



Homeless Healthcare Program Frequently Asked Questions

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WHAT IS THE WEST COUNTY HEALTH CENTERS HOMELESS HEALTHCARE PROGRAM?

WCHC applied for and received federal funding to open a new facility to address the complex health care needs of those who are currently homeless and those at risk of homelessness. Community health centers play a vital role in helping to pull people out of homelessness and keeping others housed.

WHERE ARE THE HOMELESS HEALTHCARE SERVICES PROVIDED?

The Homeless Healthcare Services program opened its doors at its current location “Third Street House” at 16312 Third St in Guerneville in February 2019. WCHC began offering Homeless Healthcare services at a temporary modular adjacent to this location in September of 2016.

WHY IS A SEPARATE SITE FOR HOMELESS HEALTHCARE SERVICES NECESSARY?

Even before the recent fire, the Russian River Health Center was not able to meet the demand for services in the community. With the expanded capacity that the new health center offers, RRHC will be able to serve more community members.

The new Homeless Healthcare services are designed to meet the unique needs and address barriers to health care for the homeless community. Establishing a primary healthcare home in the community in which they reside is a proven method of reducing homeless individual’s costly dependence on sheriff, fire, paramedic and hospital emergency room services.

WHY IS THE PROGRAM BASED IN GUERNEVILLE?

West County Health Centers operates health centers in Occidental, Guerneville, Sebastopol and Forestville providing easy access to services in the communities where our patients reside. Consistent with this practice, we opened our Homeless Healthcare Program in Guerneville which has long been considered as having the highest concentration of people experiencing homelessness in western Sonoma County.

WHAT SERVICES ARE BEING OFFERED?

WCHC offers a comprehensive array of services including: behavioral health and psychiatric care, substance abuse counseling, case management, primary care, dental care, and outreach. As a best practice, we work closely with shelter and housing providers to integrate health services into those settings. Many clinical care interventions are directly related to a person’s ability to obtain and retain housing. Hygiene practices, medication compliance, proper nutrition and behavioral health counseling including drug and alcohol counseling all contribute to long term success in housing.



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OTHER THAN HEALTHCARE, WHAT WILL BE OFFERED?

Research around Social Determinants of Health has proven that there are many factors other than access to quality healthcare which influence health outcomes. To offer the best chance of success, we seek to offer a “no wrong door for entry” to the local system of care. To accomplish this we work closely with a wide range of partner agencies providing rapid linkages to life stabilizing services.

HOW WILL THE WCHC HOMELESS HEALTHCARE CENTER ACTUALLY HELP TO REDUCE THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS FACING HOMELESSNESS?

Often times, even when housing becomes available, people experiencing homelessness lack the resources and social supports to successfully navigate the move to housing. For many people who have experienced long-term homelessness, clinical supports including behavioral health are essential to long term success in housing. We work closely with housing providers to integrate our care team into their existing housing case management services. While we do not operate housing programs, we do recognize the impact of housing on healthcare and seek to not only improve people’s access to affordable housing, but to support their long-term success so they never return to homelessness.

DOES WCHC RUN THE WINTER SHELTER AND HOMELESS DAY SERVICES?

No. WCHC will continue to focus on our mission: to provide comprehensive, quality, and accessible health care services to the communities of western Sonoma County. Shelter and Housing is a complex issue and the winter shelter facility is operated by a local service agency with experience in that area.

WON'T ADDING HOMELESS SERVICES DRAW MORE HOMELESS TO THE AREA?

Local and national research has not supported this belief. Recent countywide data indicates significant reductions in homelessness in some areas of the county while other areas saw an increase in the number of homeless. The greatest reductions in homeless populations in the last year are in areas with established homeless health and housing services, Santa Rosa and Petaluma. At the same time, areas of the county with little or no services including North County, West County and Sonoma Valley, have seen their homeless numbers increase.