



Strengthening Rural Health Through Cross-Sector Housing and Care Collaboration

PAYETTE, IDAHO

The
**BUILD
HEALTH**
Challenge®



Payette County Health Action Team (PCHAT) is a community collaborative in rural Idaho that engages residents to develop solutions to address housing needs and inequities with support from The BUILD Health Challenge®.

The partners engage with residents to gather input on needs to develop preventative services that address social influencers of health. Through resident data, PCHAT identified housing and mental health as critical issues in Payette, and are leveraging cross-sector partnerships to blend funding to establish and co-locate healthcare with affordable housing.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



COMMUNITY IMPACT



Awarded sustainable HUD funding (\$150k/year) to become southwestern Idaho's access point provider to focus on housing the unhoused.



Secured a land donation to host a future community clinic and twelve affordable housing units, and worked with the mayor's office to successfully champion zoning changes for the land parcel to pave the way for the housing and clinic project.



Created a blueprint for a new building that responds to community needs and priorities that blends affordable housing with a clinic.

A Close-Knit Community Facing Growing Barriers to Health

Members of the Payette County Health Action Team (PCHAT) describe Payette as a hardworking community with a strong sense of connection. At a population of just over 9,300, many families have lived there a long time, and jobs center around agriculture and farming, a Coca-Cola distribution center, the local tater tot and french fry plant, construction, and a large prison. Raquel Nuñez from Southwest District Health describes it as something out of Friday Night Lights on the weekend, with a huge football rivalry with neighboring towns like Fruitland. “The pride is immense,” she said. “If one community member seeks out some support, you can definitely guarantee that there’s going to be a huge outcome in the end because there’s that pride of showing up for their neighbor.”

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— RAQUEL NUÑEZ
Southwest Health District



While there is a large Hispanic community working in agriculture, there is tension with local elected officials who won’t allow resources to be posted publicly in Spanish, which poses a barrier for residents and prevents community organizations from expanding outreach. It’s also common for Payette residents to cross into Oregon for work or healthcare services, and access to medical care has become more difficult in recent years. Since Roe v. Wade was struck down, over 35% of OB-GYNs have left Idaho, many of whom specialized in high-risk pregnancies and infant care.

There is only one pharmacy in Payette. Amanda Johnson from the Western Idaho Community Action Partnership (WICAP), the backbone agency for PCHAT, explained the impact of scarce health care resources in their community: “We’re right on the border of Oregon and a lot of care is on the Oregon side. The specialists tend to be in Boise — 70 miles away — but the traffic is awful. If a mom has four kids and needs to take one to a specialist, that’s an all-day event. There are so many barriers for people to get health services — like transportation, not being able to afford a babysitter or gas, or not having healthcare.”

Small Town Pride Takes on Housing and Health

The idea to form PCHAT and apply for The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD) award started when Trinity Health, a local health plan, approached WICAP about working together to improve access to housing through resident engagement and cross-sector partnerships. Dawn Callaham, a partner from St. Luke's Health System, said: "One of the most unique aspects of the BUILD Payette partnership was the equal footing of diverse sectors — health care, public health, community-based organizations, local leadership, and community members — working toward shared goals rather than operating in silos. Each partner brought distinct strengths: trusted community relationships, lived experience, policy influence, implementation capacity, and data-driven health insights."

The PCHAT group focused initially on outreach and housing. Even when some community health worker partners were relocated or key staff turned over in the first year of PCHAT, they remained focused on their goals. "We wanted to increase housing stock because it's very limited here," said Johnson. "We also wanted to make sure that we were reaching out and making sure that people were getting the resources they needed. People who are working need housing they can afford near their jobs, and there's a significant need for senior housing."

Starting with what the community wants and needs has been a core driving value for the project. "We wanted to make sure that we had input from the community and that we're not deciding something at the top level and then telling people what to do," said Johnson. "We built a bridge with unseen members of the community. We're getting their input to make sure that we are doing something that the community wanted and that they had a significant input into."

The partners hosted three community focus groups between December 2023 and March 2025. One focus group was held with Head Start families, the second was done at a senior center, and the third was with residents who sought services from WICAP and had completed a housing survey. Housing continued to emerge as a top priority, alongside better access to medical care and better care for children, mirroring findings from a community health needs assessment.

As PCHAT partners learned more about the needs of residents, they saw firsthand some of the unique housing challenges people in Payette are facing. "A lot of them are living in housing that is not meant for human habitation

any longer," explained Johnson. "They're really run down. We've seen a lot of the mobile homes catch on fire, or parks have been sold, which has displaced a large portion of the seniors who couldn't afford the new lot rents. Payette has one small eight-room motel, so transitional housing is hard to find, too."

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— **DAWN CALLAHAM**
St. Luke's Health System

There are often families co-located or set up in driveways or backyards, or even living in "converted garages," adds Jonathan Gonzalez of WICAP. While some new zoning changes have made it legal to establish accessory dwelling units (ADUs), not everyone can afford the building costs. Nuñez from Southwest District Health recalled helping with the recent HUD Point-in-Time survey: "I got to have some very vulnerable conversations with folks in the community on homelessness," she said. "There was one specific older gal who shared that she was housing her entire daughter's family because her daughter could not afford the places that were in the community to either purchase a home or rent." Every day, the PCHAT partners work with families who are struggling to afford housing, including many seniors. Gonzalez said he sees many seniors on fixed incomes who are barely able to pay their rent. "The majority of them aren't in affordable housing," he said. "I don't understand how they're able to get by."

Bringing a Blueprint Closer to Reality: Land and Zoning Secured

During a standing monthly meeting between WICAP, Southwest District Health, and St. Luke's Hospital, the partners developed a plan for a new facility that would be a hub for health and housing in Payette.



Originally designed to have a community center with apartments, the bottom half will now also be a medical facility. The second floor will be senior apartments. There will also be a large conference room for the community, separate entrances, and good security, all priorities that emerged from the focus groups. At the senior focus group, participants expressed interest in proximity to shopping, groceries, and retail; the location will meet that need. In addition, the partners are hoping there will be room for an additional pharmacy to bring Payette's total up to two. Their vision is more than a building; it's the health of a community. "We have the blueprint, and I'm hoping that it builds that momentum in creating healthy communities," said Nuñez. "There's space for community gardens or increasing walkability to the grocery store. This project keeps in mind the holistic health of a community and makes sure everything ties together to support the strong community pride that is in Payette, in a way that can fully address all needs of all the populations that are living there."

"Upstream work — it takes time. We're investing in long-term solutions like housing and access improvements, but it takes years to see the full impact."

— JONATHAN GONZALEZ

Western Idaho Community Action Partnership

Finding the land to build this new facility came to fruition when Johnson attended the opening of a local food bank, where a gentleman asked if he could sit next to her. "We started chatting, and he asked what I was working on," Johnson said. "I told him, and he said, 'Oh, well, I have a couple of acres. Why don't you call me? We'd be happy to have that on our land.' It was the biggest, best thing that probably came out of this." Within six weeks, Ken Hart, CEO of Valley Family Healthcare, had donated the land for the project. The mayor has shown support, too. When it turned out that zoning changes were needed for the parcel, the mayor worked with the PCHAT team to make sure they had the right language. The vote from the city council went in their favor.

While securing the funding for the building is taking longer than initially expected, the partners are making progress on their goal by continuing to build partnerships and new opportunities. They're pursuing a Low Income Housing Tax Credit application and funding for the medical facility and clinic in partnership with nonprofit LEAP Housing. "Upstream work — it takes time," said Gonzalez. "We're investing in long-term solutions like housing and access improvements, but it takes years to see the full impact."



Removing Barriers to Housing with HUD

In addition to their vision of the new residential and medical building, the PCHAT partners are leading other opportunities that remove barriers to health for residents. Nuñez reflected: “We’re all here to serve the same community, but sometimes different sectors can see it a little bit differently. I appreciate being able to see how the Payette County paramedics can sit at the same table as a school district nurse, seeing how they are in the same health serving field, but how different their perspectives are. We’re figuring out what that middle ground is and areas that we can best support each one of their specific motivators.”

One of those “middle grounds” is putting on community events for Payette residents. In March 2026, partners hosted a “Share the Day” event. “We had everything from vaccinations to food boxes to senior care,” said Johnson of the event. “We were able to reach into every pocket of what’s needed for community resources. The biggest success was when a family came in with a baby, almost six months old, that had not had a single immunization. We were able to catch the whole family up on their immunizations. We had 22 service providers: domestic violence and sexual assault resources, community services, Head Start, food boxes, parks and rec, community health workers, and senior services. Sixty-six people and two dogs attended.” If there was one regret the partners have, it was not doing this kind of event sooner. “It connected us a lot better,” Johnson reflected. “After it was over, I felt like we should have probably done that in the first year. That would be the one thing that I really wish we had done differently.”

While the partners are dedicated to hosting more community resource events in the future, they continue to grapple with a changing political environment with new policies that create barriers for low-income residents to connect with health and other services. “There are a lot of state and federal policies that negatively impact the community,” said Nuñez. “From a health district perspective,

new regulations require people who are part of Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to provide documentation or proof of legal documentation. It conflicts with what we are trying to promote — that we are here to serve everyone. There are policies that get passed in higher leadership that I have no control over that are very conflicting to our mission.”



From WICAP's perspective, Johnson adds: "The political environment is hard. We're in this survival-reactive mode as a nonprofit, and it's hard to do the bigger picture work. We're trying to help, but there's this constant waiting for the other shoe to drop. That's distracting and it makes it harder to do our jobs."

As the BUILD award comes to a close, the PCHAT partners continue to stay focused on reducing barriers for Payette residents until they can get the funding they need for the housing and medical facility. In recognition of all the work they've put in over the last few years, WICAP was recently awarded a \$150k/year HUD contract to be the Access Point Provider for the region. "We got the award letter last week, so we're going to be able to continue to support what we've done with BUILD," said Johnson. "We'll be helping the unhoused get housed, increasing housing stock, and informing policy change for nine counties in southwestern Idaho."

The work of PCHAT underscores that progress doesn't happen overnight and is often interrupted by staff turnover, policy shifts, and funding uncertainty. The team keeps coming back to their standing monthly meeting to listen to the community and make progress on a blueprint for their shared future. "As a result of BUILD, we have seen greater alignment across organizations, improved communication between sectors, and increased confidence within the community to engage in collaborative problem solving," said Callaham. Partners are better equipped to use data, elevate resident voices, and pursue sustainable solutions that support health equity. While community-wide change takes time, the Payette partners created momentum — shifting how they work together and how health is understood as a shared responsibility. That systems-level change is one of the most meaningful and enduring impacts of the project.

Donated land acreage, a hard-won zoning vote, and a family caught up on immunizations are all evidence of steady progress. As Gonzalez reminds his partners, upstream work takes years to see full impact. In Payette, patience is connecting a community through relationships, events, buildings, and pharmacies — one by one.

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— **AMANDA JOHNSON**

*Western Idaho Community
Action Partnership*





The BUILD Health Challenge® (BUILD) invests in multi-sector, community-centered partnerships that transform systems and elevate community power to advance health and racial justice.

Through learning, connecting, and amplifying these local initiatives, BUILD champions the national movement for health equity and moves attention, resources, and action upstream to support vital community conditions for health and well-being across the United States.

The BUILD Model for Transforming Community Health



Bold

Drive fundamental shifts in policy and sustainability, creating systems-level changes through a lens of justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity.



Upstream

Focus on the social, environmental, and economic factors that have the greatest influence on the health of a community, rather than on access or care delivery.



Integrated

Align the practices and perspectives of cross-sector partners under a shared vision, establishing new roles while continuing to draw upon the strengths of each partner.



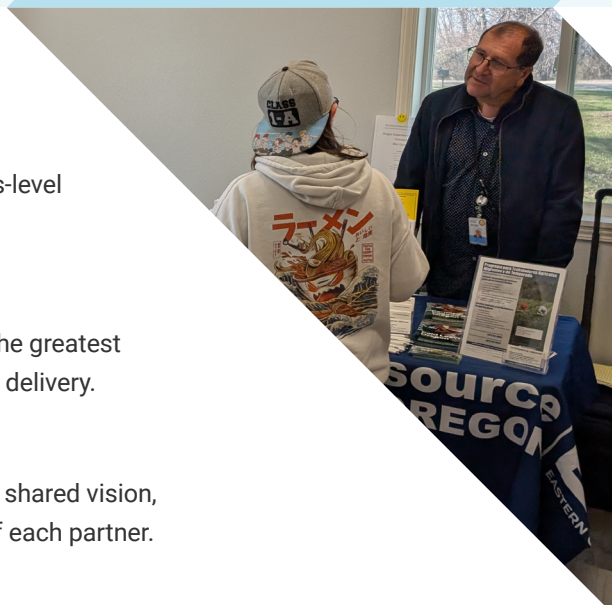
Local

Prioritize the diverse lived experiences, voices, and leadership of neighborhood residents and community members throughout all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.



Data-Driven

Use varied forms of data from both clinical and community sources as tools to identify key needs, measure meaningful change, and facilitate transparency amongst stakeholders in order to generate actionable insights.



BUILD's fourth cohort (2023-2026) was made possible with generous support from:

BlueCross and BlueShield of North Carolina Foundation
Blue Shield of California Foundation
The de Beaumont Foundation
The Episcopal Health Foundation
The Kresge Foundation
The Leonard Parker Pool Institute for Health
Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.
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The W.K. Kellogg Foundation

