELP MENTALLY. THERE ARE NOT THERAPISTS HERE, LIKE BENCHMARK, ALL THOSE SPECIALISTS THAT COULD HELP YOUNG FAMILIES."

-TETON COUNTY RESIDENT

PRIORITY 1: INCREASE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

GOAL 1.1: REDUCE MENTAL HEALTH STIGMA

	<p>Objective: By July 2026, develop and disseminate a community-based awareness campaign that involves consistent messaging across multiple community partner organizations aimed at creating positive messaging around mental health</p>
1.1.1	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build a toolkit with curated messages that highlight community strengths to address behavioral health• Frame messaging of mental health in The Science Of The Positive style• Determine how and when partner orgs will disseminate• Work with various local media outlets to frame and distribute these messages• Review metrics related to messaging campaign and make adjustments for future campaigns
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, Choteau Acantha, MSU Extension, Choteau Schools</p>
1.1.2	<p>Objective: By December 2026, deliver evidence based, targeted skill-building educational programs that are designed to empower community members with practical knowledge and competencies; and increase public knowledge of available wellness resources.</p>
	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to update the Teton County 211 pages• Increase awareness and improve utilization of 988• Provide and Promote educational programs such as QPR, COMET, MHFA and YAM• Work with various media outlets to share with community members current and future educational opportunities through advertisements, community calendars and various social media outlets.• Produce a calendar of community educational opportunities that reflect the population of Teton County across the life span.
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, Choteau Acantha, Teton County Schools</p>

PRIORITY 1: INCREASE PROTECTIVE FACTORS

GOAL 1.2: FOSTER CONNECTION AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

1.2.1	<p>Objective: By January 2027, cultivate resilient, supportive environments, events and activities that strengthen community bonds and increase a shared sense of community belonging and mutual support.</p>
	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create a CARES presence at three existing public events annually where resource material is available to community members.• Increase opportunities for “low barrier” participation in community activities. Examples could include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ “Micro Volunteering”: Short term volunteer commitments◦ Organizing low-cost or no cost community events like block parties, music series or flash mobs.◦ Working with organizers of existing event, activities, and programs to increase accessibility by offering things like childcare, scholarship, etc.
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, Choteau Acantha, MSU Extension, Community members at large, Chamers of Commerce</p>

PRIORITY 2: ACCESS TO SERVICES

GOAL 2.1: INCREASE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND STRENGTHEN TETON COUNTY CARES COALITION

	<p>Objective: By January 2027, increase the number of community partners represented in Teton County CARES to an average of 15 per month.</p>
2.1.1	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review current list of partner agencies to identify where representation needs to be boosted.• Engage 5 new partner agencies to join and participate in CARES monthly meetings and activities• Engage current and new CARES partner agencies annually with a message of shared responsibility and opportunity• Update all CARES documents (Strategic Plan, MOUs and bylaws) by incorporating feedback from partners to ensure alignment and effectiveness.
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension,</p>
2.1.2	<p>Objective: At least quarterly, offer training opportunities to partner organizations during regular CARES meetings that improves their ability to address behavioral health within their organization</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Survey CARES members to identify topics/trainings of interest and benefit to them• Identify quality, professional, evidence-based educational opportunities to bring to CARES meetings• Support CARES Coalition members in attending training outside of coalition members, that can then be brought back to the remainder of the coalition. <p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, BTMC, Front Range Psychiatry, Alluvion</p>

PRIORITY 2: ACCESS TO SERVICES

GOAL 2.2: EXPAND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SERVICE NETWORK AND INCREASE REFERRALS TO EXISTING SERVICES

2.2.1	<p>Objective: By December 2026, increase awareness and utilization of existing behavioral health and social services through resource connection, referrals systems, and reduced barriers</p>
	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update existing 211 resources• Utilize CONNECT Referral System as feasible• Highlight successful referral stories through surveys or in person meetings.• Develop a “No Wrong Door” policy among coalition members.• Identify and reduce transportation barriers for community members through resources such as telehealth, volunteer drivers, group transport days, and flexible scheduling• Update and disseminate Teton County Wellness Resources one-pager on an annual basis with input from coalition partners
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, BTMC, Front Range Psychiatry, Alluvion</p>
2.2.2	<p>Objective: By December 2027, increase behavioral health service network in Teton County through expansion of “alternative” services.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore feasibility of “paraprofessional” behavioral health capacity such as Peer Supports, Community Health Workers, etc.• Increase access to telehealth services by creating a physical space that community members can use for telehealth.• Increase access to support groups, grief groups, etc. in the county. <p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, BTMC, Front Range Psychiatry, Alluvion</p>

PRIORITY 3: CRISIS RESPONSE

GOAL 3.1: EXPAND CRISIS RESPONSE PARTNER EDUCATION AND TRAINING THROUGH REGIONAL APPROACHES

	<p>Objective: Provide at least 4 annual training opportunities to crisis response partners leveraging access to trainings happening across the region to maximize resources.</p>
3.1.1	<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with the North Central Crisis Coalition to develop and distribute a calendar of educational/training opportunities for crisis response partners• Identify education and training opportunities needed for crisis response partners through surveys and in person meetings.• Partner with North Central Crisis Coalition to conduct ongoing trainings, at least quarterly for first responders and those in the crisis system such as CIT and MHFA, to maximize limited resources
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, Teton County EMS, North Central Crisis Coalition</p>
3.2.2	<p>Objective: By September 2027, ensure that all crisis response partners in Teton County and across the North Central region are aware of and understand how to effectively utilize tools intended for crisis response.</p> <p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer trainings and TA to increase utilization of the CONNECT Referral System by providing onboarding and follow up support.• Offer annual trainings on utilization of Handle with Care, 988, and 211 platforms• Work with TCSO, TCEMS, BTMC and MRWH to integrate of Avel, 988 and 211 platforms into standard crisis response protocols
	<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, North Central Crisis Coalition, Teton EMS, Teton Sheriff's Office.</p>

PRIORITY 3: CRISIS RESPONSE

GOAL 3.2: ENSURE CRISIS RESPONSE PARTNERS ARE EQUIPPED TO PROTECT THEIR OWN WELLBEING

3.2.1	<p>Objective: Provide at least 2 annual opportunities (education, trainings, social connections) that address stress management, secondary trauma, and burnout among crisis response partners.</p>
<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Develop and deliver a curriculum focused on mitigating secondary trauma and burnout, integrating mental health resources into ongoing training.• Support a robust CISM team for implementation as needed.• Provide an agency leadership training on promoting a culture of wellness and reducing the stigma associated with seeking mental health help, including public endorsements of the Peer Support Network and resources.• Annual survey of crisis response partners to ensure continued support.	
<p>Partner Agencies: Teton County Health Department, MSU Extension, BTMC, Teton County EMS, Teton County Sheriff's Office</p>	

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Strategic Plan Review and Maintenance

The initial Strategic Plan was in effect from July 2019 to December 2021. The second Strategic Plan was in effect from January 2022 through December 2024. The third Strategic Plan was updated in Fall of 2025. This third version of the Teton County C.A.R.E.S. Strategic Plan, in addition to using the Strategic Prevention Framework, incorporated The Science Of The Positive Framework as well.

The Strategic Plan is considered a “living” document and is intended to grow and change with the needs and actions of Teton County C.A.R.E.S. The progress of the initiatives outlined in this plan will be reviewed every 6 months with C.A.R.E.S. members in January and June. Once annually, members will also review initiatives, goals, objectives, and activities and add, delete, or adjust metrics as necessary.

The CARES Strategic Plan will be reviewed biannually through a lens of what's working and what's possible. Progress will be measured not just by outputs, but by community impact, engagement, and the amplification of positivity. The CARES leadership team will coordinate evaluation, gather feedback, and adjust goals to build momentum and resilience.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- 211: Online resources
- 988: Non emergency helpline you can call or text
- ACES: Adverse Childhood Experiences
- AMHFA: Adult Mental health First Aid
- Avel: Law enforcement support
- CARES: Community Alliance for Resiliency and Educational Support
- CHA: Community Health Assessment
- CHIP: Community Health Improvement Plan
- CHW: Community Health Worker
- CISM: Certified Information Security Manager
- CIT: Crisis Intervention Team
- COMET: Changing Our Mental and Emotional Trajectory
- MHFA: Mental Health First Aid
- MTPHI: Montana Public Health Institute
- PCES: Positive Childhood Experiences
- PCN: Positive Community Norms
- QPR: Question Persuade Refer
- SAMSHA: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services
- SOTP: Science Of The Positive
- SPF: Strategic Prevention framework
- TA: Technical Assistance
- TMHFA: Teen mental Health First Aid
- YAM: Youth Aware of Mental Health
- YMHFA: Youth Mental Health First Aid