



Gifford Health Care

# **2025**

# **Community Health Improvement Plan**

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## **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 needs to help Gifford provide services to improve the health of our community.

The priority community health needs identified in the 2024 CHNA are access to primary care providers/preventative care, access to specialist services, access to dental care for adults, and access to affordable healthy food. 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, quality improvement initiatives focus on better understanding our capacity and working to reduce waitlists. Gifford is measuring access by looking at the third next available appointment (TNAA). This is a metric used to measure how soon a patient can be seen. It helps understand the overall appointment backlog; how long a patient might realistically have to wait for an appointment; and can assist in identifying areas where access is limited and implement strategies to improve appointment availability. By looking at TNAA Gifford has been able to measure the capacity of each primary care and specialty clinic and found each clinic has capacity to see more patients. Gifford is also looking at provider panels to identify patients that are actively engaged versus those "lost to care." Our goal is to improve patients lost to care in order to better understand our opportunity of growth.

Strategies to increase access include: eliminating waitlists; setting timeframe goals for how soon new patients are scheduled; some clinics have designated protected space in providers schedules for new patients and acute services; measuring TNAA for new, established, and acute visit types; setting visit volume goals per provider to increase unique patients each day; and providing regular feedback on these goals. Gifford has established a multidisciplinary access to care work group, including frontline staff from multiple locations evaluating how the growth we plan to achieve can be sustainable.

In 2024, Gifford expanded on our school-based health clinic program established in 2020. The initial program was in collaboration with the local school district. A pediatric nurse practitioner is onsite seeing students during the school day for routine health care needs, including annual exams, acute needs and sports physicals. Now one of Gifford's pediatricians is available to see patients once a week at the Rochester Elementary School.

Gifford's Blueprint Community Health Team (CHT) works to help get patients into appointments, and the nurse care managers specifically support chronic illnesses to prevent the need for excessive appointments and/or emergency room visits. 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 CHT to offer lifestyle disease prevention and management workshops through the Vermont Department of Health. 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 continued to partner with a local middle/high school to provide in-school counseling and support around the topic of teens and vaping.

### **Access to specialist services**

Gifford's initiatives to support access to specialist services echo those to support access to primary care providers/preventative health care. We are tracking TNAA to establish a standard measure for accessing care. Internally, we are looking at our referral process to better understand what happens to a referral once it is ordered. This includes looking at the percentage of referrals that get completed or cancelled, with the goal of measuring the timeframe in which a referral is placed and the patient is seen. Additionally, we are working to strengthen our partnerships with outside facilities, by promoting the specialty services Gifford provides with the goal of increasing our number of outside referrals.

Gifford is also continuing to hold quarterly *Gifford Wellness Presents* events along with additional outreach activities with the focus of providing education to the community on a variety of health topics and services.

### **Access to dental care for adults**

To increase awareness of dental health, we have continued to partner with 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 and assist with referrals to dentists. The service is available to adults and children and has a sliding scale fee. Additionally, CHT helps coordinate getting patients to other dental offices where appropriate.

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.

### **Access to affordable healthy food**

Gifford continues to work hard to address food security with the growing increase costs of food. Over the last several years our ongoing partnership with the Vermont Foodbank expanded our VeggieVanGo program to two events per month, a drive thru model and a produce bag distribution. The goal of these programs is to distribute free fresh produce to community members. There are no eligibility requirements and participation is anonymous. In 2024, Gifford distributed 8,424 shares of produce to families through

the VeggieVanGo and Drop n'Go programs. Since our collaboration began in 2019, Gifford has served nearly 46,000 families.

In addition to VeggieVanGo, Gifford continues to collaborate with the Randolph Area Food Shelf (RAFS). Gifford provides 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 are identified as food insecure. Our goal is to ensure our patients do not have to make the choice between prescriptions and food. These bags contain information regarding access to dental care, area food shelves, Gifford's CHT, and other community supports. Additionally, Gifford refers patients to the RAFS's home delivery program with the goal of expanding food access to patients unable to visit the RAFS in person.

Gifford looks forward to continuing and strengthening its community partnerships through community outreach. Outreach in our community, continues to be a top priority as we strive to provide education on the importance of physical activity and healthy eating habits. In 2025, Gifford has begun partnering with local senior centers to support their meal programs by volunteering to serve lunch. Gifford see the importance of these types of programming and events to our communities, as they help foster relationships and provide much needed support.