

# West County Health Centers COVID-19 Response



West County  
Health Centers  
*Caring for our Communities*  
a californihealth center

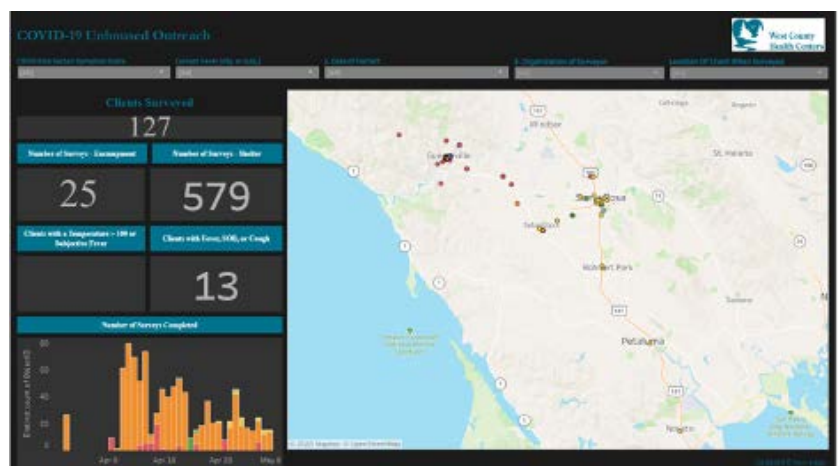
## Healthcare for the Homeless Outreach

Our neighbors who experience chronic homelessness are at higher risk for exposure to and complications from COVID-19. This population has poor access to hand-washing and other hygiene services, lives in close quarters with others, has difficulty with self-care and disease management, typically has high rates of chronic substance use and persistent mental illness, and is geographically isolated from concentrated services along the Highway 101 corridor.

Furthermore, finding, tracking, and monitoring this population, many of whom live in isolated encampments throughout the West County, is particularly difficult. Traditional public health practices, such as early syndromic surveillance, identification of high-risk population subgroups, coordinating focused services, isolating symptomatic individuals, and conducting contact tracing requires high touch, relational outreach across a large geographic service area. The Homeless Services providers in our region have scarce or limited resources to meet the needs of this population if individuals become infected with COVID-19.



Rosie Traversi, CCMA and Access Coordinator with WCHC's Healthcare for the Homeless Team at Third Street House in Guerneville meets with patient in the field for outreach.



Above: **Geomapping Dashboard** with a visual of Arc-GIS survey of geopoints representing patient contact during COVID-19. Survey123 by ArcGIS is a survey tool that uses a Geographic Information System (GIS) to incorporate geographic location elements into the survey to better understand a given population or question. Geo Mapping was extremely helpful during recent natural disasters and our COVID-19 response when our RN and LCSW visited unhoused patients in encampments. They were able to identify these patients and use the HCH geo-mapping to confirm that all the patients that we had previously identified had successfully accessed information about COVID-19 resources.

**Geo-mapping for surveillance and tracking:** West County Health Centers has invested in secure, geo-mapping technology for our high risk care management. With this tool, Survey123, our staff creates and conducts surveys for our homeless population by creating a geo-location and date-stamp for each patient contact. This allows us to spatially identify patients with early symptoms, understand groups of patients or locations with resource gaps or reduced access to critical services, and to understand migratory or time-based factors contributing to disease spread or risk. Finally, this tool will help us track contact exposure. [Visit this link to learn more.](#)

West County Health Centers is leading a collaborative of homeless service providers and volunteers across the county to understand the evolving risk of COVID-19 infection, to provide early testing and specific resources such as access to clean water, Narcan, feminine hygiene products, food and access to safe shelter for high risk individuals.

## Wellness Services for the Underserved

West County Health Centers invested in a comprehensive and robust wellness program to serve patients and our community with a wide range of services and allows patients with a lower socioeconomic demographic access to wellness services that typically were out of reach financially. Patients have accessed 891 individual visits for Osteopathic Manipulation Treatment, Acupuncture, integrative medicine consults, and individualized, one-on-one consultations with experts in herbal medicine, Ayurvedic medicine, and nutrition.

Four hundred and seventy-one group medical visits were conducted on topics that included: living well with chronic pain, Qigong, mindful eating, meditation, women's writing, support for new mothers, and diabetes education. Learn more online about our [Wellness Services](http://www.wchealth.org) at [www.wchealth.org](http://www.wchealth.org).

At no time have these services been more important than during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our dedicated staff have worked hard to quickly pivot to an online model using an encrypted, secure virtual platform. Staff, patients, and the community have continued access to these services with enhanced resources for managing illness, supporting immune function, and treating symptoms. Check the listing of [Group Wellness Zoom Events](#) and download the [Group Wellness Events Calendar](#) at [www.wchealth.org](http://www.wchealth.org).



*Dr. Jared Garrison-Jakel, Health Care for the Homeless Medical Director, with patient at Third Street House.*

## Non-Congregate Shelter (NCS)

The Non-Congregate Shelter (NCS) is a county-wide initiative with an overall goal of providing a safe location for medically vulnerable individuals to shelter in place, which will help to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in our community. The intent of the "high risk" site is to provide safe, temporary living space for homeless individuals who are at higher risk for complications from COVID-19 infection.

We are identifying high risk homeless individuals who are eligible for placement at the County Fairgrounds or Sonoma State University during the COVID-19 outbreak. To date we have placed 5 unhoused individuals in the trailers at these locations. One of these individuals is a 85-year old woman who has been homeless for a number of years and recently lost her daughter to an accidental overdose. She is grateful for the housing and we are thankful that she has a safe place to stay during this difficult time.

## Alternative Care Sites

West County Health Centers is participating in placement of patients who have screened positive for COVID-19 or are waiting for results into alternate care sites. These patients require quarantine but are not able to isolate at home, or have circumstances such as medically fragile housemates that make home quarantine dangerous. Many of our most vulnerable patients fall into this category.

## Teen Clinic

The Teen Clinic has continued to provide, without interruption, a full scope of family planning services including contraceptive management, STD/HIV testing, emergency contraception and free condoms using phone, video and in-person visits. The clinic also provides additional services related to COVID-19 through social media outreach, peer education and live round table Instagram discussions. The Teen Clinic has also provided drive-up long-acting contraception injections, mental health support for high risk adolescents, coordination with local high schools, and care package delivery for 60 high risk adolescents who were identified by our 22 peer educators.



*Administering the ArcGIS Survey with HCH Clients. Vanessa Woodbyrne, HCH Care Management Assistant during her weekly outreach rounds asking her HCH Clients WCHC's Survey123 questions.*



*Nurse Appreciation Week at West County Health Centers during the coronavirus pandemic was full of love and appreciation for the support that WCHC nurses give to our providers, MA's, and support staff and their dedication to WCHC patients.*

*Below: Jymmye Purtil, RN Clinic Nurse Manager and Dr. Steve Bromer, Co-Chief Medical Officer work together on complex care management for patients at the Gravenstein Community Health Center.*



## Registered Nurse Care Management

West County Health Centers has a long history of Nurse Care Managers who support patients with complex medical needs and who may struggle with complex barriers such as homelessness, transportation insecurity, mental illness, poverty, food insecurity and historic trauma. Our highly trained nursing professionals help patients manage highly acute medical diseases and have extensive training in trauma-based care, motivational interviewing, care coordination and community resource allocation. Our Nurse Care Management team has been an invaluable resource during the coronavirus pandemic. Our nurses provide outreach and support to thousands of patients and families affected by HIV, diabetes, heart disease, chronic lung disease, and complex mental illness. They additionally reach out to frail elderly, isolated and medically disabled, connecting these patients and families with needed resources, assist in problem solving, provide safe medication management including creating medication sets and medication delivery, and care coordination.

## Community Health Worker COVID-19 Outreach

West County Health Centers understands the value of high-touch, relational care to support patients struggling with social isolation, chronic illness or social stressors, and those who require quarantine due to COVID-19. We have invested in an expanded Community Health Worker (CHW) program to ensure that our most vulnerable patients are supported during this difficult time. Newly hired and existing staff are working with our nurse care management and behavioral health team to provide outreach and care coordination. These CHWs have access to clinical staff including Physicians, Nurse Practitioners, Physicians Assistants and pharmacy staff to support any clinical needs that arise and have access to a wide array of services available through West County Health Centers wellness and behavioral health services and community-based resources.

## Sonoma County Resilience Collaborative

West County Health Center is a co-founder of the Sonoma County Resilience Collaborative. This collaboration between community leaders and The Center for Mind Body Medicine is designed to develop local capacity for healing and to build the tools and community connections needed to build resilience in our community impacted by recurring natural disasters and collective loss and trauma. Since the 2017 wildfires, we have invested time for staff to complete the training and have provided multiple healing sessions for our staff and community.

These skills and networks have been instrumental in providing structure and space for staff resilience and community connections. We have offered video-based daily meditation and mindfulness sessions, and a daily fantastic 10-minute dance party joined by staff and partners from around the state. Recognizing our deep internal resources and skills in mindfulness, meditation and wellness, we have created a blog website with videos, articles, and helpful links cultivated and authored by our staff. This resource is public facing and content is actively directed to patients during this COVID-19 pandemic.

## Behavioral Health Support

West County Health Centers has over 25 Clinical Psychologists, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists, Psychiatrists and staff who provide comprehensive Behavioral and Mental Health Services to our patients. With the use of individual phone and video visits, group video visits and care management support, these professionals provide services such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, EMDR, parenting support, trauma support, mindfulness, brief behavioral support, and meditation along with other services to patients, family and staff. Their perspective and skills are an invaluable resource and a critical element of successful care delivery during this time.

## COVID-19 Testing

West County Health Centers has been conducting appointment based drive-up COVID-19 testing in Sebastopol and Guerneville since the second week of the Shelter-In-Place orders. Staff conduct clinical triage to identify risk at the time of testing and provide resources and referrals for individuals who need to quarantine until results of the tests are known. Our staff tracks results through the Sonoma County Department of Health Services, Quest, or UCSF to ensure that results are received and communicated in a timely manner. To date, 120 patients have been tested and 6 individuals have been identified as COVID-19 positive through our testing sites.



## Reinvesting Back into Our Community

West County Health Centers has been the recipient of many grants and donations during this coronavirus pandemic. Our staff has tirelessly worked to ensure that all the money and in-kind donations are put back into our community including:

- 1 Masks, clean water, feminine hygiene products and overdose-reversal medication for our unhoused clients
- 2 Care packages including thermometers, gloves, masks for patients requiring isolation at home
- 3 Access to hand sanitizer for all patients
- 4 Community COVID-19 testing for all patients, including those who are uninsured or those with financial hardship
- 5 No copays or charges for patients falling below 200% of the Federal Poverty level for phone/video, in-person care or labs
- 6 Blood pressure cuffs for patients with hypertension, to monitor their health at home
- 7 Expansion of a community health worker program connecting patients with needed resources and coordinated care
- 8 One-time COVID-19 staff support compensation for all front line and management staff
- 9 Establishment of a hardship fund through a non-profit community foundation providing staff access to \$1000-\$2500 grants
- 10 Creation of a homeless outreach program, in collaboration with other homeless service providers, to assess risk of COVID-19 infection, to identify individuals who require testing, facilitate transfer for isolation as needed, and to provide requested services
- 11 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to ensure our staff are safe for in-person visits, homeless outreach, and drive up testing

*Left: Dr. Steve Bromer, Co-Chief Medical Officer in charge of coordinating COVID-19 Curbside Testing at West County Health Centers with Diana Montero, CCMA at the Sebastopol Community Health & Dental Center.*

## Patient Care Metrics

DURING COVID-19 RESPONSE MARCH-MAY 2020

Telehealth Primary Care Visits: **9,375**

In-Person Primary Care Visits: **115**

Telehealth Behavioral Health Visits: **3,806**

Patients Attending Wellness Groups Online: **120**

Unhoused Patients Sheltered: **13** (2 pending)

Essential Staff Employed: **220** (No layoffs/furloughs)

Teen Clinic Encounters: **224**

Perinatal OB Patients Served: **107**

Call Center Average Volume: **2000** (per week)

## Financial Impacts

COVID-19 RESPONSE COSTS MARCH-MAY 2020

Waived Co-pays and Sliding Scale Fees for Uninsured Patients: **<\$140,000>**

Reduced Medicare Reimbursement for Telehealth Visits: **<\$130,000>**

Reduced Capacity for in-person Dental Visits due to CDC Guidelines: **<\$115,000>**

Hard Costs of Transition to Telehealth: **<\$130,000>**

HRSA Federal Stimulus: **\$776,000**

SBA Payroll Protection: **2 months**

Projected Increases in Uninsured Patient Care resulting from Future Unemployment: **Unknown**

Projected Loss if Telehealth Funding Discontinued: **\$200,000/month**



*Above: West County Health Centers PPE TEAM poses for a "THANK YOU" photo for the many in-kind donations of Personal Protective Equipment to support WCHC Staff while on the front lines of the COVID-19 Response.*

*Below: West County Health Centers staff set-up for COVID-19 Drive-thru curbside testing at the Gravenstein Community Health Center.*

