

Boulder County Public Health

Strategic Plan - Summary 2024 - 2029



**BOULDER COUNTY
PUBLIC HEALTH**
Opportunity for a Healthy Life

Table of Contents

Letter from the Public Health Director 3

Executive Summary 5

Health Justice 8

Who We Are and How We Work 9

Our 2024 - 2029 Strategic Plan 11

Strategic Priorities 12

Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning 15

Acknowledgements 15

Letter from the Public Health Director

Dear Colleagues,

As Boulder County embarks on the next five years of its public health journey, we stand at a transformative juncture characterized by unprecedented challenges and profound opportunities. The landscape of public health is evolving rapidly, influenced by shifting demographics, emerging health threats, and a heightened awareness of systemic inequities. Our strategic plan for 2024-2029 is designed to navigate these changes with a commitment to health and racial equity, community engagement, mental and behavioral health, emergency management, climate action, and stewardship. This comprehensive approach reflects our dedication to fostering a healthier, more resilient Boulder County, and it embraces innovation as a catalyst for meaningful change.

Health and Racial Equity

At the heart of our strategic plan is a commitment to health and racial equity. We recognize that health disparities are not only a matter of public concern but a reflection of deeply entrenched systemic injustices. In Boulder County, despite strong averaged health indicators in many areas, marginalized communities face disproportionate health challenges when data is disaggregated. Our goal is to address these inequities through targeted interventions, equitable policy-making, and community partnerships. By focusing on health equity, we aim to dismantle the barriers that prevent equitable health outcomes and ensure that every individual, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to lead a healthy life.

Community Engagement

The strength of our public health efforts lies in our ability to engage and collaborate with the community. The changing public health landscape demands that we move beyond traditional top-down approaches and foster meaningful dialogue with the people we serve. Community engagement is not just a component of our strategy; it is a fundamental principle guiding our work. We will prioritize building relationships with diverse community groups, understanding their unique needs and perspectives, and co-creating solutions that are both effective and culturally relevant. Through active engagement, we seek to empower residents, enhance trust in public health initiatives, and ensure that our strategies are grounded in the lived experiences of our community members.

Mental and Behavioral Health

Mental and behavioral health (MBH) is an increasingly urgent priority as we address the rising prevalence of mental health conditions and the complex interplay between mental health and overall well-being. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the critical need for robust mental health support systems, and Boulder County is committed to advancing initiatives that address these needs comprehensively. Our strategic plan includes scaling positive mental health supports and increasing social connectedness in our community and supporting policies that support mental and behavioral health, and reducing stigma through public education and outreach. This work builds on and contributes to a broader county-wide Behavioral Health Roadmap, focusing on public health contributions to MBH. By focusing on mental health, we aim to build a supportive environment that promotes resilience and well-being for all residents.

Emergency Management

The ability to effectively manage emergencies is fundamental to safeguarding public health, and with climate change, emergencies and disasters are increasing. Boulder County faces a range of potential emergencies, from natural disasters to public health crises. Our strategic plan emphasizes strengthening our emergency management capabilities to ensure a swift and coordinated response to any situation. This includes enhancing preparedness and response, improving communication and coordination among agencies, and investing in infrastructure and resources that support rapid response. By prioritizing emergency management, we aim to protect the health and safety of our community, minimize disruptions, and build resilience against future challenges.

Climate Action

Climate change poses a significant threat to public health, affecting air quality, water resources, communicable disease, and the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. Our strategic plan integrates climate action as a core component, recognizing the interconnection between environmental sustainability and health outcomes. We will focus on initiatives that mitigate the impact of climate change, promote sustainable practices, and address environmental health risks. By advancing climate action, we aim to create a healthier environment that supports both current and future generations.

Stewardship

Effective stewardship is essential to the success of our strategic plan. This involves not only responsible management of resources but also a commitment to transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. We will ensure that our initiatives are evidence-based, data-driven, and aligned with best practices. Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms will be integral to our approach, enabling us to adapt and refine our strategies in response to emerging needs and opportunities.

In conclusion, Boulder County's public health strategic plan for 2024-2029 is a forward-looking blueprint designed to address the evolving needs of our community with a focus on equity, engagement, and resilience. Through a comprehensive approach that integrates health equity, community involvement, mental health support, emergency preparedness, climate action, and responsible stewardship, we are poised to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our residents. Together, we will navigate the complexities of the public health landscape and build a healthier, more equitable Boulder County for all.

Sincerely,

Lexi (Alexandra) Nolen, PhD, MPH

Executive Director

Executive Summary

Boulder County Public Health's (BCPH) 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan provides strategic guidance and direction for the agency and stakeholders over the next five years. Developed through a comprehensive planning process, this plan identifies BCPH's priorities, what we aim to accomplish within each priority, how the work will be implemented, and outlines the methods by which we will monitor and evaluate progress.

The 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan focuses on six strategic priorities that highlight the impact the agency hopes to achieve, and the internal infrastructure needed to support this work. These priorities were selected based on a variety of factors, including the current needs of the agency and community, the desire to build on progress from previous strategic plans, and to align with other county initiatives.

The six strategic priorities are:

- **Mental and Behavioral Health:** Improve mental and behavioral health in Boulder County by strengthening protective factors and building capacity to support well-being.
- **Climate Action and Sustainability:** Enhance Boulder County communities' resilience to effectively cope with the impacts of climate change by improving public health programs, prioritizing disproportionately impacted populations, and ensuring better preparedness and protection for local environments.
- **Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery:** Ensure Boulder County residents and community partners are equitably supported in emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.
- **Health and Racial Equity:** BCPH institutionalizes the infrastructure, knowledge, culture, and resources for staff to effectively plan and implement HRE improvements in the community.
- **Community Engagement:** BCPH effectively engages with the public and community partners to create trust and to incorporate community and partner priorities into planning, policies, and agency activities.
- **Sustainability, Transparency, and Stewardship:** BCPH has infrastructure, culture, and practices to support good governance through sustainability, transparency, and stewardship of resources.

Through this strategic plan, BCPH will elevate and expand on work previously initiated, moving towards increased efficiency and coordination to achieve greater impact. In doing so, BCPH will position itself to better serve Boulder County communities. Additionally, this plan outlines how the agency will ground this work in health equity and support priority populations.

To support accountability and transparency in this work, BCPH is committed to sharing progress and lessons learned throughout the implementation of this plan, with updates provided to stakeholders at regular intervals over the next five years. Together with the dedication of staff and engagement with partners, BCPH is excited to move this work forward and realize positive change in the community.

Health Justice: Our Foundational Approach to a Healthier Community

Health justice is the foundational and cross cutting approach that frames the work outlined in our strategic plan. For BCPH and our strategic plan, health justice means dismantling systemic barriers and promoting policies and practices that foster equity and inclusions and maximize opportunities for everyone in our community to achieve their optimal health, regardless of their background, life experience, race/ethnicity, or socio-economic status. Health justice principles focus on achieving a fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities around key social determinants of health that drive health disparities in our community. By centering health justice throughout our strategic plan, we will ensure that all community members benefit from our programs.

Historic & Modern Inequities in Boulder County

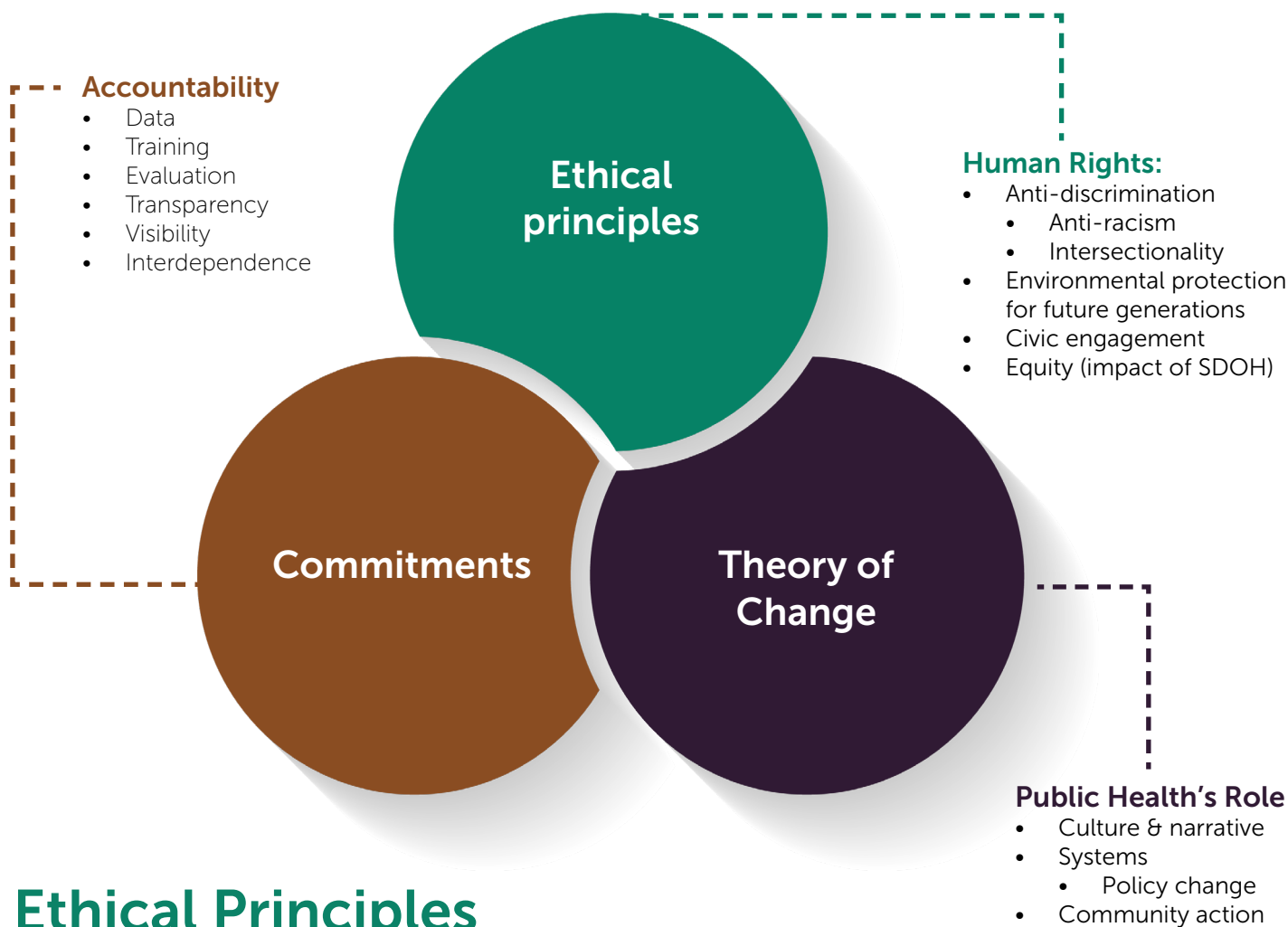
Boulder County, as other communities across the world, has a history marked by significant inequities in physical and mental health. Marginalized groups in Boulder County, including Black, Indigenous, Hispanic/Latine, unhoused, low-income, and immigrant communities, have faced systemic barriers to accessing quality healthcare, educational attainment, environmental risks and climate resilience, and meaningful economic opportunities, among many other influencers of health. These systemic barriers are important contributors that persistently drive inequities related to health risks, exposures, and outcomes, as well as the social and economic consequences of adverse health outcomes reflected in county health data.

The Case for Health Justice

Disparities in Boulder County have roots in systemic racism and social injustices that impact equitable access to preventive health services, erode climate resilience, and accelerate poor mental health outcomes. Health justice must be central to BCPH's strategic plan and champion principles of anti-racism, equity, and robust community engagement. By working to dismantle systemic barriers and promoting inclusive policies, BCPH will foster environments where all residents can thrive and communities with unique needs are meaningfully engaged in ways that are culturally relevant and effective. Our strategic plan's foundational commitment to health justice will not only address immediate health disparities but also build stronger, more resilient communities capable of withstanding future challenges to a healthy and just society for all.

BCPH's Health Justice Framework

As part of our commitment to health and racial equity, we developed a unique Health Justice Framework that will be the lens we use to focus and frame health justice across our strategic priorities. This framework will guide the implementation of our strategic plan and strengthen our work and commitments to creating equitable health outcomes for all residents in Boulder County. This comprehensive framework encompasses our ethical principles, theory of change, and key commitments to appropriately address systemic inequities and foster a healthier community.



Ethical Principles

Our commitment to health justice is deeply rooted in our ethical principles of:

- **Anti-racism** - Actively addressing perspectives, policies, and behaviors that perpetuate racism.
- **Civic Engagement** - Centering community voice in processes to promote quality of life.
- **Environmental Protection** - Preventing, mitigating and repairing harm to our environment.
- **Human Rights** - Upholding the value of individuals and communities, regardless of background.
- **Intersectionality** - Recognizing the interdependent and overlapping systems of oppression.
- **Solidarity** - Supporting efforts in our community that share our goals of health equity.

Integrating these ethical principals in our work is essential to creating equitable health outcomes. These ethical principles often intersect, and only by acknowledging and addressing these overlapping and compounding forms of discrimination will we be able to positively impact health of disproportionately impacted communities. By committing to illuminate the basic human rights connected to these ethical principles we will ensure that every individual has access to the resources and opportunities needed for a healthy life.

Theory of Change

Our theory of change outlines a comprehensive approach to achieving health justice through three main components. First, we aim to cultivate an internal culture and an external narrative centered on equity and health justice. This involves reshaping public discourse to highlight the importance of these values and embedding them into our organizational practices. Second, we focus on influencing and building systems and infrastructure that promote equity and health justice. This includes developing policies, practices, and frameworks that dismantle systemic barriers and create equitable opportunities for all. Third, we emphasize community engagement and action, promoting equity and health justice through genuine partnership and community ownership.

Commitments

To realize our vision of health justice we will focus on the following areas in which we will need to commit and invest additional resources.

- Building staff capacity to effectively engage in health justice and health equity work.
- Collecting, evaluating, and learning from a more robust data, monitoring, and evaluation system to effectively measure progress, learn and identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability.
- Increasing public transparency to foster trust and accountability within the community and create space for partnerships, conversation, and community action.
- Identifying and maximizing collaborative efforts with community which support community autonomy and participation; enhance quality, cultural appropriateness, and effectiveness of programs; and create more lasting change.

Conclusion

BCPH is steadfast in its mission to advance health justice and equity for everyone in our community. The core elements of our Health Justice framework - ethical principles, the theory of change, and commitments - are reflected and foundational throughout our strategic plan and will inform the investments into our strategic plan work. By upholding these principles, we will build a healthier more equitable Boulder County where all residents have the opportunity to thrive.

Who We Are and How We Work

Mission

Our mission captures the enduring purpose of our agency – why we exist as an agency.

At BCPH, our mission is to address social, economic, and environmental conditions to ensure that all people in Boulder County have the opportunity for a healthy life.

Vision

Our vision describes the desired future state that our agency is working to create – what we are working to accomplish.

At BCPH, we envision a Boulder County that is a socially just and inclusive community where physical and mental health, social well-being, and the environment are valued, supported, and accessible to all.

Values

Our values are the enduring beliefs for how we as an agency expect to operate and carry out our work – how we act.

At BCPH, we understand that we work for and are accountable to the public, we will model the following values in our interactions with the public, our partners, and one another. We believe that we as an agency must:

- Foster Trust
- Demonstrate Respect and Compassion
- Collaborate and Build Strong Teams
- Be Flexible, Creative, and Innovative
- Pursue and Support Personal and Professional Development
- Recognize Leadership in Everyone
- Promote Inclusion and Honor the Life Experiences of Others

As a local public health agency, BCPH is part of the broader Boulder County government serving communities within the county. As an integral part of the government system, the health department collaborates with numerous county departments and programs, as well as external partners, to support the health of the county. BCPH is governed by a five-member Board of Health (BOH), who are appointed by the Boulder County Board of County Commissioners. The BOH is responsible for assuring appropriate policy for BCPH, hiring and supervising the Boulder County Public Health Director, approving the department's budget, and providing oversight of agency operations.

The Public Health Director serves as the administrative and executive head of BCPH. BCPH is comprised of six divisions that house numerous programs serving the community and supporting the success of the agency. Learn more about [BCPH's programs and services](#)

Community Overview

Boulder County, located at the base of the foothills of the Colorado Rockies, is comprised of 10 municipalities as well as unincorporated areas that include both rural and mountain communities. Municipal residents account for 87% of the county's population, with 13% of residents living in unincorporated areas of the county¹.

Based on 2022 data, Boulder County is the ninth largest county within Colorado based on population size, with a total population of 327,422 individuals². Boulder County's total population has seen a slightly increase in the past decade. By 2030, Boulder County is projected to have a 28% increase in the 65-and-older population, while the under 18 age group is projected to decrease by just over 10%. The majority of Boulder County residents identify as non-Hispanic white (76%), with 14% of the population identifying as Hispanic or Latino³. The proportion of individuals identifying as Hispanic or Latino has doubled in the past 30 years and contributed to the increasing diversity within the county⁴.

1 Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation. (2021). Boulder County, Colorado – 2021 economic profile. https://www.metrodenver.org/sites/default/files/data_central/DB_comm_boulder%20county%20profile_Nov21.pdf

2 Colorado Department of Local Affairs State Demography Office. (n.d.). <https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/>

3 U.S. Census Bureau. (2022). 2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSD-P5Y2022.DP05?q=Boulder%20County,%20Colorado>

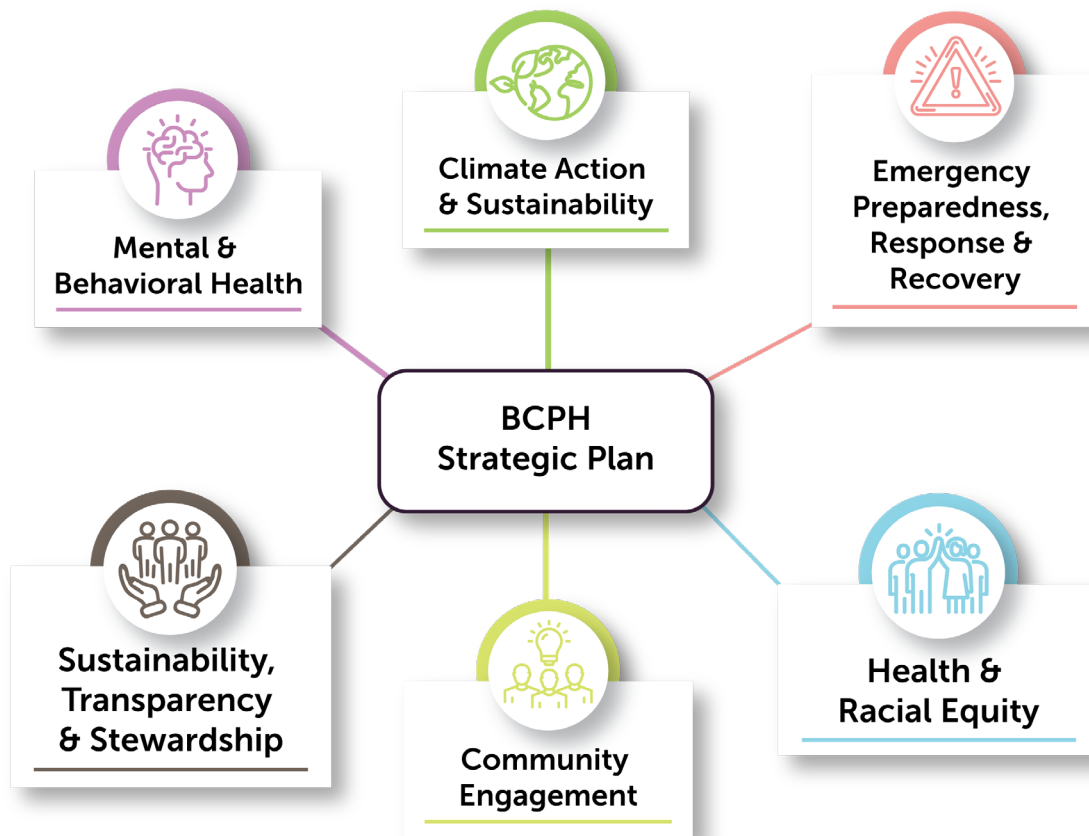
4 U.S. Census Bureau. (1990). 1990 Census of Population. <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1990/cp-2/cp-2-7.pdf>

Our 2024 - 2029 Strategic Plan

Planning Process Overview

The development of BCPH's 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan began by identifying six strategic priorities for the agency to focus on over the next five years. The priorities were selected based on a variety of factors, including the desire to build on progress from the previous strategic plan, current needs of the agency and community, and alignment with other initiatives occurring within Boulder County.

After priorities were identified, the agency initiated a comprehensive planning process to develop strategic goals, objectives, and activities. Workgroups were established for each strategic priority, comprised of BCPH staff with subject matter expertise in the priority areas. The workgroups developed goals, objectives, and activities for each priority, using existing plans and initiatives as a foundation when appropriate. BCPH staff provided input on the goals and objectives, specifically on how current programmatic efforts aligned with the priorities, considerations for implementation, and resources needed to successfully implement the strategic plan.



The first three priorities are externally focused and aim to support the Boulder County community by addressing mental and behavioral health needs; mitigating the impacts of climate change; and increasing the capacity of the agency and partners to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

The final three priorities are internally focused and aim to address the practices and infrastructure needed to best serve Boulder County. This includes centering health and racial equity in all our work; establishing practices to authentically engage with community to build trust, work together, and share power; and ensuring good governance of the agency through sustainability, transparency, and stewardship. It is expected that these internally focused priorities will be an on-going and evolving effort throughout the life of the strategic plan. Enhancing our internal infrastructure and policies in these areas will increase the impact of our external-facing priorities. As we strengthen internal capacity in these three critical priority areas, we will explore and expand opportunities to embed and operationalize this work in our external facing programs and with the community.

Strategic Priorities

Mental & Behavioral Health

Goal 1: Improve mental and behavioral health (MBH) in Boulder County by strengthening protective factors and building capacity to support well-being.

Objectives

- 1.1 Increase community understanding and capacity to improve MBH through technical assistance, training, and community education.
- 1.2 Develop and advocate for public health policy that improves MBH at the organizational, local, and state levels.
- 1.3 Increase social connectedness and strengthen social support systems for the Boulder County community to improve MBH.
- 1.4 Obtain sustainable and sufficient funding for prevention, early intervention, and harm reduction focused MBH activities.

Climate Action & Sustainability

Goal 2: Enhance Boulder County communities' resilience to effectively cope with the impacts of climate change by improving public health programs, prioritizing disproportionately impacted populations, and ensuring better preparedness and protection for local environments.

Objectives

- 2.1 Advance intersectional collaboration with Boulder County agencies and community organization to clarify BCPH's role in climate change.
- 2.2 Develop and implement BCPH's Climate Action Plan.

- 2.3 Ensure that those impacted the most by climate change in Boulder County are given the equitable resources to lead in the decision-making process for defining and implementing solutions.

Emergency Preparedness, Response, & Recovery

Goal 3: Ensure Boulder County residents and community partners are equitably supported in emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

Objectives

- 3.1 Build the internal infrastructure of BCPH by reconfiguring emergency response plans, policies, agency systems, and procedures to ensure BCPH has the resources and capacity in place to equitably and effectively prepare for, respond to, and recover from the significant public health components of emergencies and disasters.
- 3.2 Through a power sharing approach centered on health and racial equity, BCPH will strive to provide the resources, funding, and support to enable the capacity building of community partners and the community to recognize and reduce their risk, prepare for, respond to, and recover from the significant public health components of emergencies and disasters. BCPH will take the following actions to seek to achieve community power building: Foster diverse community partnerships, particularly those that work with and represent priority populations, and championing transformative change.

Health & Racial Equity

Goal 4: BCPH institutionalizes the infrastructure, knowledge, culture, and resources for staff to effectively plan and implement HRE improvements in the community.

Objectives

- 4.1 Purposefully advance inclusiveness, support healing spaces for staff, and ensure accountability for behaviors that advance a healthy, anti-oppressive organizational culture.
- 4.2 Advance a human resource practice that increases diversity and inclusion within our agency, ensures BCPH is a supportive environment, and creates opportunities for career advancement.
- 4.3 Have ongoing accessible opportunities for staff to learn and grow their health and racial equity knowledge, competency, and skills to be applied in their everyday work.
- 4.4 Have a process to ensure internal and external policies, procedures, and practices are anti-racist and pro-equity.

Community Engagement

Goal 5: BCPH effectively engages with the public and community partners to create trust and to incorporate community and partner priorities into planning and interventions.

Objectives

- 5.1 Improve our policies, structures, and methods to ensure sustainable, ethical, and impactful health initiatives led by the community. This involves working closely with the public and community partners to drive discussions, plans, and policies on key issues, with the goal of aligning our agency's priorities with those of our community to effect positive health changes in Boulder County.
- 5.2 Reinvigorate public understanding, trust, and support for Public Health values and initiatives.

Sustainability, Transparency, & Stewardship

Goal 6: BCPH has infrastructure, culture, and practices to support good governance through sustainability, transparency, and stewardship of resources.

Objectives

- 6.1 Optimize and streamline agency administrative systems and processes.
- 6.2 Establish and strengthen systems and processes to identify, secure, maintain, and effectively allocate resources to support agency needs and strategic priorities.
- 6.3 Increase transparency around agency operations and governance to support accountability with the Boulder County community, partners, and BCPH staff.
- 6.4 Strategically support the development of a thriving workforce culture.

Monitoring, Evaluation, & Learning

To evaluate progress on the strategic goals, objectives and activities, BCPH will follow a monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plan. This plan outlines the process of collecting regular progress updates on the objectives and activities; identifying successes, challenges, and opportunities for improvement; and sharing progress with stakeholders. Understanding that there are many external factors that may influence the strategic plan over the next five years, following this MEL plan will be an important component to allow us to adapt and use data to drive decision-making.

Acknowledgements

Creating a thoughtful, visionary plan is only achieved through the collaboration and dedication of many. Boulder County Public Health (BCPH) would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the development of this strategic plan:

- BCPH staff for their expertise, vision, and time in developing this plan. Additionally, we would like to thank BCPH staff who developed and implemented previous agency strategic plans, as they created the foundation upon which this strategic plan was built.
- Boulder County Public Health Board of Health for their leadership and support throughout this planning process.
- Boulder County sister agencies, community organizations, and community members who provided invaluable input leading to the development of BCPH's 2024 -2029 strategic priorities, goals, and objectives.

Learn more about BCPH's five-year vision in the full version of BCPH's 2024 – 2029 Strategic Plan.