Improving Health Through Stable Housing

The Oregon Health and Housing Learning Collaborative

A growing body of research has shown that quality, affordable housing has significant health benefits for vulnerable populations, and that providing coordinated health services in an affordable housing setting can both reduce costs and improve health outcomes for the most at-risk and hard to reach individuals. Despite the evidence, there are still few replicable models for how these types of coordinated partnerships can be effectively designed and operated.

Enterprise Community Partners is addressing this gap by supporting innovative housing and health-care partnerships through its national Health and Housing initiative. Under this initiative, Enterprise has established The Oregon Health and Housing Learning Collaborative (OHHLC). This Collaborative brings together and supports nonprofit affordable housing providers and their service partners so that all parties can meet their common goals: saving public costs while improving health outcomes for low-income and vulnerable individuals and families. Oregon presents an ideal testing ground for these new partnerships, thanks to federal changes to Medicaid and state-driven health-care reform, which has introduced a new coordinated care model to the region.

This brief highlights OHHLC member Home Forward, whose program model is being successfully piloted at Bud Clark Commons in Portland, Ore.

Home Forward

Home Forward is a public housing authority serving Multnomah County, and the largest provider of affordable housing in Oregon. It assists individuals, families, people with disabilities or special needs and seniors through a portfolio of affordable apartments, Section 8 rent assistance and support services.

The Apartments at Bud Clark Commons (BCC) is a Home Forward property that offers permanent supportive housing to extremely vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. Residents receive an array of services provided by community partners and coordinated by the housing authority. The services range from community activities to wellness programs, case management and mental health treatment. Applicants must be homeless, have an income below 35 percent of the area median income and qualify for public housing.

What’s Worked at Bud Clark Commons

• Home Forward is breaking new ground as a public housing authority by adopting the proven “housing first” and harm reduction model at BCC. This model, designed to minimize barriers to housing, moves people into housing directly from street and shelter living without requiring them to accept treatment or services. It also prioritizes the most vulnerable applicants and does not screen out residents struggling with addiction.

Bud Clark Commons Spotlight

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood</th>
<th>Downtown Portland</th>
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<tr>
<td>Opened</td>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
<td>Units</td>
<td>130 independent-living studios (9 accessible) with full kitchens and baths</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building Amenities</td>
<td>Community room, 24-hour desk, resident services staff, wound clinic on-site, LEED Platinum certification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Service Provider Partners</td>
<td>Outside In, Central City Concern Old Town Clinic, Native American Rehabilitation Association, Multnomah County Community Health Clinic, Health Share, Care Oregon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operating Funding Sources</td>
<td>Home Forward (public housing subsidy and rent assistance); Portland Housing Bureau (mental health resources and staff)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014 Housing Operating Costs</td>
<td>$1.5 million ($32 per unit per day)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact</td>
<td>Rachael Duke</td>
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<td>Project Director</td>
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<td>Home Forward</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:rachael.duke@homeforward.org">rachael.duke@homeforward.org</a></td>
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• Even before opening, Home Forward recognized that primary health care and mental health services would be essential to support and stabilize BCC’s target population. Home Forward established a partnership with the Coalition of Community Health Clinics, wherein the clinics agreed to assess and refer potential clients to BCC, as well as to accept new patients referred by BCC’s staff.

• Mental health services (including those not reimbursed by Medicaid) are available to all residents, even those who refuse to officially enroll in services. Under contract with the City of Portland, BCC is able to offer a full-time, on-site behavioral specialist to coordinate services.

• After opening, Home Forward recognized that residents had certain health issues – tied to drug abuse or diseases like diabetes – that were not easily addressed through existing services. With funding from the local Coordinated Care Organization via the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Innovation Center, BCC opened an on-site wound care clinic in 2014 to serve residents safely and efficiently.

Outcomes
In 2013, BCC served 157 residents, with 70 percent participating in case management services. Eighty-four residents enrolled in on-site mental health services, and 41 actively participated in treatment services. Over 12 months, 80 percent of all residents remained stably housed.

A recent study by the Center for Outcomes Research and Education (CORE), at Providence Health Services, found that BCC is producing significant health cost savings and better resident-reported health outcomes. The study found that:

• Residents reported better overall health after moving in to BCC.

• Health-care expenses, including emergency room visits and hospitalizations, declined by 45 percent in the first year after a resident moved into stable housing at BCC, and remained low in subsequent years (see chart, above).

• On average, BCC saved Medicaid $8,724 per resident per year. Claims data for 58 residents with Medicaid indicated a total reduction in costs of just over half a million dollars in the year after they moved into their apartment.

BCC is helping to demonstrate that public housing authorities can successfully improve health and lower public health-care expenses for vulnerable people. Home Forward is sharing lessons learned with peers through Enterprise’s Oregon Health and Housing Learning Collaborative, and the BCC model is soon to be adopted by the Vancouver, Wash., housing authority.

Enterprise Community Partners
Enterprise works with partners nationwide to build opportunity by creating and advocating for affordable homes in thriving communities. Over more than 30 years, Enterprise has created nearly 320,000 homes, invested $16 billion and touched millions of lives. The Enterprise Health and Housing initiative works to improve the link between quality, stable housing and good health-care outcomes, particularly for vulnerable populations.

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