Benefis
HEALTH SYSTEM

2026-2028

Community Health Implementation Plan

Community Health Implementation Plan (CHIP)

Benefis Health System (Benefis or the Health System) serves approximately 230,000 residents in a vast, 14-county region in Montana with a mission to provide excellent care for all, healing body, mind, and spirit. Benefis was founded in 1996 when two hospitals combined to form a not-for-profit health system with the goal of providing excellent care to all in need. Benefis' roots trace back more than 130 years, but patients expect and deserve state-of-the-art medical care. Benefis continues to prioritize world-class facilities, technology, and, most of all, high-quality care.

Organized as a non-profit health system, Benefis conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) in 2025 to comply with the requirements imposed by IRC Section 501(r) as an organization described in Section 501(c)(3). Benefis identified key community health priority areas through its 2025 CHNA process. The complete findings from this CHNA process can be found on the Benefis website.

As a follow-up to the CHNA process, Benefis developed a CHIP to address the most pressing health challenges in the region. These focus areas were selected because (1) they were seen to align with the Benefis clinical mission and (2) Benefis has resources available to carry out an action plan for each. This document outlines plans for Benefis to support specific community benefit efforts as part of a larger community-wide plan. Details of the plan are discussed in this document.

Priority #1: Access to Care

Description of Community Need and Vision

Access to care emerged as a significant health need within the community throughout the CHNA process. Benefis is committed to strengthening Cascade County's ability to obtain timely medical, dental, and mental health services. Access to healthcare means that individuals can receive the care they need without unnecessary obstacles, yet factors such as travel distance, time limitations, and financial challenges can hinder this access and create disparities in health outcomes. Benefis recognizes that the limited availability of free and reduced-cost services further prevents many residents from obtaining essential care. Through outreach efforts and improved connections to existing resources, Benefis strives to ensure that more community members can access affordable, timely healthcare and ultimately experience better overall health.

Expanding Service Offerings and Investing in Infrastructure

Benefis is investing in facilities to expand patient access and improve patient experience. One example is the Goodnow Healthy Aging Center, which is on track to open in the fall of 2026. This dedicated 15,000-square-foot outpatient clinic will address issues of nutrition, medication, cognitive health, and mobility with dedicated specialists focusing on care gaps in prevention and adaptations. It will be less intimidating for older patients to navigate, as well as simplify and improve their care. The center is intended to drive improved health status and reduce the incidence of acute illness in our aging population by addressing issues more proactively.

> By 2030, 25% of Montana's population will be 65 and older. To help keep this population healthy, Benefis brought on two physicians for the center in 2025: Dana Morgan, MD, who practices functional medicine, and Kyra Carpenter, DO, a geriatrician.
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> Functional medicine is a holistic approach to medicine, focusing on the root of issues rather than symptom management. Dr. Morgan has already begun seeing many women in their 30s to 50s who are struggling to sleep, more anxious and irritable, and are experiencing brain fog. Hormone replacement therapy often can help these women better navigate the aging process. Dr. Carpenter's background in geriatric medicine make her well-equipped to review complex family histories and discuss patient concerns surrounding long-term health status.

Close to Benefis' East Campus, we are working on plans to turn the former Poor Clares of Montana monastery and surrounding land into a special memory care campus where residents have more freedom to move around inside and outside and feel like they are part of a small village. Research shows such a model slows the progression of dementia, decreases agitation, and improves quality of life.

A new urgent care location in Lewistown opened in 2025, bringing same-day care closer to home. Providers have also recently begun traveling to Lewistown to offer outreach services, including joint replacement consultations and dermatology exams. We expect to continue expanding our outreach opportunities there.

Benefis is also focused on making improvements to our existing spaces to reduce wait times, expand offerings, and improve patient experiences while giving new life to our buildings that otherwise would be nearing the end of their lifespan.

In 2025, we renovated and expanded our Endoscopy Laboratory, which allowed a record number of patients to quickly receive screening and diagnostic procedures. In early 2026, we opened a newly renovated and expanded cardiovascular clinic in one of our medical office buildings. The remodeled location is designed to accommodate our expanding state-of-the-art treatment offerings while putting our treatments under one roof to better serve patients. Our cardiac rehab team will soon be moving over to the building as well.

In 2023, Benefis was the first in the world to use the ARTIS icono angiography system in our new hybrid cardiac catheterization lab. Now in 2026, we are looking to build out a third cath lab to increase capacity and access.

Extensive work to make major improvements to the main hub of our Great Falls campus began in 2024 with the North Tower renovation project. It's been 60 years since the North Tower was built, and healthcare has changed a lot in those six decades. The improvements will help us continue to provide the latest in cutting-edge technology and meet inpatient demand in the area. Our surgical waiting area was also refreshed in 2025 to provide a private space for families waiting for loved ones to come out of surgery, and our main laboratory has been expanded to accommodate a new automation system that will reduce the number of tests that must be sent out to other facilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed emergency medicine processes, and work is underway to bring the Benefis Emergency Department more in line with these new protocols. The revised waiting space will allow for a workflow that supports a more effective triage process for those experiencing an emergency.

We're seeing the number of patients coming to Sletten Cancer Institute continue to grow as we wrapped up our revisioning project. In addition to an expanded infusion suite and pharmacy, we also established a teaching kitchen, a genetic counseling suite, a new salon, a bigger lab, new offices and exam rooms, and other reconfigurations. Currently, we are looking at adding a full-body MRI scanner to the center to help more proactively identify cancers.

Increasing the Number of Employed Providers

The number of providers practicing at Benefis has been steadily increasing since 2008. The system saw an increase of 102 providers between 2022 and the end of 2025. This includes providers from a variety of specialties, including surgical specialties, who travel across the Benefis service area to provide care for patients throughout the region. Heavy growth has occurred and continues in the areas of cardiology, gastroenterology, family medicine, and geriatrics.

The Benefis Spine Institute was established within Benefis' Orthopedic Center of Montana in late 2024. Led by Anthony Russo, MD, a board-certified orthopedic surgeon with more than 20 years of experience treating complex issues with the cervical, thoracic, and lumbar spine, the Benefis Spine Institute provides comprehensive care, treating degenerative conditions, deformities, and traumatic injuries. The team includes five providers who treat patients in both Great Falls and Helena.

Apprenticeship Innovation

Increasing access to medical care requires a larger pool of staff working in specialized clinical positions across the system. Through expanded efforts by the Department of Labor and our educational partners, Benefis has launched an apprenticeship program to directly address the persistent healthcare workforce shortage. In 2026, Benefis will begin offering apprenticeships in five roles with plans to expand in the future. The five roles are: surgical technologist, radiologic technologist, respiratory therapist, medical laboratory technician, and certified medical

assistant. While taking classes, apprentices work at Benefis in their chosen field. The state program provides oversight and coordination for Benefis and the students. Apprentices finish the program fully licensed and certified.

Residency Program and Medical Student Clinical Training

On July 1, 2025, Benefis became a teaching hospital and welcomed the first group of 10 resident physicians to our internal medicine residency program. These medical school graduates continue their hands-on training at Benefis for three years before either beginning their own practices or continuing in a residency for a specialty such as cardiology. The residents divide their time between the clinic and the hospital, where they work alongside hospitalists, taking care of patients and exploring specialties. This program has already begun increasing patient access to primary care services in Great Falls, and we expect that to continue into 2027 as the program sees year-over-year growth in the number of residents.

The inaugural class at the Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine Montana began their studies in August 2023. It was the official start of a partnership with Benefis and a crucial step in establishing Benefis' role as a teaching hospital. Those students began clinical rotations across Benefis in 2025 during their third year of medical school. Students transition from learning about medicine in books to learning to care for real patients, all while learning the culture of Benefis. It's an experience that can inspire students to continue on to the internal medicine residency program at Benefis or practice a different specialty here when they complete their training.

Epic and Artificial Intelligence

Benefis recently made a significant investment in Epic, an electronic medical record system that helps streamline access, connects patients and doctors with other health systems, and improves efficiency. Improved "healthcare intelligence" is the latest focus in clinical documentation, revenue cycle management, patient-facing chats, and data analysis.

Together, these features save providers time so they can see more patients in a day. That means shorter wait times and better access to those depending on us for care. Epic's clinical indicator tools help people get the right care more quickly, eliminating unnecessary visits and saving patients' money. In addition, Epic's reminder tools are also helping reduce no-show rates, and they have tools that facilitate quickly back-filling last-minute openings.

To help prepare patients for when they leave the hospital, Benefis is using a set of discharge planning tools to help streamline tasks and increase transparency. Soon, AI tools will pull together data to provide clinicians with summarized patient stories before they round and create end-of-shift care plan notes to reduce nurses' documentation loads. AI that will prepare draft correspondence regarding denial appeal letters to improve the odds of obtaining coverage for patients is also in the works. A pilot group of providers is testing AI ambient listening technology to quickly produce comprehensive and accurate clinical notes.

Benefis is utilizing Epic for patient education and awareness through the MyChart Campaigns tool. The first successful use of this tool was during Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October. A mammography campaign targeted women who were overdue for a mammogram. Patients who had a Benefis Women's Health provider could schedule a mammogram directly from the message they received. In addition, a more generic Breast Cancer Awareness month message went out to female patients over the age of 40 about the importance of scheduling a screening mammogram. The campaign has been sent to more than 8,500 women, and 317 women scheduled their mammograms through the campaign. Benefis is continuing to build on this success with a MyChart campaign for

Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month and a message about the importance of scheduling a colonoscopy. Future campaigns will be used to educate and re-engage patients with screenings and important healthcare information.

Ensemble Health Partners (Ensemble)

Benefis began using Ensemble to oversee revenue cycle operations in the third quarter of 2025. Ensemble is an industry-leading innovator in revenue cycle management, partnering with more than 380 hospitals and 7,000 healthcare providers across the U.S. to improve financial outcomes and patient experiences. Ensemble has a proven track record of providing remarkable results and a seamless financial experience for health systems and patients across the country through a combination of innovative technologies and exceptional operators.

With insurance companies increasingly denying claims, Ensemble's facilitating of preauthorization is expected to significantly reduce denied claims. From front-end staff training to smoother pre-access processes for patients, the new standards implemented by Ensemble will reduce the occurrence of services being cancelled or delayed due to denials.

This change allows Benefis to leverage the technology and proven practices developed at Ensemble to streamline and improve the patient experience when it comes to billing. This, combined with convenient tools built into Epic's MyChart, make paying a bill easier, and the charges more transparent. Patients can now apply for financial assistance directly through the patient portal, MyChart.

Priority #2: Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Description of Community Need and Vision

Through the CHNA process, education and preventative care were identified as needs in the community. Benefis recognizes that education and preventative care in key health areas such as alcohol and substance abuse are essential to promoting a healthier community. Combined with local community organizations, Benefis offers health education and resources to schools and community families. We also leverage social media platforms to make available health resources more widely known to community members, regardless of age, to reduce the number of youths and adults using and abusing alcohol, tobacco, and other substances.

Alliance for Youth Partnership

Benefis provides financial support for Alliance for Youth programs that focus on preventing underage drinking and drug use while promoting mental and emotional health, reducing juvenile violence and school dropouts, and addressing early childhood trauma.

ReStart Program

Benefis provides financial support to Alliance for Youth's ReStart Program, a collaboration between Youth Court, Great Falls Public Schools, and Alliance for Youth to re-engage students who have dropped out of school and are part of the criminal justice system.

Epic Caring Contacts

Benefis implemented Caring Contacts, an Epic program to assist our Behavioral Health providers in connecting with patients. Caring Contacts is an evidence-based suicide prevention intervention where clinicians, other members of the patient's treatment team, or office staff periodically send caring and supportive messages to patients at risk for suicide over the course of one to two years. Patients who are discharged after being admitted for a suicide attempt, suicidal ideation, or self-harm are sent a letter timed based on research.

Suicide Prevention Training

Benefis aims to expand annual suicide prevention training to include Secure Lethal Means Storage Safety training for community partners. This important suicide prevention presentation from Karl Rosston, suicide coordinator for the state of Montana, is required training for Benefis Behavioral Health providers. It is also open to Benefis employees as well as behavioral health professionals, teachers, first responders, and other relevant service organizations in the community. The training has received overwhelmingly positive feedback on course evaluations and is being expanded to include information on community gun and medication storage safety from Seattle Children's Hospital Injury Prevention Coordinator Christina Delgado. The focus is on suicide within our culture, with specific attention toward assessment and intervention with high-risk suicidal patients. The training is based on the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education's Suicide Prevention Toolkit for Primary Care Providers and the Zero Suicide Initiative. The training covers national and Montana data, suicide demographics, warning signs, depression screening with the PHQ-9, risk assessment utilizing the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale and the ASQ, safety planning, and caring contact. The training will also focus on lethal means counseling with a review of safe storage practices that includes giveaways. An important component of this program is educating both the community and patients about the connection between depression, firearm access, and suicide, and how practical steps can improve safety in the home.

Play is Power

The summertime gap for children continues to widen, and the effects can last a lifetime. For many kids, summer is not a season of enrichment, it is a period marked by loneliness, boredom, safety risks, and stalled learning. It's also a time when some young people are more vulnerable to experimenting with substances or getting involved in unsafe activities.

To help address this, Benefis Foundation has launched "Play is Power," a new fund created by a child and adolescent psychiatrist and a pediatric clinical psychologist. The fund supports access to meaningful summer opportunities, such as attending summer camp, that give children and teens the chance to explore new skills, engage in creative projects, form friendships outside their usual circles, experience positive connections with caring adults, and grow in ways that strengthen their well-being.

Park Pals

Benefis supports the "Get Fit Great Falls Park Pals Program," which provides free meals to children in four city parks over the summer break when school-subsidized meals are not available and kids need extra support. In addition, the program includes free summer camp-style activities.

4 the KIDS Montana

Benefis supports "4 the KIDS Montana," which is a summer camp for foster children in northcentral Montana. Offered for foster children ages 6 through 12, the camp provides an environment intended to disrupt the cycle of abuse and neglect and help children heal from past trauma.

Priority #3: Obesity and Weight Gain

Description of Community Need and Vision

Through the CHNA process, obesity and weight gain were identified as significant health concerns within the community. Benefis recognizes that addressing obesity, weight management, and related chronic conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, is essential to improving overall community wellness. In collaboration with local organizations, Benefis will expand access to health education and wellness resources that support individuals and families in making sustainable lifestyle changes. This includes increasing the availability of preventive services such as blood pressure screenings, diabetes management tools, and community-based exercise and movement programs. Benefis will also ensure these resources are widely promoted through schools, community partners, and digital platforms so residents of all ages are aware of available tools, with the long-term vision of increasing the number of community members who achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Benefis will continue to support the Great Falls Community Food Bank and its efforts to provide food to those in need. We are the main supporter of the Backpack4Kids Program, which has expanded to serve all 15 Great Falls Public School elementaries as well as the primary school in Vaughn.

Goodnow Healthy Aging Center Patient Programming

Nutrition plays an important role in your health as you age, as does the interaction of the medication you must take and the food you eat. The Goodnow Healthy Aging Center will have patient programming that emphasizes the importance of food as medicine, incorporating it into testing, classes, and medically tailored meals and recipes, with a dedicated dietitian based in the center.

Healthy Aging Market

A new, innovative food destination will be located within the Goodnow Healthy Aging Center, offering meals thoughtfully designed by a specialized culinary team. The space will provide a variety of convenient options, including meal kits, frozen entrées, grab-and-go selections, and a curated assortment of dry goods and cooking essentials. All meals will be tailored to the specific nutritional needs of the center's patients, such as low-sodium options to support heart health or high-fiber choices that promote cancer prevention, ensuring that every offering contributes to overall wellness.

Teaching Kitchen

Patients often struggle to stay nourished during or after their medical treatment, so the teaching kitchen at Sletten Cancer Institute offers a place where they can learn tips on how to manage their nutritional needs from dietitians and chefs. For the estimated 80% of cancer patients who experience malnutrition during treatment, Sletten Cancer Institute aims to empower patients through the sharing of culinary skills and holistic nutrition education, as well as building a sense of community among patients going through the same issues.

The teaching kitchen classes offer strategies on how patients can incorporate different flavors, textures, and nutrients into their diet to help alleviate some of the changes they might experience. Classes include hands-on activities such as knife skills, accurate measurements, a variety of cooking techniques, and how to plate food. Through these culinary classes, the nutrition services team strives to help patients feel empowered to take control of their lives while building relationships and discovering the fun in cooking.

The teaching kitchen opened its doors to students for the first time in 2024. Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine Montana students stepped into the kitchen to bolster their knowledge about nutrition and health. The Farm to Clinician Culinary Medicine Program brought together second-year medical students, dietetic students and professionals, and culinary experts to explore the "food as medicine" principles in healthcare. The teaching kitchen offers classes on a rotating basis, exploring the following topics:

- Cancer Survivorship and Prevention
- Cancer Symptom Management
- Low-Sodium Cooking
- Diabetes Nutrition
- Kidney Disease Nutrition
- Culinary Medicine (for Touro Medical students only)

Update to Cafe

The East Campus cafe is being remodeled, which will allow it to have expanded hours and additional grab-and-go meals. This means that our healthy meal options will now be available to night-shift team members within Benefis who previously did not have any options beyond vending machines. Our Food Services team continues to bolster their offerings and will cater dishes to different disease types going forward as part of the belief that food is medicine.

Hiring

At Benefis, our registered dietitians provide guidance and leadership to teams throughout the system to ensure our patients' nutritional needs are met. With a greater focus on nutrition as a source of wellness, we are actively recruiting to increase the number of registered dietitians on staff to provide dietary direction across service lines.

Health Lifestyles Program

For residents who are overweight or at risk of developing diabetes or heart and vascular disease, the Healthy Lifestyles Program provides a supportive environment to help achieve and maintain healthy habits. Participants learn how to lose weight and keep it off by incorporating healthy eating habits and regular exercise into their lifestyle. The 12-month program includes lab tests and educational materials. After completing the program, participants can continue attending at no additional cost for ongoing support, setting them up for a lifetime of healthy lifestyle habit encouragement.

Priority #4: Child Abuse and Neglect

Description of Community Need and Vision

Through the CHNA process, child abuse and neglect were identified as concerns within the community. Benefis recognizes that protecting children and strengthening families are essential to fostering a safe, healthy community. Working with local agencies, schools, and family-support organizations, Benefis will expand access to prevention resources and education to help reduce risk factors for abuse and neglect. These resources will be promoted through community partners and digital platforms to ensure families know where to find support with the long-term vision of reducing the number of child abuse and neglect cases in Cascade County.

Organizations We Support

Benefis supports local organizations with focused initiatives to combat child abuse and neglect, including Alliance for Youth, Toby's House Crisis Nursery, Family Promise, Great Falls Rescue Mission, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Great Falls Children's Receiving Home, The Dandelion Foundation, YWCA Great Falls, Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies, 4 the KIDS Montana, and more.

Meadowlark Program – Counselor Addition

Benefis aims to improve outcomes and decrease separation of families during pregnancy and in the postpartum period by integrating medical care and community service resources for mental illness and substance use.

The initiative is run by a small but mighty duo, licensed counselor Amy Steffenson and Perinatal Substance Abuse and Behavioral Program Coordinator Jessica (Jess) Yurek, who go above and beyond to provide screening, treatment, and support for pregnant women and their families. They provide an unbiased approach that provides a safe place for women to share their challenges and seek help. In early 2025, Benefis welcomed Georgia Hansen, LCPC, to the Meadowlark team.

The Meadowlark Initiative was recognized as a Benefis "Team of the Quarter" thanks to their consistent support and dedication to patients and the Benefis staff who serve them. A Benefis leader wrote the following in their nomination letter:

"The Meadowlark team is such an asset to our patients, families, and staff. They take time out of their very busy days to come up to Labor and Delivery whenever our staff calls to offer support to a mom or family who needs it. A lot of these mothers have poor social situations with limited support systems, sometimes accompanied by current or past addictions or environments with abuse. Amy and Jess always bring an unbiased approach and positivity, as well as a true desire to support each and every person they serve, no matter what the circumstance."

Foundation Funds

Having a child with complex medical needs or a medical emergency is a strain on families, but Benefis Foundation offers support through Angel Fund, which helps with travel costs when families must travel for a child's treatment, and the 221 Children's Fund, which assists families with medical expenses, prescriptions, and equipment. The extra money helps families stabilize and regroup while they cope.

Process for Identifying and Prioritizing

All areas identified in the 2025 CHNA were considered for implementation planning. Results of the CHNA survey, as well as community data, were presented to the Board of Directors at Benefis. In analyzing the data, the Board of Directors determined the above to be the most significant health needs in the community.

Areas Not Covered by Priority Initiatives

Benefis identified the four top areas to focus on out of all the needs identified by the assessment. These four are considered the most significant health needs in the community and will be covered by the priority initiatives. Other health needs identified in the assessment, not deemed significant, may be indirectly impacted by the initiatives, but resource constraints prevent Benefis from directly addressing these needs.