

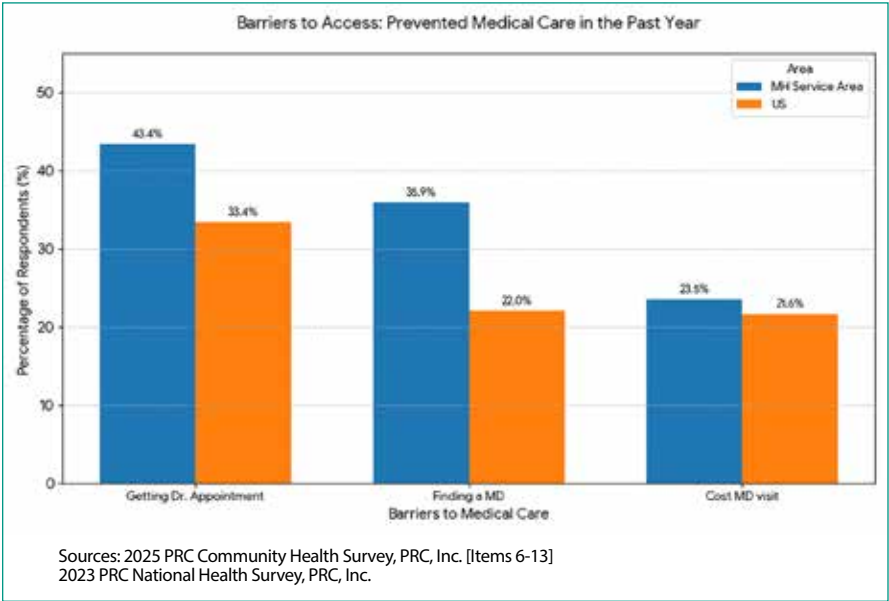
# Bridging the Divide: Utilizing Regional CHNA Findings to Inform Colorado Nursing Advocacy

Christine Deem, RN, MSN

Since stepping into my role as the Colorado Nurses Association Region 5 Board Director and co-chair of the Rural ANT, I began considering the central focus and what we ultimately want to accomplish. To help clarify our focus, I turned to the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) completed by our regional hospital, Mercy Hospital Common Spirit. A Community Health Needs Assessment outlines the key health challenges, service gaps, and strengths within a community. It helps the hospital design programs and services, fulfill IRS obligations for nonprofit status, strengthen partnerships, and support community well-being by ensuring resources are directed toward the most urgent local health priorities.

The CHNA for Mercy Hospital identified the community’s top health needs, based on input from providers and community leaders. One need that was identified is mental health, which is prioritized as a key concern in the region. Suicide rates in La Plata County (25.3 per 100,000) exceed both state (22.9) and national (14.7) levels. The survey completed by key informants revealed 62.5% perceived mental health as a problem in the MH’s service area. 62.5% of key informants identified mental health as a significant community problem. Contributing factors include a statewide shortage of behavioral-health providers, the absence of local inpatient psychiatric facilities, long delays for follow-up care, Emergency departments are not equipped to manage acute mental-health crises and the lack of inpatient psychiatric increases pressure on hospital staff who lack specialized behavioral health training.

The data depicted below lists the common barriers to accessing medical care (Getting a Doctor’s Appointment,



Finding an MD, and Cost of MD Visit) are pertinent to addressing several high-priority health needs. Other needs identified in order of priority include access to health care services, substance use, diabetes, and disabling conditions.

Mercy Hospital will draw on the findings from this Community Health Needs Assessment to create an Implementation Strategy aimed at addressing the community’s most pressing health concerns.

Mercy Hospital’s CHNA outlines key health needs in Southwest Colorado and underscores meaningful opportunities for nursing advocacy and community engagement. The assessment also provides insight that can inform statewide strategies to reduce regional health disparities. Findings from any CHNA can be a valuable resource for nurses across Colorado as they work to support the well-being of their own communities.

It is important to note that this Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) was completed prior to the passage of *One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025* (P.L. 119-

2), enacted through the 2025 Budget Reconciliation Act. Given that this legislation introduces substantial cuts and eligibility changes to public insurance programs (e.g., Medicaid/ACA), the barriers to care identified in this survey are now highly likely to be exacerbated. Proactive, creative strategies are essential to mitigate the expected loss of coverage and increased administrative burden on our most vulnerable residents. ■

### References

2025 PRC Community Health Survey, PRC, Inc.  
2025 CHNA FY 2026-2028- Mercy Hospital