This is the facility specific implementation strategy for Blue Ridge Regional Hospital and addresses the community health needs identified through a collaborative community health needs assessment (CHNA) process conducted with local and regional partners in western North Carolina. This document outlines plans for Blue Ridge Regional Hospital to support specific community benefit efforts as part of a larger community-wide plan.

**OUR COMMUNITY AND KEY PARTNERS**

**Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Community**

Blue Ridge Regional Hospital was founded in 1955 in Spruce Pine, North Carolina and has 46 licensed beds.

Community is defined as “county” for the purposes of the North Carolina Community Health Assessment Process. In western North Carolina, hospitals define their community as one or more counties for this process. The Blue Ridge Regional Hospital serves Mitchell and Yancey counties for the purposes of community health improvement and investment, and as such the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital was a key partner in this local level assessment process.
Community Health Needs Assessment

Process and Product
The Blue Ridge Regional Hospital assessment was conducted in partnership with the Toe River Health District, Mitchell Community Health Partnership, Healthy Yancey, and other non-profit community organizations. This written report describes:

- The community served by the hospital
- Community demographics
- Existing health resources in the community available to respond to needs
- How data was collected in the assessment process
- The priority health needs of the community
- Health needs and issues of uninsured, low-income, and minority groups
- The process for identifying and prioritizing community needs and services to meet the needs
- The process for consulting with persons representing the community’s interests
- Information gaps that limit the hospital facility’s ability to assess the community’s health needs

Sharing of Results
Detailed findings for our assessment[s] were posted on Blue Ridge Regional Hospital website http://www.blueridgehospital.org/about-us in September 2013. The CHNA was presented to the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital on September 23, 2013 for approval and discussion. Documentation of this board approval is available in the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Board minutes from September 23, 2013.

Regional Partnership
Our hospital’s collaborative community health improvement effort is also supported by a larger partnership with other hospital facilities and health department partners across a sixteen county region in western North Carolina to improve community health: WNC Healthy Impact. More information about this innovative regional collaboration, county-wide community health assessments, and overall regional findings, are made widely available to the public at www.WNCHealthyImpact.com
PRIORITY HEALTH NEEDS & HOW THEY WERE ESTABLISHED

Prioritization Process
During the 2013 Community Health Assessment Process, county data information was collected from community health resources. Committee members of the CHA Team compiled the information and reviewed a wide variety of quantitative data, highlighting areas of significance. This data was placed into categories and a list of the top ten health concerns was generated.

To identify these top ten priority issues for Mitchell and Yancey Counties to focus on over the next several years, the following process was used:
1. Residents shared their concerns and priorities regarding the county’s health in surveys and community meetings. WNC Healthy Impact assisted with gathering primary and secondary data via various sources including a phone survey. This data was then reviewed locally, priority areas were determined, and a community forum was held.
2. Partakers, at the April 2013 Community Health Forum, participated in a voting process to narrow “the top ten list” down to three to direct our focus. The group prioritized the list by giving each participant 3 dot stickers (pink one=high, orange one=medium, and green one=low priority) and having a poster with the list of the top ten health concerns. Then each participant was instructed to choose their top choices based on the data and personal belief by placing a sticker dot next to the health concern listed on the poster.
3. The Community Health Assessment Team reviewed the CHA results. The CHA Team discussed the community concerns, and concluded on the issues to be addressed over the next several years. The CHA Team thought if the health concerns were important enough to be brought up by citizens of each county and discussed among community members, these would be the priorities we would address.

As part of the collaborative health assessment process in our community, specific health needs were prioritized based on the data that was collected, community input, and various factors related to feasibility of addressing the need. In North Carolina, community-level prioritization is a required part of the community health (needs) assessment process.

Priority Health Needs for Our Communities

Mitchell County/Yancey County
In the Mitchell County local priority setting process described above, the following health issues were prioritized for collective community-wide action.

1. Healthy Living Behaviors and Lifestyles
Mitchell County residents would like to see more opportunities to engage in Healthy Living Behaviors and Lifestyles in order to obtain optimal health; primarily focusing on
physical spaces (such as parks) to participate in physical activity. Some opportunities residents have mentioned are: creation of a fitness center, youth programs that are free and accessible, community gym, comprehensive transportation plan completed for Mitchell County including sidewalks and bike lanes, etc.

2. **Substance Abuse Prevention and Increasing Availability/Access to Mental Health Services**

Many residents stated they would like to see services and treatment centers available in the county. Integrated Mental Health Care into Primary Care appointments/visits would also help capture the target audience in one-stop-shop approach. Education and Outreach efforts will be forthcoming to generate awareness of availability of services and reduce the stigma of accessing services.

3. **Access and Assistance for Low-Income Households (Lack Everyday Needs)**

Several residents are concerned for themselves and/or others struggling through everyday life and meeting daily necessities. Mitchell County is motivated to help their own. A Federally Qualified Healthcare Clinic is opening in Bakersville and Spruce Pine that offers healthcare on a sliding fee scale for the underinsured and uninsured. Toe River Project Access also works with local doctors to donate a certain number of hours toward those in need of healthcare, MY Meds helps with the cost of medicines, and food pantries are county-wide throughout churches, local businesses, and schools. Outreach and educational campaigns will be needed to inform the community about what programs and services are currently available, such as using social media and writing grants and fundraising for media campaigns, seek funding to help support and sustain food pantries, create food assistance programs for families/students during summertime, and create more community gardens in all areas of the county.

**Yancey County**

In the Yancey County local priority setting process described above, the following health issues were prioritized for collective community-wide action. [Include number, list, and description of priorities as appropriate.]

1. **Substance Abuse Prevention and Increasing Availability/Access to Mental Health Services**

Currently, the Mitchell-Yancey County Task Force (MYSATF) has hired a part-time coordinator to conduct Drug Take Back Days, educate residents about proper storage and disposal of medication through local media and community education campaigns, work on a jail diversion program, updating the Substance Abuse resource guide, explore treatment center options, and plan teen prevention activities/encourage positive youth development. The task force will be working with physicians and other health care professionals to increase utilization of the North Carolina Controlled Substance Reporting Database. The key concentration for this health issue is to direct our efforts in supporting the existing task force and paid part-time coordinator.
Many residents stated they would like to see services and treatment centers available in the county. Integrated Mental Health Care into Primary Care appointments/visits would also help capture the target audience in one-stop-shop approach. Education and Outreach efforts will be forthcoming to generate awareness of availability of services and reduce the stigma of accessing services.

2. **Cancer:**
   Several Yancey County residents feel more education, support, and outreach to the community is needed regarding preventative annual screenings, as well as about programs that can help with payment plans. A number of preventative programs are currently being implemented in Yancey County, such as a youth prevention program called Tar Wars, a federally funded program at the local health department (BCCCP), and American Cancer Society awareness activities and promotions throughout the area. Some citizens are concerned as to why people are not getting screened in the area and troubled by the inadequate treatment options that exist.

3. **Healthy Living and Lifestyles:**
   Yancey County residents continually look for ways to engage in healthy living behaviors and lifestyle changes in order to help themselves and others obtain optimal health. Ongoing projects regarding lifestyles in Yancey County include, but not limited to, are: development of a local park, county-wide community garden, comprehensive pedestrian plan, and cooking demonstrations at the local farmers’ market. Potential projects expressed by the residents of Yancey County comprise of: BMI collection on students in schools, utilize cooking kitchens at the School Based Health Centers by offering cooking classes and healthy eating programs, and building an indoor pool in the county.

**HOW THIS IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED**

**Engagement in a Community-Wide Plan**
As a next step following the development of a community health needs assessment (CHNA), which includes prioritization of health needs, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital collaborated with local public health experts and other key community stakeholders to develop a written description of the activities that hospital facilities, public health agencies, and other local organizations plan to undertake collectively to address specific health needs in our community. This collaborative action planning process resulted in the development of a community health improvement plan (CHIP) for each county in our hospital facility’s defined community, which includes Mitchell and Yancey counties.
Priority Health Issue #1: Healthy Living Behaviors and Lifestyles (primarily, focusing on Activity/Recreation/Healthful Opportunities)

Description of Community Need
Mitchell & Yancey County residents would like to see more opportunity to engage in Healthy Living Behaviors and Lifestyles in order to obtain optimal health; Mitchell is primarily focusing on spaces and centers to participate in physical activity and Yancey concentrating on outreach and education opportunities.

Vision of Community-Wide Impact
Blue Ridge Regional Hospital will seek to collaborate with agencies, government, non-profit organizations and citizen groups to partner our services and programs to create the largest impact on the citizens in the two counties; educating about and providing opportunities for healthy living behaviors and lifestyles.

Partner Agencies and Roles
Partner Agencies include Yancey and Mitchell County Recreation Departments, Spruce Pine Main Street, Bakersville Improvement Group as well as each county administration office. Proposed and ongoing community projects regarding lifestyles in Yancey County include, but not limited to: development of a local park, county-wide community garden, comprehensive pedestrian plan, and cooking demonstrations at the local farmers’ market. Potential projects expressed by the residents of Yancey County comprise of: BMI collection on students in schools, utilize cooking kitchens at the School Based Health Centers by offering cooking classes and healthy eating programs, and building an indoor pool in the county. In Mitchell County, community leaders are working to develop a series of walking and biking trails throughout the county as well as develop an athletic and wellness facility. Partner Agencies in each county play vital roles in developing strategic community plans and administration of planned projects in the counties.

Related Hospital Strategy

1. **Support Community Efforts in Healthy Lifestyle Opportunities:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital plans to partner with local community organizations to assist with providing facilities and opportunities for healthy lifestyles in both counties. Blue Ridge Regional Hospital and the Foundation will provide funding for playground equipment and fitness equipment at the Cane River Park in Yancey County and funding for playground equipment at the Bakersville Creekwalk. The anticipated goal is that each community will continue to develop recreation, fitness and wellness opportunities in each county and that the hospital can play a partnering role in helping these projects come to reality. The hospital will seek to engage with the Town of Spruce Pine in the planning stages of a new walking/running path through the town which will greater increase the capacity and interest in outdoor recreation and physical exercise.
2. **Target Youth in the Two County Area to Educate and Encourage Healthy Lifestyles:**
The Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Fitness Center provides educational sessions for the community addressing healthy lifestyles throughout the year. In addition, the Fitness Center has begun a pilot program in both counties’ middle schools to work with at-risk students. The after school program combines fitness, wellness and recreation as well as educational support to 15-30 at risk middle school students. In addition, the program will provide fitness equipment to the schools for the students to use. This program is a partnership with Graham Children’s Health and local donors.

3. **Provide local students with access to athletic and sports medicine professionals:**
Blue Ridge Regional Hospital’s Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Clinic will provide board certified athletic trainers and Sports Medicine professions to the local middle and high schools as well as recreational league sports in the service area. The trainers will be located on the school campuses and will incorporate injury prevention, education, diagnosis and rehabilitative services into their service to the students. Blue Ridge Orthopedics & Sports Medicine will also provide medical coverage during sporting events at local schools, recreational activities and Little League functions. The athletic trainers are placed at the schools in the area with no financial obligation from the schools.

4. **Sponsor local athletic events to encourage physical activity and participation:**
Blue Ridge Regional Hospital will continue to sponsor the Spruce Pine Skedaddle, a 5K run and family walk event held each spring. This event was developed to encourage citizens of all ages to participate in a healthy outdoor event in the community where people of all ages can exercise and have fun doing it. In addition, BRRH is currently collaborating with Graham’s Children’s Hospital and the Town of Burnsville (Yancey County) to combine the three races currently sponsored by these organizations individually into a circuit of races. This collaboration is intended to raise awareness of the events while also raising awareness of the growing trend for outdoor recreation sports in the area with the hopes of engaging more of the community’s participation.

5. **Ensuring and providing access to adequate primary care in the communities:**
Blue Ridge Regional Hospital’s strategy will be to continue to put priority on the eminent need for recruitment of primary care physicians to the rural areas of Mitchell and Yancey counties.

**Priority Health Issue #2: Access and Assistance for Low-Income Households (Lack Everyday Needs)**

**Description of Community Need**
Several residents are concerned for themselves and/or others struggling through everyday life and meeting daily necessities. Poverty is clearly the greatest disparity to health in the counties the local hospital serves. The poverty rate for all ages was higher than the comparable rates regional and statewide. Also, 20.3% of those surveyed in Mitchell County report lack of health insurance (Yancey County rate 27.9%). In both counties, the number and percent of Medicaid-eligible persons increased every year since 2005, and the percent of Medicaid-eligible residents was higher than the comparable figures for WNC and NC for each year shown.
Contributing to poverty is the cost of housing and annual wage amounts. In Mitchell County, Yancey County, WNC, and NC, a higher proportion of renters than mortgage holders spend 30% of more of household income on housing costs.

Poverty contributes to access to quality health care. 10.8% of persons surveyed in Mitchell County (14.4% persons surveyed in Yancey County) said they were unable to get needed medical care at some point in the past year, compared to a similar rate for WNC of 10.8%. The main reason being cost/no insurance (74.7%) in both areas.

**Vision of Community-wide Impact**
With all partnering organizations addressing this identified need, we envision a community where low-income individuals have the support they need to live a healthy lifestyle.

**Partner Agencies and Roles**
Partner agencies addressing this issue include a collaborative effort between area physicians, dentists, optometrists, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, Toe River Health District, and Mitchell and Yancey Counties' Departments of Social Services.

**Related Hospital Strategy**

1. **Provide Access to Healthcare for Low-Income Households:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Foundation’s Toe River Project Access provides access to primary and vision care for low income, uninsured patients who have a household income at or less than 150% of the federal poverty guidelines. TRPA works with MY Meds to help patients get the medications they need. Toe River Project Access is a non-profit organization, created as an initiative of the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Foundation in November 2003. TRPA assists low-income, uninsured residents through a collaborative effort between area physicians, dentists, optometrists, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, Toe River Health District, and Mitchell and Yancey Counties' Departments of Social Services. The purpose of TRPA is to provide eligible uninsured residents of Mitchell and Yancey Counties access to medical, dental and vision care, through placement with our participating providers. As an NC HealthNet site, TRPA is committed to providing low-income uninsured residents in our communities' access to a primary medical home, as well as other needed healthcare services. TRPA services assist in avoiding unnecessary health complications and providing a better quality of life for the patient and their families.

2. **Assist the uninsured in accessing health insurance:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital staffs Medicaid Assistance Counselors to identify and aid uninsured patients who may qualify for Medicaid. The hospital also offers Mission’s Financial Assistance Program for charity care for uninsured and under-insured patients who meet income guidelines. Staff is available to help and answer questions in the Business Office. We also offer Yancey County assistance with a staff person housed at the Yancey Campus.
addition, the Toe River Project Access staff are certified healthcare.gov counselors and will assist those needing assistance in enrolling on the healthcare.gov website.

3. **Support local non-profit organizations:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital contributes support funds and needed support to area non-profit organizations throughout the year i.e. United Way, Senior Citizen Centers, etc.) to help bridge the gap for our neediest citizens.

4. **Partner with local agencies to support low-income expectant and new parents:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital’s Labor and Delivery staff partner with the Mitchell/Yancey Families organization to assist low income patients. The organization serves families who are vulnerable to a diverse set of challenges and is the only community based program in the region that supports families with comprehensive, intensive and tailored services in their home. Services include intensive parenting education, crisis intervention, skill development and goal setting and it is entirely home based.

5. **Increase awareness of the availability of health care resources in the area:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital will continue to be the primary sponsor of the 211 Information resource in the area. 2-1-1 is an easy to remember telephone number that connects callers to information about critical health and human services available in their community. The areas of assistance that citizens can access include: Basic Human Needs Resource (food banks, clothing, shelters, rent assistance, utility assistance), Physical and Mental Health Resources (medical information lines, crisis intervention services, support groups, counseling, drug and alcohol intervention, rehabilitation, health insurance programs, Medicaid and Medicare, maternal health, children’s health insurance programs), Employment Support (unemployment benefits, financial assistance, job training, transportation assistance, education programs). (Support for Older Americans and Persons with Disabilities) home health care, adult day care, congregate meals, Meals on Wheels, respite care, transportation, and homemaker services (Support for Children, Youth and Families) Quality childcare, Success by 6, after school programs, Head Start, family resource centers, summer camps and recreation programs, mentoring, tutoring, protective services (Volunteer opportunities and donations).

6. **Ensuring and providing access to adequate primary care in the communities:** Blue Ridge Regional’s strategy will be to continue to put priority on the eminent need for recruitment of primary care physicians to the rural areas of Mitchell and Yancey counties.

**Priority Health Issue #3: Substance Abuse Prevention and Increasing Availability/Access to Mental Health Services**

**Description of Community Need**
Survey results indicate the citizens in both Yancey and Mitchell counties are concerned about the abuse of illegal drugs among their residents. Specifically, there is great concern over the misuse of prescription drugs among both teens and adults. Ongoing concern for the risk factors associated with the tobacco use and the growing rate of tobacco use in the region remains a
subject of concern. With recent changes to mental health care in the state of North Carolina, availability and access to Mental Health Services has emerged as a critical area of importance.

**Vision of Community-wide Impact**
We envision a community where substance abuse is no longer on the rise and those who need mental health services and treatments know how to access them and are able to receive them. It is desired that attention and education regarding Substance Abuse and Mental Health services will aid in reducing the occurrences of illness and death brought on by these conditions.

**Partner Agencies and Roles**
The community agencies and departments seeking to address this priority include Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Foundation, Toe River Health District, Mitchell and Yancey County Health Departments, Mitchell and Yancey County Sheriff’s Department, Substance Abuse Taskforce, Center for Rural Health Innovations.

**Related Hospital Strategy**

1. **Collaborating with local agencies to address the prescription drug problem in the counties:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital supports and participates in the annual Drug Take Back Days in both Mitchell and Yancey counties twice a year where over 100,000 pills are collected/turned in. The hospital’s Community Outreach staff assists in the organization and implementation of these events. This project, done in partnership with the Toe River Health District, Substance Abuse Taskforce and the local Sheriffs departments has continued to grow and collect more prescription and non-prescription drugs each year. With prescription drug use on the rise in both counties, this projects help get drugs out of the medicine cabinets in the community and turned into the local law enforcement where they are destroyed.

   Currently, the Mitchell-Yancey County Task Force (MYSATF) has hired a part-time coordinator to conduct Drug Take Back Days, educate residents about proper storage and disposal of medication through local media and community education campaigns, work on a jail diversion program, updating the Substance Abuse resource guide, explore treatment center options, and plan teen prevention activities/encourage positive youth development. Blue Ridge Regional Hospital will provide support to the task force as they work with physicians and other health care professionals to increase utilization of the North Carolina Controlled Substance Reporting Database. The key concentration for this health issue is to direct our efforts in supporting the existing task force and paid part-time coordinator.

2. **Reducing the opportunity for citizens to develop dependence on narcotics in the area:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital is taking steps to address the growing dependence on narcotics in the two county area. The Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Emergency Department has standardized chronic pain management policies across the hospital,
clinics and Emergency Departments. The BRRH Emergency Department’s new pain medication policy has resulted in the decrease of pain medications distributed by 50% in 2012-13. BRRH will continue our efforts in this direction regarding all take-home medications.

3. **Addressing the need for mental health support for school age children:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital is collaborating with Mission Health and the Center for Rural Health Innovation to ensure that Telepsych is available at schools across Western North Carolina.

4. **Ensuring and providing access to adequate primary care in the communities:** Blue Ridge Regional’s strategy will be to continue to put priority on the critical need for recruitment of primary care physicians to the rural areas of Mitchell and Yancey counties.

**Priority Health Issue #4: Cancer**

**Description of Community Need**
Residents surveyed during the assessment feel more education, support, and outreach to the community is needed regarding preventative annual screenings, as well as information about programs that can help with payment plans.

The Yancey County five-year aggregate rate for 2006-20010 now shows total cancers as the leading cause of death compared to being the second leading cause of death in WNC and the state.

Total cancer mortality rate in Yancey County rose from 5-year aggregate period 2002-2006 to 2006-2010 by 14.7% while the state as a whole fell 6.8%. Like heart disease mortality, total cancer mortality demonstrates a gender disparity; total cancer mortality rate among Yancey County males appears to have risen, as the comparable rate for females remained static.

This data shows the trend for cancer in Yancey County has fluctuated between the years of 2009 to 2011, at some point surpassing heart disease to the number one leading cause of death.
**Vision of Community-wide Impact**

We envision a community where access to cancer prevention and treatment services are widely available and familiar. Preventative care is critical in the prevention of cancer related illnesses and education is key.

**Partner Agencies and Roles**

Blue Ridge Regional Hospital partners with the American Cancer Society and the Toe River Health Department to create opportunities for education and access to free or greatly reduced preventative care.

**Related Hospital Strategy**

1. **Providing educational opportunities for the communities to learn about cancer prevention, treatment and access to care:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital sponsors awareness campaigns throughout the year, primarily coordinated with National Observance dates (i.e. Breast Cancer Awareness Month) with a comprehensive approach including newspapers, radio, billboards, educational events and social media. These campaigns are aimed to inform citizens of the area of cancer related topics, encourage preventative actions such as annual mammograms, and to connect citizens in the community with local healthcare providers. Each month, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital hosts a Ladies Night Out event which focuses on a specific health topic. Women from the community are invited to this free monthly event where they can hear from local healthcare providers and hospital staff about the newest treatments as well as preventative care for specific health care issues.

2. **Provide state-of-the art cancer care for local citizens:** Blue Ridge Regional Hospital’s Cancer Care Center provides a state-of-the-art cancer care center where citizens can receive treatment close to home. For many, the closest cancer treatment options would be over an hour’s drive distance from the region. The Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Cancer Care Center provides a newly renovated space with an educational resource room, healing arts program and certified staff to address the mind, body and soul of our patients and their families. Cancer support groups and educational resources are available to all patients.
**NEXT STEPS**

As part of the community health improvement process, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital will continue to work with community partners in the implementation of our community health improvement plan (CHIP) based on the hospital strategies outlined in this document. The CHIP will be reviewed annually to assess progress on key community indicators and updates will be made publically available in a county-wide State of the County Health Report (SOTCH Report). The next community health needs assessment (CHNA) will be conducted in 2015.

**APPROVAL**

Each year, the Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Board of Directors, which includes representatives from the business, health, non-profit and community areas of Mitchell and Yancey counties reviews the community benefit report from the prior fiscal year and approves this implementation strategy for addressing priorities identified in the most recent community health needs assessment and additional community benefit plans. At this time, the community benefit budget for the coming fiscal year is also approved.

This report was prepared for the January 2, 2014 Blue Ridge Regional Hospital Board of Directors meeting, and is approved as signed below by the Board Chairperson and Hospital CEO.

\[\text{Courtney Mauzy, Board Chair, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital}\]

\[1/27/14\]

\[\text{Date}\]

\[\text{Oscar Wehmeister, President and CEO, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital}\]

\[1-29-2014\]

\[\text{Date}\]