

# 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment



## **BIG SANDY, MONTANA**

Prepared by: Big Sandy Medical Center



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**CHNA and CHIP for media distribution**

## Introduction

Big Sandy Medical Center (BSMC) is a 25 bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH) and Rural Health Clinic (RHC) located in the city of Big Sandy, Montana. Its primary service area is northern Chouteau County with Big Sandy at the center. Its secondary service areas include the southern half of Chouteau County, the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation 10 miles north of Big Sandy and the larger community of Havre, Montana, approximately 35 miles north of Big Sandy.

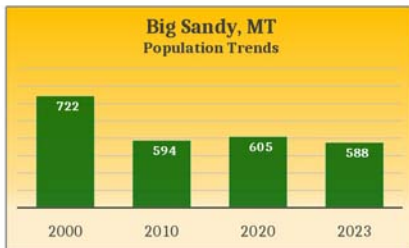
Southern Chouteau County is primarily served by Benefis Missouri River Medical Center in Fort Benton, approximately 38 miles from Big Sandy. To the north in the bordering Hill County, Northern Montana Hospital in Havre is the primary provider of health services. In addition, Rocky Boy Indian Reservation has a very robust Federally Qualified Health Clinic serving the local Native American population.

With only 5,800 people spread over 3,997 sq. miles, Chouteau County is federally designated as Frontier (six or less people per square mile) by the US Department of Health and Human Services. For further demographic, socioeconomic and other related county and state data, please see Appendix C to review the Secondary Data Analysis.

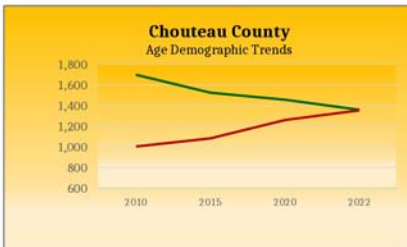
Big Sandy is a farm and ranch community in the heart of the famous Golden Triangle, known for its high-quality wheat production. Many of the farms and ranches are family-owned and have been passed down from generation to generation, however, some of the largest land owners are corporations and Hutterite colonies.



After experiencing a significant drop in population between 2000 and 2010, the population of Big Sandy has since stabilized at around 600 people within the city boundaries and an estimated 600 more scattered around a 30-mile radius of town. BSMC and the school district are the largest employers.



As with many rural farming communities, the population of children and youth are declining at the same time the population of 65+ is growing. During this period, the number of households have remained relatively constant with 2,196 in 2012 and 2,184 in 2022. This would indicate family sizes are decreasing, which antidotally is confirmed by the old-timers.



BSMC offers a continuum of hospital services including acute inpatient, skilled swing bed and long-term swing bed. Most common patient encounters, however, come through either the 24/7 emergency room or the Monday through Friday clinic. Ancillary services of x-ray and lab provide diagnostic testing to support the Provider's evaluations.



Front of Hospital



Outside Patio enjoyed by long-term patients

BSMC staffs its clinic, ER and hospital with Physician Assistants and/or Nurse Practitioners all of which are overseen by a physician medical director.

## Health Assessment Process

The primary method of obtaining the communities perceptions of local healthcare and needed services was through paper surveys. The surveys were divided up into three groups. One survey was customized for the students of Big Sandy High School. Another survey was customized to address the more elderly population via a focus group meeting at the Senior's Center. The remaining survey was a general survey for all adult community members.

Hospital staff input was solicited for each of the three survey types to ensure questions were written to reflect the local culture and customs.

## Survey Methodology

Based on the high costs and low return rates on mailed out surveys conducted in past CHNAs, it was decided to make the paper surveys available in town at establishments frequented by the locals. This included the hospital, grocery store, library, post office, seniors center and two bars. Unique to the survey process was providing a customized survey for all high school students to complete while in the classroom. This age group offered its valuable perceptions of the community health issues and hopes for the future.

Because of the high number of residents over the age of 65, a special focus group meeting was conducted at the Senior's Center which included completing the survey followed by an open discussion time.

The community survey distributions started in January of 2024 and closed in mid-February allowing ample time for residents to complete the survey.

This report will show the results of the survey in both narrative and chart formats. Copies of the survey instruments are included at the end of this report (Appendix E.). The narrative report touches on the highlights while the charts present data for virtually every question asked.

The number of completed surveys by survey type are shown below:

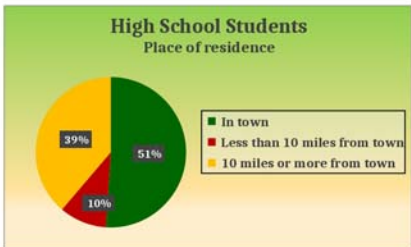
• High School students	49
• Senior Center focus group	15
• General public	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>

## Survey Respondent Demographics

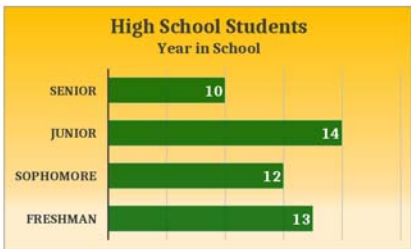
The survey respondent demographics are divided into two groups:

1. High School Students
2. General Public including the Senior's Center participants

From the graph below, nearly 40% of high school students live more than 10 miles from Big Sandy. This can make it impractical at times to make the long trip into town for preventative health care services.

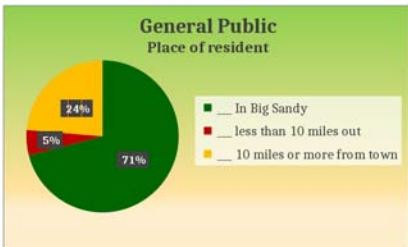


The survey captured a good mix of students from each Class.

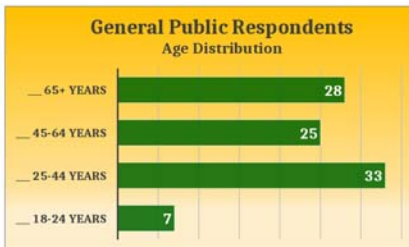


In addition, the gender of the students was split evenly: 51% M, 49% F

The other demographic group surveyed was the general public with key findings shown below in graph form. The graph below indicates 71% of respondents live within the town of Big Sandy.

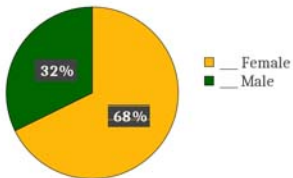


The survey captured a good cross-section of age categories as shown below from oldest to youngest with the least responses from the 18-24 age group.

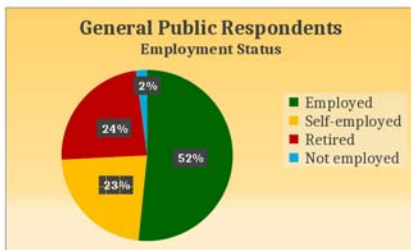


It is not uncommon to have health surveys completed by more women than men for a variety of reasons, the biggest being women tend to utilize health services more than men.

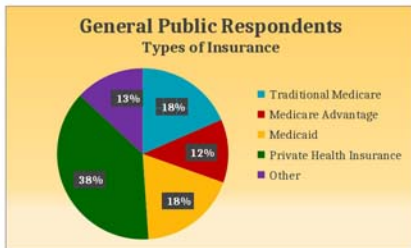
### General Public Respondents Gender Split



74% of respondents indicated they are employed or self-employed. Another 24% stated they are retired.



When asked about insurance coverage, 38% said they had private insurance; 31% said Medicare or Medicare Advantage; 18% had Medicaid and 13% stated they had other or no insurance coverage.



In summary, the high school and general public surveys captured a broad spectrum of community members from young to old, those living in town and out, employed and retired, and insured with Medicare, Medicaid or private insurance.



Bears Paw Mountains 15 miles outside Big Sandy

# SURVEY RESULTS

## Snapshot

### High School:

Survey respondent's answers to the following questions:

**What are the three (3) most important factors for a healthy community?**

Healthy Community	#	% of Total	Rank
Low crime/safe neighborhoods	33	67%	1
Good healthcare services	31	63%	2
Clean environment	21	43%	3
Access to affordable healthy foods	16	33%	4
Quality education	11	22%	5
Indoor exercise	10	20%	6

Two-thirds of respondents said "low crime" was the number 1 factor for having a healthy community. "Good healthcare" was number two and a "clean environment" came in third. One-third of respondents said access to healthy foods was important. Other important factors were quality education and indoor exercise.

### What are the top three (3) risky behaviors of the High School students?

Risky Behaviors	#	% of Total	Rank
Alcohol abuse	31	63%	1
Untreated mental health problems	26	53%	2
Drug abuse	20	41%	3
Overuse of social media	19	39%	4
Poor eating habits	12	24%	5
Unprotected sex	12	24%	6
Reckless driving	11	22%	7

Almost two-thirds of respondents said alcohol abuse was the number 1 risky behavior exhibited by Big Sandy high school students. Just over half said untreated mental health problems, making it the second most risky behavior and another 41% said drug abuse. Other risky behaviors identified included overuse of social media (39%), poor eating habits (24%), unprotected sex (24%) and reckless driving (22%).

#### General Public:

When the general public respondents were asked the same questions, here's how they answered:

Healthy Community	#	% of Total	Rank
Good healthcare services	48	52%	1
Good place to raise kids	47	51%	2
Quality education	38	41%	3
Low crime/safe neighborhoods	37	40%	4
Clean environment	27	29%	5
Affordable housing	22	24%	6

Over half of respondents said both "good healthcare service" and "good place to raise kids" were the most important factors to a healthy community.

"Quality education" and "low crime" were nearly tied as the next most important factor followed by a "clean environment" and "affordable housing."

Risky Behaviors	#	% of Total	Rank
Alcohol abuse	76	82%	1
Being overweight *	42	45%	2
Avoiding preventative care	33	35%	3
Poor eating habits *	32	34%	4
Drug abuse	29	31%	5
Lack of exercise *	27	29%	6

Alcohol abuse was the dominant number one risky behavior at 82%. This was also the number one risky behavior identified by the high school students with 63% of respondents selecting this as their first choice.

\* Being overweight, poor eating habits and lack of exercise are all related and if combined would rank as the solid #2 most risky behaviors among Big Sandy adults. This would move "drug abuse" to the number 4 ranking.

The General Public survey also asked the question:

**What health issues have the greatest overall impact on Big Sandy's community health?** Here's the response.

Community Health Issues	#	% of Total	Rank
Aging issues - dementia, etc.	59	63%	1
Cancer	42	45%	2
Mental health	40	43%	3
Heart-disease and stroke	34	37%	4
Obesity	32	34%	5
High blood pressure	29	31%	6

As the proportion of Big Sandy's older adult population grows, so do the concerns over aging issues and increased risk of cancer. Aging issues mostly centered around Dementia and Alzheimer's. Sometimes focusing on these concerns too much can cause an increase in anxiety and/or depression and may be a contributing factor to mental health being ranked as number three.

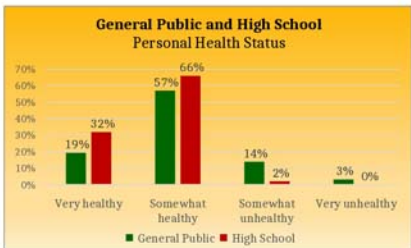
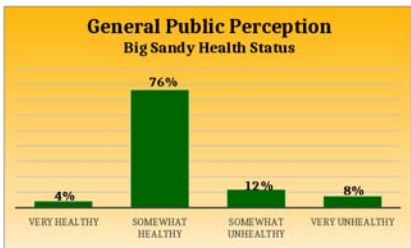
Other major community health issues identified by respondents included heart disease, stroke, obesity and hypertension.

## Overall Community and Personal Health Status Perceptions

The survey respondents were asked about their overall perception of the health of the community and of themselves personally. Here's the results.

### How would you rate the overall health of the Big Sandy community?

Note: Only the General Public survey asked this question



From the above responses, 80% of the general public respondents perceive the community being somewhat to very healthy. This is similar to their own health status ranking of 76%, although more see themselves as very healthy. 98% of high school students believe they are either somewhat healthy or very healthy.

## Quality of Life

The remaining questions in the survey all related to quality of life in Big Sandy. The respondents were asked to rate their answer from 1-5 as follows:

- 1. Strong No    2. No    3. Neutral    4. Yes    5. Strong Yes**

The questions are listed below along with weighted average of the overall rating. NA indicates the question was not asked on the survey. The first question is an overall rating of the quality of life in Big Sandy followed by the remainder of questions listed from the highest to lowest ranking.

	<u>General</u>	<u>High School</u>
<b>Are you satisfied with the overall quality of life in the Big Sandy community?</b>	<b>3.95</b>	<b>3.58</b>
Is our community a good place to raise children?	4.27	NA
Is Big Sandy a safe place to live?	4.27	4.30
Is our community a good place to grow up?	NA	3.93
Is our community a good place to grow old?	3.90	NA
Do you believe you have adequate access to healthcare when you need it?	3.82	NA
Are you satisfied with the health care services in the Big Sandy Community?	3.67	NA
Do all individuals and groups have the opportunity to contribute to and participate in our community's quality of life?	3.60	NA
Are there networks of support for individuals and families during times of stress and need?	3.45	3.33

	<u>General</u>	<u>High School</u>
Do all residents perceive that they – individually and collectively – can make the Big Sandy community a better place to live?	3.42	NA
Is our community working together to achieve shared goals?	3.36	3.37
Is there a sufficient number of health and social services in our community?	3.22	NA
Are there economic opportunities in our community? (jobs / businesses)	2.83	2.64

Based on these rankings, most respondents from the general public answered Yes to being overall satisfied with the quality of life in Big Sandy. The High School students ranked this somewhat lower, hovering between Neutral and Yes.

The highest rankings centered around the sense of Big Sandy being a safe and good place to live, raise children, grow up and grow old.

In regards to access and satisfaction with the healthcare services in Big Sandy, the rankings leaned toward a Yes score, yet when asked about the sufficiency of health and social services it leaned towards a Neutral.

When asked questions about community support, participation and unity, The answers ranged from 3.36 to 3.60 indicating a leaning toward Yes with some lower scores bringing the average down.

Not surprising to those who live in Big Sandy, the public respondents and high school student's perception of there being good jobs and business opportunities in Big Sandy ranked the lowest of all answers. With a small, aging population base, it will be challenging to figure out ways to grow the local economy that provides good quality, high paying jobs.

The High School survey included an open-ended question for students to provide their opinion to the question below:

**If you could change or add one thing to help High School students get/stay healthy, what would it be and why?**

<b>FOOD</b>
Serve beef for lunch
Give healthier food at lunch
Healthier lunch options that taste good
Check the milk dates to make sure they're not expired
Require vegetables
Make the lunch healthier
Drink lots of water
<b>EXERCISE and ACTIVITIES</b>
Weight lifting
Eat healthy, play sports or exercise outside of school
To take gym as much as possible
Lifting in the mornings with Kurt
Add an open gym to keep people fit
Exercise program
Add a recreation center for kids to stay active physically and mentally
Add more activities for teenagers because all there are is bars here
Encourage being outside doing activities
Less time on-line, more time outside in the dirt
Have more things to do
Adding more activities
Would add walking and biking trails
A movie theater
<b>MENTAL HEALTH</b>
Pay attention to suicide prevention all year round (not just Suicide Prevention Month)
A meditation class to help us focus
A mind exercise class learning about health and doing mindful health practices
Start focusing on yourself, look after yourself
Just don't mess up your life
Make sure everyone has access to a mental health facility
Daily affirmations to help keep positive minds

**ADDRESSING RISKY BEHAVIORS**

Being more educated on risky behaviors and how to keep the community healthy

Add a TV (ad) about staying healthy and never give up

Access to health resources

Don't do drugs

Control student access to alcohol

Do frequent drug tests on all students

Make them attend school

Make wise decisions

**OTHER**

Do eye checks at school

Start school an hour later

Access to more food for the less fortunate

To be able to practice even though your late

Another PE/Health option for the older kids instead of 4th period

Not to have to come to school

The General Public survey also included an open-ended question for providing their opinion on the following question:

**In your opinion, if there is one thing that should be a top priority for a healthy community, what should it be:**

<b>EXERCISE AND NUTRITION</b>
Access to a fitness facility
A community gym (2)
Exercise
Physical activity
Walking paths around town
Nutrition
Sidewalks
More education on how to eat healthy
<b>SPIRITUAL AND COMMUNITY HEALTH</b>
Being an active participating member of one of the churches, attending services every Sunday, God in our schools and hospitals
Jesus is the only answer
Caring about each other
Being a community
Clean up the community
More opportunities/events for people of all ages to bring everyone together and feel more like a community
Have a good thrift store
<b>ADDRESSING RISKY BEHAVIORS</b>
Alcohol abuse
Decrease use of poisons in homes and agriculture
Activities year round for kids, young adults and adults that doesn't include alcohol and food
No smoking
Three bars in one little town can't be good
The dangers of substance abuse
A place for kids to go
<b>HEALTH</b>
Wellness and preventative healthcare
Healthy drinking water
Access to good healthcare (x3)
Pediatrics, hospice, heart and cancer care

Preventative medicine
Affordable health care insurance coverage
Affordability of services
Mental health and activities to move our body (x2)
<b>EDUCATION</b>
Quality education for the future of students
Better education in the schools
<b>Senior Center comments below</b>
Good medical center
Specialists coming to our community
Communications with doctor and staff
EMS and Fire Protection
Place to exercise
Better health services -more doctors available when needed
Privacy and confidentiality in the clinic
<b>Employee Comments below</b>
Quality healthcare with welcoming staff and a high level of confidentiality
Community member engagement in the community, well-being as a whole, joining all forces for a common goal
A good school, good morals and a good work ethic
Addition of services and providers
Education - preventative care, chronic conditions, health insurance
Don't judge, just love each other and be kind
Preventative Care
Healthy Activities for the community

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

In a small town, everyone is a key informant. From high school students to church ministers, from bar owners to the grocery store clerks. Everyone has their own experiences and outcomes that make their story unique. Although there were many informal "interviews" with these "key informants", the best way to hear their stories and opinions was by encouraging them to complete the surveys, which most did.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this little town of Big Sandy, surrounded by wheat fields and cattle ranches, is a community filled with caring, kind and generous people. And for nearly 60 years, the community has rallied around its hospital and supported its efforts to grow and meet the primary health needs of its residents. And often you can hear it said in town, "the hospital was built by the community for the community".

As the primary local steward of healthcare resources and services, Big Sandy Medical Center strives to understand and meet the community health needs as best it can within its limited resources. Every three (3) years it takes the pulse of the community and assesses the high priority needs of the community identified through surveys and interviews. What did it find this time around?

Hands down, the vast majority of survey respondents believe Big Sandy is a great place to raise kids, to grow up and grow old in a safe environment. Yet most also said it's difficult to find a living wage job or business opportunity to support a family. Many see affordable housing as a problem as well as access to affordable healthy foods.

When asked about the behind-the-scene risky behaviors often confronting the community, alcohol and drug abuse rated in the top three along with mental health concerns. Another major concern raised was centered around diet and exercise with many stating there is no indoor place to exercise and very limited options for affordable healthy foods in town. As with many small towns, Big Sandy's only eating-out options are bars offering up amazingly delicious fried foods loaded with carbs, fats, and sugars.

From a mental health perspective, many of these unhealthy behaviors are coping mechanisms for dealing with much deeper and personal worries. The stress among family farmers and ranchers has increased significantly in the past several years due to increased financial pressures, changes in weather patterns and overwhelming regulations. Although, BSMC cannot do much to change those factors, there are things it can do to offer healthier options for coping. These will be spelled out in more detail in the Community Health Improvement Plan.

On a final note, as the demographics continue to change in Big Sandy, with more of the population being made up of seniors 65 and older, it's important for Big Sandy Medical Center to connect this cohort of residents to services and education that address their biggest concerns; that being aging issues, cancer and mental health.

### **PRIORITIZATION OF HEALTH NEEDS**

From the surveys, interviews and demographic data, a few key priorities have emerged for BSMC to consider as it develops its Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP):

- Offering healthy alternative options for coping with stress. This may include creating access to nutrient-dense affordable foods, wellness and exercise programs, and mental health services.
- Provide education and prevention strategies customized for each major age group in the community based on their needs and concerns.
- Explore opportunities to identify and support the development of senior services that address the aging issues of growing old.

## AVAILABLE COMMUNITY RESOURCES

In prioritizing the health needs of the community, it's important to identify potential community partners and resources in which to assist with meeting these needs. The list below is a good start but not exhaustive and grow with time.

- **Chouteau County Health Department** offers a variety of services to the community including child/adult immunizations, disease surveillance, public health emergency preparedness and referrals for care or resource.
- **Big Sandy School District** offers adolescent counseling services
- **Big Sandy Senior Center** offers low-cost lunches
- **Montana Healthcare Foundation** offers a number of grant funded programs including integrated behavior health, Montana healthy communities, and housing is healthcare
- **Montana Office of Rural Health (MORH)** provides technical assistance to rural health systems and organizations
- **Montana Hospital Association (MHA)** offers networking, education, technical and financial support to Critical Access Hospitals and Rural Health Clinics
- **Quinn Research Institute**, Big Sandy, offers expertise and assistance on growing nutrient-dense, organic fruits, vegetables and grains.

## EVALUATION OF PREVIOUS CHNA AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In the prior Community Health Needs Assessment conducted in early 2021, some of the same healthcare needs identified then were again identified in this year's CHNA. Listed below were the top eight (8) needs identified through a focus group session:

- Education
- Mental Health services
- Additional services offered at BSMC
- Physical Activity
- Aging Services
- Chronic disease management
- Daycare
- Understanding the cancer prevalence in the community

Of those listed above, the group selected the top two priorities as follows:

- **Education and outreach** – community-wide effort
  - One specific education program - Diabetes Mgmt. Program
- **Marketing** BSMC's current services
  - Exploring other services BSMC can provide

With these top priorities selected, BSMC developed an implementation plan focusing on the following objectives:

- 1. Procure a market analysis**
  - Current market assessment
  - Demand modeling of service gaps
- 2. Develop a Diabetes Management Program**
- 3. Create and dispense an updated CHNA Survey Tool to residents in primary and secondary service areas**
  - Mail to all residents
  - Add an Online platform
  - Post on BSMC's website

The **first objective** of conducting a market analysis was met in mid-May of 2021 and identified the need to add CT services to BSMC imaging department. A CT Scanner was purchased with COVID funds and remodeling is currently underway to create optimal space for its installation and use and is scheduled for completion in December of 2024.

The **second objective** was met in July of 2022 when the Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialists (ADCES) certified the BSMC Diabetes Education Program as meeting the National Standards for Diabetes Self-Management Education.

The **third objective** was not addressed.

# FY25-FY27

## COMMUNITY HEALTH IMPROVEMENT PLAN

A Community Health Improvement Plan, also known as **CHIP**, is in response to the findings of the 2024 Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) and the selected areas of focus for the next 3 fiscal years.

The selected areas of focus from the 2024 CHNA (pg. 23) are as follows:

- Offering healthy alternative options for coping with stress. This may include creating access to nutrient-dense affordable foods, wellness and exercise programs, and mental health services.
- Provide education and prevention strategies customized by major age groups in the community based on their needs and concerns.
- Explore opportunities to identify and support the development of senior services that address the aging issues of growing old.

Below are strategies selected for each focus area:

### Offering healthy alternative options for coping with stress:

Access to Healthy Foods	Year	Potential Partners
Look at feasibility of constructing a community greenhouse for growing nutrient-dense food or purchasing smaller home-based greenhouses	Year 1	Quinn Research Institute MSU - Bozeman
Identify cost projections and potential funding sources	Year 1 and 2	MT Healthcare Foundation MT Farmers Union
If feasible, apply for grants to fund the selected project(s)	Year 2 and 3	Master Gardeners Quinn Research Institute Grantor(s)
If funded, implement selected project(s)	Year 3	Quinn Research Institute Master Gardeners

<b>Wellness and Exercise</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
Redesign Wellness Center for PT patient privacy as well as for opening the Center and golf simulator to the community	Year 1	Student golf team
Recruit Wellness Coordinator for Center	Year 1	Community
Develop wellness and exercise programs for all age categories	Year 1, 2 and 3	Wellness Coordinator

<b>Mental Health Services</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
Look at financial and clinical feasibility of implementing integrated behavioral health	Year 1	MT Healthcare Foundation
If feasible, hire LCSW as care management coordinator and provider	Year 1	MT Healthcare Foundation
Expand tele-psych services to surrounding areas	Year 2 and 3	Schools, clinics, patients

**Providing education and prevention strategies based on age, needs and concerns:**

<b>Education and Prevention – Youth</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
Ensure Big Sandy youth are getting education and prevention on alcohol and drug abuse	Year 1, 2 and 3	Support school programs
Conduct at least 2 education and prevention community outreach events to the senior population in regards to aging issues	Year 1, 2 and 3	Community experts State agencies Research organizations

**Explore opportunities for developing other senior services:**

<b>Senior services for aging population</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Potential Partners</b>
Explore technologies for assisting seniors in their homes with age-related issues	Year 1, 2 and 3	Senior-focused companies Community seniors/family Grantors