

2026 RELEASE
(Q2 OCT.-DEC. 2025)



Rio Grande Prevention Program



RIO GRANDE COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH
JANUARY 2026



VISION

Healthy Children,
Families, Communities,
Schools and Cultures.



Welcome!

By Chelsea McNerney-Martinez,
Rio Grande County Public Health (RGCPH) Prevention Coordinator

Welcome to the Rio Grande Prevention Program and Rio Grande Prevention Partners newsletter! This quarterly newsletter recaps our prevention efforts and highlights opportunities for community participation in our prevention efforts!

The second quarter of the fiscal year and the end of 2025 brought some unique challenges, but we have continued our efforts to plan for new programs and keep current efforts sustainable! Our Byrne SCIP grant, which was scheduled to begin October 1, 2025, was put on hold until late December due to the federal government shutdown and the process for contract approval following its reopening. We still continued planning and meeting with stakeholders to prepare for its launch in early 2026! We also submitted interest forms and grant applications for a new three-year cycle of STEPP funding, our LPHA Chronic Disease Pilot program and a competitive STEPP program focusing on reaching families with children in early childhood facilities/preschools. We found out in January we were not awarded that grant despite our best efforts but we are very happy for the American Lung Association who won the award!

We are continuing our work in the spirit of collaboration with our community partners and coalition members to accomplish our mission and vision!

COALITION WORK THIS QUARTER

This quarter, the Rio Grande Prevention Partners/SLV Tobacco Champions coalition met on November 14 and December 12. Due to a power outage that closed the RGC offices, October's meeting was canceled. If you would like to see any of the agendas or minutes for these meetings, please reach out to Chelsea at chelseamm@riograndecounty.org.

Coalition members are encouraged to keep up recruitment efforts for missing sectors in our coalition and in the SLV Teen Prevention Coalition (SLVTPC)!

November:

- Coalition members discussed new partnership opportunities, including High Valley Community Center's grant application which could enable the community to retain the Life Skills Training (LST) program and the Strengthening Families 10-14 Program. Dr. Bankole also announced the release of the regional Opioid Prevention RFP and Karicia presented a new version of the Youth Resource Evaluation!

Mission

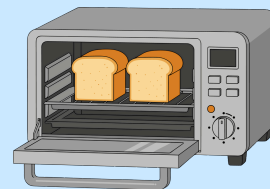
Partnering to create a county-wide environment conducive to safe, healthy and productive living through education, awareness and community support.

December:

- We reviewed new Colorado Quitline incentives, which provides adults (18+) up to \$100 in gift card incentives for completing coaching calls, in addition to free NRT! We also reviewed some progress being made with the Byrne SCIP grant and planning with San Luis Valley Behavioral Health Group (SLVBHG) and Rio Grande Hospital (RGH). We also heard updates from agencies doing amazing work in the SLV, including Hope in the Valley.

For Future Meetings:

- Following the recommendation of a community engagement course facilitator, RGPP meetings will be integrating the "Half-Baked-Idea Fair." If you have any ideas about how to promote prevention work or if you see something in our communities that you feel prevention can address, bring it to the meetings and we can look at creative ways to come together to address it! It doesn't have to be a completely funded and exquisitely-designed program proposal, bring things you have been mulling over and we'll put our heads together!

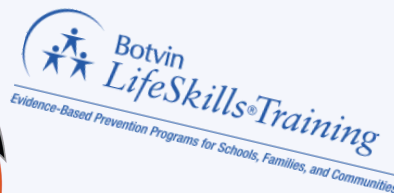


Life Skills Training update

Both the Del Norte Jr. High and the Skoglund Middle School cohorts for the Life Skills Training curriculum wrapped up at the beginning of quarter 2. In total, 63 7th & 8th grade students in Center and 27 7th grade student in Del Norte completed the program. The facilitators and students celebrated with pizza and post-surveys!

The RHSE grant, which is currently supporting the facilitation of LST and the Strengthening Families 10-14 Program ends this year, but High Valley Community Center in Del Norte has submitted a grant application to keep these programs going. Keep your fingers crossed for them! Our Health Equity Specialists will be coordinating with HVCC to possibly facilitate an Elementary LST cohort in Q3.

If you work with elementary or middle school youth and you are interested in becoming a facilitator for LST, contact Ida White at iwhite@riograndecounty.org





Safer Streets program making progress with community involvement

RGCPH's Safer Streets program continues to make progress in Rio Grande County!

The Youth Resource Evaluation presentations wrapped up this quarter after being presented to South Fork Neighborhood Watch, Monte Vista Neighborhood Watch and the Rio Grande Prevention Partners coalition. Karicia took the lead on addressing youth mentorship opportunities and means to promote positive community events for youth. See her new events calendar [linked here!](#) She will also be assisting Monte Vista School District staff with a trip for the members of their Big Buddies & Little Buddies program in January and will be reaching out to find new and creative funding and volunteer opportunities to provide youth with transportation.

South Fork Neighborhood Watch met three times this quarter, including a presentations on Emergency Preparedness and Credit Card Skimmers from SFPD and a presentation on the Blue Envelope Program from RGSO.

In Monte Vista, Neighborhood Watch also had three meetings this quarter. We covered a variety of topics including Karicia's presentation of the Youth Resource Evaluation, RGSO's Blue Envelope Program and a holiday relevant presentation on package theft awareness and prevention.

In November, both South Fork and Monte Vista celebrated one year of revitalized Neighborhood Watch meetings! The celebrations were attended and residents expressed appreciation for the opportunities to connect with law enforcement and each other and get their questions answered directly. November saw our biggest MVNW turnout to date and we were featured in an article in the *SLV Journal* and the *Valley Courier*.

In the next quarter, we will be hiring at least one new Youth Outreach Specialist, will be working on a grant application to keep youth mentorship programs sustainable and we will be working to purchase a new round of street lights.

Upcoming Neighborhood Watch meetings

- | <u>SOUTH FORK:</u> | <u>MONTE VISTA:</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| • JAN. 14 | • JAN. 21 |
| • FEB. 11 | • FEB. 18 |
| • MARCH 11 | • MARCH 18 |



All Monte Vista & South Fork Neighborhood Watch meetings include educational components and presentations, sometimes incorporating relevant community members/organizations! If you have ideas for topics of interest, reach out!

Virtual attendance at both Monte Vista and South Fork meetings can be accommodated, contact chelseamm@riograndecounty.org

It pays to use the Quitline.



Quitting tobacco and nicotine is hard.

Up to **8 weeks** of free nicotine replacement products and **\$100 in gift cards** might make it a little easier.

When you're ready to quit using nicotine products you can:

Receive a \$10 gift card after your first call to a Quitline coach, \$15 for the second, and \$25 for each of the next three calls. Up to \$100 available if you enroll before January 31, 2026.

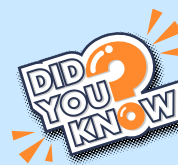
Order up to 8 weeks of nicotine replacement products through a Quitline coach or through the Quitline's web-only option.



Scan to start today!

Visit ColoradoQuits.com or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) to learn more.

Colorado Crime Statistics can be [found here](#) from the Colorado Auto Theft Prevention Authority and CBI.



National Statistics can be found on the [FBI website here](#).

Quarter 2 Around Rio Grande County Public Health....

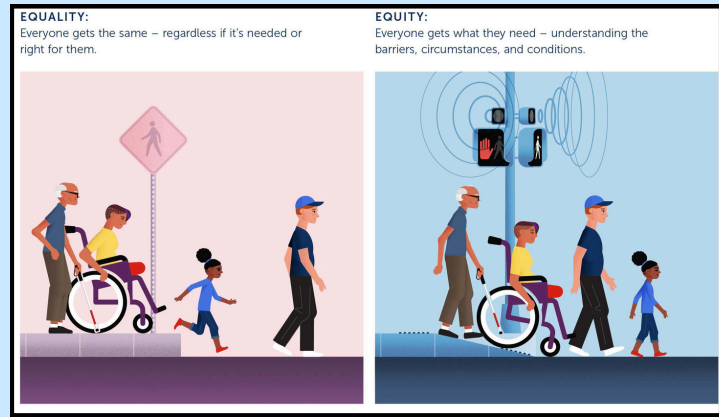
Roberta Marquez and Dolores Atencio, RGCPH's Health Equity Specialists, have been hard at work recruiting parents for a new cohort of the Strengthening Families Program 10-14. They will be facilitating a new cohort January-March in Monte Vista. For more information on upcoming cohorts, contact them at datencio@riograndecounty.org or rmarquez@riograndecounty.org.

In addition, they have been participating in vaccine clinic events, providing translation for different public health initiatives and patients, coordinating care for patients in need of services and also connecting and monitoring responses to COVID-19 cases in Rio Grande County.

They also took the final class in their Community Healthworker and Patient Navigation Certification course list this quarter! This will allow them to provide more services and referrals to patients in our county who need help finding specific care, navigating the healthcare system and maintaining lifestyle or other changes necessary for their treatment. This will also provide another source of revenue (via insurance billing) for RGCPH!

Response Coordinator Ida White is actively involved in expanding the LST and SFP programs by focusing on recruitment and coordination of new cohorts. She is also dedicated to maintaining strong relationships with key partner organizations. With the CPCI and RHSE grants nearing their end, meeting all deliverables is a top priority!

Our Response Coordinator plays a crucial role by offering comprehensive support in managing communicable disease outbreaks, ensuring effective responses, and actively contributing to robust emergency preparedness strategies for the organization.



Graphic courtesy of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation






Now Recruiting!

STRENGTHENING Families PROGRAM
FOR PARENTS AND YOUTH 10-14



For ALL Families & ALL Youth

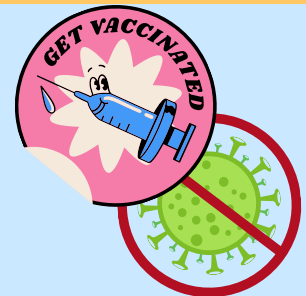
All families with children aged 10-14 can benefit from this family-based program. Program outcomes include:

-  Improved attachment and prosocial involvement with parents
-  Reduced Youth Substance Use
-  Reduced Youth Aggressive Behaviors
-  Reduced Youth Depression
-  Increased Youth Academic Achievement

For more information, please call Roberta Marquez or Dolores Atencio 719-657-2296



Flu rates are on the rise! Locally, statewide and nationally, both Flu A and Flu B cases are increasing!



Protect yourself by following these recommendations from the CDC and getting your flu shot!

If you still need your flu vaccine, RGCPH will have a clinic on Saturday, February 7th from 9am-1pm at the Rio Grande County Annex!

Operations Manager Logan Montoya has been working diligently to ensure day-to-day operations continue to run smoothly behind the scenes.

Logan has led the implementation of a new patient scheduling software, which included researching available options, comparing systems, and finalizing an agreement with the selected platform. His primary focus throughout this process has been long-term sustainability, ensuring the software will support the organization's needs for years to come. He is also preparing to train staff to ensure a smooth and effective transition.

In addition to this major initiative, Logan continues to support fellow team members in their projects and initiatives while overseeing overall operational efficiency. He remains actively involved in billing, patient scheduling, and addressing questions as they arise, helping ensure the organization operates cohesively and effectively.

Public Health Nurse Dianne Koshak and Travel Nurse Helen Lester wrapped up most of their seasonal Flu and COVID vaccination clinics this quarter. Following a successful season at community clinics, senior living facilities, schools, for fire department and ambulance staff and for some home-bound clients, Dianne and Helen provided 155 total Flu and 63 total COVID vaccines by the end of December. Due to the recent influx of rates of flu cases, RGCPH will host an additional flu vaccine clinic, see page 4 for details.

Dianne also wrapped up the last of the 2025 Child Fatality Prevention and Review team meetings in November. This is a process authorized by CDPHE and the CDC, bringing together relevant stakeholders to review preventable child fatality cases in the SLV region to address gaps in services and develop strategies to potentially keep a similar event from occurring. Dianne is the regional coordinator for our six-county team.

Helen is always accepting appointments for SLV residents planning on international travel. If you need to know what vaccines are recommended/required for the region you're visiting, give Helen a call!



REFERRAL PROGRAM

RIO GRANDE COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH IS NOW OFFERING
THE BABY & ME TOBACCO FREE PROGRAM!

How does it work?

Providers can refer pregnant people who smoke/vape/use nicotine (or who quit since becoming pregnant) at or before 36 weeks of pregnancy. Over 4 prenatal visits and 6 postpartum visits with our staff, we provide cessation referrals, guidance and financial incentives for quitting!

 1:1 counseling and support

 Nicotine testing (oral swab)

 Up to \$700 in vouchers for mom and a supportive partner!




For more information or to make a referral, please contact
Dianne Koshak, RN
or
Chelsea McNeerney-Martinez

Get in Touch

 (719)657-3352

 www.rgcp.org

 925 6th Street Room 101
Del Norte, CO 81132




FREE


Blood Pressure & Blood Glucose Screening!

1st Wednesday of the Month Tri County Senior Citizens

9am-12pm
311 Washington St.
Monte Vista CO 81144

2nd Wednesday of the Month Casas de Rio Grande Senior Housing

10am-1pm
1305 6th Street
Del Norte CO 81132

Public Health Accountant Kaleigh White is continuing to be hard at work for our agency! In the past quarter she has been providing budget updates on all our Public Health grants to ensure we are on the right track for being halfway through this fiscal year. She has been on the lookout and working with the Public Health Director to find more grants to bring to our county for the next fiscal year.

Outside of our department, RGCPH is also the fiscal agent for some regional sources of funding, including the Child Fatality Review. Kaleigh coordinates with the six counties in the SLV and other agencies to ensure everyone is submitting invoices and all work being done under this program is compliant with the standards set forward by the State.

Free Diapers!



Thanks to a partnership with Weecycle,

Rio Grande County Public Health again has free diapers available!



One package per child per month for RGC residents only. Call ahead for size availability!
(719)657-3352

Communities
MAKE CHANGE



Did You Know?



February is National Heart Month! This is a great opportunity to check in with your provider about your heart health and take preventative steps!

- The CDC reports heart disease is the leading cause of death across gender and most racial groups. One person dies every 34 seconds from heart disease.
- The World Health Organization reports 17.9 million die globally every year from heart disease. That's over three times the entire population of Colorado.
- According to CDPHE, 31.88% of adult Coloradans have high cholesterol, and 35.97% of Rio Grande County residents do. 26.31% of the state population have high blood pressure and 30.97% of Rio Grande County residents do.
- The biggest factors in heart disease prevention are a healthy diet, regular exercise and not using tobacco.
- Here is a list of symptoms from the Mayo Clinic, but even if you don't have any, you could still be at risk! Monitor your blood pressure, take preventative steps and talk to your doctor regularly!

february is

**Teen Dating
Violence
Awareness
Month** 

#RealLoveRespects

Director's Message: Starting the New Year with a Commitment to Youth Wellness

By Dr. Kolawole Bankole, MD, MS, MBA
Public Health Director, Rio Grande County

As we begin the new year, winter offers a natural moment for reflection, renewal, and recommitment to the health and well-being of our community's youth. I am encouraged by the continued progress being made across Rio Grande County to support youth wellness and prevent substance use, and I am grateful for the strong partnerships that make this work possible.

January marks a time to look ahead with purpose. The Rio Grande County Public Health Agency remains focused on strengthening youth substance use prevention efforts through the implementation of evidence-based public health strategies that create lasting, measurable impact. During the winter months, when young people may face increased isolation and stress, prevention and connection are more important than ever.

In collaboration with schools, law enforcement, behavioral health providers, and community coalitions, we are advancing initiatives that build protective factors for youth, promote resilience, and expand access to positive youth development opportunities. These efforts are designed not only to reduce risk but also to support healthy decision-making and strong community connections. Our prevention programs continue to evolve by integrating data-driven strategies, family engagement, and community outreach tailored to the unique needs of our region. By aligning our work within a unified prevention framework, we are ensuring that limited public health resources are used effectively, sustainably, and with the greatest possible benefit for our community.

Prevention is not a one-time effort—it is an ongoing commitment we carry forward together. Families, educators, community leaders, and residents all play an essential role in shaping the environments where our youth live, learn, and grow. As we move into the new year, our shared investment in prevention helps lay the foundation for a healthier, safer, and more resilient Rio Grande County.

Thank you for your continued partnership and dedication to supporting the well-being of our community's youth.



National Nutrition Month® is an annual campaign established in 1973 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. During the month of March, everyone is invited to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits.

This year's theme is "Discover the Power of Nutrition." Nutrition has the power to help individuals and communities thrive. Discover how food and beverage choices can help power your day. Learn tips for accessing healthy foods in your area. And build healthy habits into your day to help you feel great now and in the future.

Whether you're looking at nutrition headlines or searching for nutritious options, boost your confidence when it comes to food and health. A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) or nutrition and dietetics technician, registered (NDTR) can expertly guide you with information driven by science.

LOOKING TO THE (NEAR) FUTURE...

2026 will continue to be a busy year for Rio Grande County Public Health and our Prevention Program!

Following the delay due to the federal government shutdown, we are looking forward to beginning our new behavioral health crisis response program! Following meetings with community partners, we have found a way to expand crisis response services in facilities in RGC where SLVBHG's funds/services couldn't previously be utilized. We will also be hiring our Peer Support Specialist to provide follow-up resource navigation for clients who use the crisis response program.

We will also be working on the first phase of our Chronic Disease Pilot grant program in Q3. This phase involves bringing community partners to the table and completing an evaluation of chronic disease data in our county and region. Then, based on the data that shows what our most prevalent needs are, we will move forward with selecting from a menu of evidence-based strategies that fit within the state's 1-3-4-50 framework and the Chronic Disease Plan.


We will also be continuing work on our youth incentive program in partnership with the SLV Teen Prevention Coalition/DFC Program and Alamosa County Public Health. This program will provide financial incentives to youth who violate their tobacco-free schools policy if they agree to a multi-week program with peer support, cessation program enrollment and participation in the American Lung Association's INDEPTH program and possibly the Not-On-Tobacco program.

In the coming quarter and beyond we will continue efforts for:

- Launching Sources of Strength at Monte Vista High School
- Continued work on vape recycling programs
- Promotion of the Baby and Me Tobacco Free program
- Youth mentorship opportunities
- Commercial theft/crime reduction strategies



RGCPH is hiring for a Peer Support Specialist for our new Crisis Response Program! Visit the [HR site](#) for details!



Call 988
Text 988
Live Chat

988 Colorado Mental Health Line
988Colorado.com



WE ARE LOOKING FOR INTERNS

\$750 after completing 75 hours
Get involved with your community
get to know others go to events.
AGES 14-18
Work groups
Media, Executive Team,
Hospitality


APPLY NOW



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF THE SAN LUIS VALLEY



MY LIFE MY QUIT™



I Matter.

All Colorado youth are eligible for free therapy at IMatterColorado.org.

Contact info:

Chelsea McNerney-Martinez, Prevention Coordinator
chelseamm@riograndecounty.org

Ida White, Response Coordinator
iwhite@riograndecounty.org



[@Rio Grande County Public Health](#)
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www.rgppp.org

