



Gifford Health Care

Implementation Strategies to Improve Community Health

As a community health center and medical home, Gifford Health Care's mission is to improve the health of the people we serve by providing and assuring access to affordable, high-quality health care, and by promoting the health and well-being of everyone in our service area.

Every three years Gifford conducts a formal Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA). Designed to fulfill the requirements of the Federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, these assessments identify and prioritize issues and need to help Gifford provide services to improve the health of our community.

The priority community health needs identified in the 2021 CHNA are access to primary care providers/preventative care, mental health counseling and treatment, lifestyle disease prevention, and dental care access for adults. The following work has been done in response to this survey, and Gifford will continue to be responsive.

Access to primary care providers/preventative care

Gifford has launched numerous initiatives to support access to primary care providers and preventative care. These include programs inside our health care center walls and partnerships in our greater community. Faced with the staffing shortage experienced by health care facilities nationwide, a top priority of Gifford's is the ongoing recruitment and retention of health care providers to meet the needs of our community and fulfill our implementation strategies.

Within our hospital, current quality improvement initiatives focus on comprehensive care for patients with diabetes, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and colorectal cancer screening. These initiatives draw on the expertise of care providers across departments to provide comprehensive and effective interventions to our patient populations identified through evidence-based medical algorithms.

In addition to direct patient care, Gifford is currently undergoing EMR upgrades which will provide patients greater access to actively engage in their healthcare as well as increased opportunities for patient education.

To help care for patients beyond our facility, Gifford has partnered with our regional ambulance services, White River Valley Ambulance, First Branch Ambulance, and South Royalton Rescue Squad, to provide basic in-home visits to individuals identified by providers and our Community Health Team. These regular visits include monitoring vitals and checking on basic medical and home care needs. Patients identified for this program include high emergency department utilizers, those with transportation barriers, and those with physical limitations that may prevent them from visiting their provider.

In 2021, Gifford continued its school-based health clinic in collaboration with a local school district. This clinic allows students to be seen by a pediatric nurse practitioner during the school day for routine health care needs, including annual exams, acute needs and sports physicals.

Mental health counseling and treatment



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Gifford Health Care has continued to strengthen its services surrounding mental health counseling and treatment. This has included adding a support group that focuses on grief. Gifford has actively sought out counselors with a wide variety of clinical skills to add to our psychiatry and counseling team, including those with backgrounds in marriage and family counseling, palliative care, and adolescents. During the COVID pandemic, we recognized the increased need for access to mental health services and responded by providing interventional therapy options and telemedicine visits. Additionally, Gifford has partnered with Alpine Telehealth to help facilitate prompt access to psychiatric care in our emergency department.

Lifestyle disease prevention

A top priority for Gifford is to provide our patients with the tools to take an active role in their own health. A strong focus of our preventative care is on lifestyle disease prevention. Gifford works with its Blueprint Community Health Team to offer lifestyle disease prevention and management workshops through the Vermont Department of Health. As COVID prevented in-person workshops, Gifford facilitators quickly moved to an online format to minimize disruptions in workshop offerings. These workshops include Diabetes Management, Diabetes Prevention, and Hypertension. Additionally, tobacco cessation counselors are trained to work with youth and adults to provide prevention education and cessation support. Gifford has recently partnered with a local middle/high school to provide in-school counseling and support around the topic of teens and vaping.

Gifford works hard to address food security, a need many of our patients found themselves facing for the first time during the pandemic. An ongoing partnership with the Vermont Foodbank provided the resources to expand our VeggieVanGo program to two events per month, a drive-thru model and a produce box distribution. Gifford saw an exponential increase in the number of families we served, providing food to an average of 700 families per month.

In addition to VeggieVanGo, Gifford collaborates with the Randolph Area Food Shelf to provide bags of nonperishable goods in our clinics and at community locations. These “Green Bags” are available to any patient or community member who expresses barriers to food access or is identified as food insecure. Our goal is to ensure our patients do not have to choose between prescriptions and food. These bags contain information regarding access to dental care, area food shelves, Gifford’s Community Health Team, and other community supports.

As COVID restrictions lift, Gifford looks forward to continuing and strengthening its community partnerships through community outreach. Outreach in our community, especially in schools, continues to be a top priority as we strive to educate youth on the importance of physical activity and healthy eating habits to help them grow into healthy adults. Education and prevention must start at a young age to break the cycle of escalating healthcare costs.

Gifford sees the value in providing these types of events and programming to our communities, as they help foster relationships and provide much-needed support.

Dental care access for adults

Gifford’s Federally Qualified Health Center designation has brought resources to help us support local dentists as they strive to better care for the under- and uninsured. To increase awareness of dental health, we have partnered with



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HealthHub, a local nonprofit with a mobile dental trailer. The trailer travels to a variety of locations, including area schools, and Gifford, to offer screenings, X-rays, examinations, and cleanings by a dental hygienist. The service is available to adults and children and has a sliding scale fee. In 2019, HealthHub served 641 individuals, numbers for 2020 and 2021 participants were greatly affected by service disruptions caused by Covid. Gifford recognizes the need and shortage of dentists providing care to the Medicaid population in our area. We plan to continue to explore possible collaborations and initiatives while promoting current dental services in our area.