

Health Care for the Homeless Program - Manchester

Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) Manchester, also known as the Mobile Community Health Team (MCHT) at Catholic Medical Center, has been addressing the multi-faceted health needs of men, women, children, teens and families who are homeless in the City of Manchester, since 1988. As the numbers of those seeking care grew, it became apparent that no single agency could alone provide the broad array of skills, resources and services required to care for the health, housing, and socio-economic needs of this most vulnerable population. In collaboration with other health providers, shelters, housing programs, and human services agencies, a city-wide extended team and continuum of caring was formed, with HCH Manchester at its core.

In 1987, the City of Manchester was awarded a grant as one of the first federally funded health centers for people who are homeless. This Health Care for the Homeless (HCH - 330h) Program was initially authorized and funded by the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of the 104th United States Congress, in 1986. In 1996, all HCH programs nationwide were funded and re-authorized within the federal Health Centers program of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Manchester Health Department is the grantee for the HCH Manchester site, and Timothy Soucy, MPH, Public Health Officer, serves as its Executive Director. Clinical sessions occur at 2 shelter clinic locations, staffed by a team of Medical providers, Nurses, Outreach workers, Behavioral Health counselors and Program Assistants who are based at Catholic Medical Center (CMC). In addition, CMC's Poisson Dental Facility provides Dental Care; The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester provides Psychiatric Care; and a local Ophthalmologist provides pro-bono Eye Care, on site at the shelter.

An estimated 2,000 people are homeless in Manchester, struggling daily with abject poverty, unemployment, and lack of affordable housing. Health-wise, they suffer common acute and chronic conditions worsened by years of medical neglect, poor access to care, malnutrition, and exposure to communicable disease. Often patients harbor tri-morbid, co-occurring Medical, Mental Health and Substance Use disorders. No matter the history or context, every person experiencing homelessness is impoverished, isolated, and in crisis. Akin to victims of disaster, theirs is a very personal and singular crisis. Sometime estranged from family and friends, they lack the means, resources and support systems to overcome such a plight. Homeless families often travel with children to unfamiliar, faraway places, in search of jobs, shelter, or to flee domestic violence. In addition to housing and health care, persons who are homeless need counseling and crisis intervention. HCH Manchester employs intensive case management, where the clinical team wraps around services and support, assisting each patient to achieve health, sustain recovery and end their personal homelessness.

HCH Manchester accepts referrals from any source, the criteria being that a person or family is “homeless”. The operative definition of homeless is: “individuals who have no regular nor adequate sleeping accommodations; those in precarious situations, e.g., a battered wife who is unable to return to her residence; persons who are in transitional housing or have only temporary accommodations in shelters or with friends; and those who live in places neither intended or designed for human habitation.” Comprehensive medical, nursing and behavioral health care is offered daily (Mon thru Fri) at New Horizons Shelter and (Tues-Wed-Thurs) at Families in Transition (FIT). HCH Nursing Street Outreach and Health Education occurs regularly at: Homeless Services Center, FIT Emergency-Family Shelter, the Child and Family Service (CFS) Teen Drop-in Center, other local smaller shelters and on streets, riverbanks and in woods. Health Ed classes cover topics such as fitness, smoking cessation, nutrition, diabetes, psycho-education and mindfulness based stress reduction. HCH Manchester works closely with community partners such as: Pastoral Counseling Services, City Welfare Dept, Catholic Medical Center, Elliot Hospital, The Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester, Manchester Community Health Center/Child Health Services, Dartmouth, West Side Neighborhood Clinic, Poisson Dental Clinic, The Way Home, Southern New Hampshire Services, and Lens-Crafters. HCH also provides comprehensive health care and services to participants at addiction treatment centers such as: Serenity Place, Farnum Center and Phoenix House. Long-term partnerships with local physicians, hospitals, pharmacies, addiction care centers, dental providers, eye care specialists, emergency shelters, housing and human service organizations have been integral to the success of this HCH program. Ending Homelessness in Manchester cannot happen without this vibrant network of partnerships.

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HCH Manchester welcomes all referrals and inquiries as it maintains its commitment to providing health care and human services to all persons who are homeless. HCH Manchester is funded, in part, by grants to the City of Manchester from federal and state Departments of Health and Human Services.