

CHCB Vaccine Team Brings Immunity to Our Community



CHCB staff and vaccine clinic partners celebrate their work at the Grand Isle Fire Station.



When Robyn Souza, BSN, RN, MPH accepted the position of Chief Nursing Officer this past February, she hit the ground running. We sat down with Robyn for a quick Q&A about her collaborations with CHCB staff, the Vermont Department of Health, and community partners to identify areas most in need of COVID-19 vaccination access.

■ CHCB: What is the origin story of our vaccine clinics?

Robyn: When I arrived at CHCB, the state was trying to increase access to vaccines. An area we identified as having limited vaccine availability was the Champlain Islands. CHCB formed a steering committee who worked closely with local fire and rescue teams on launching this initial clinic. When the Grand Isle Fire Station was built, it included a community center which was large enough, had the ease of access for people driving in, and was centrally located for the Islands community, so a perfect fit.

CHCB: How did everything evolve from there?

Robyn: We spent a few months in the Islands while meeting regularly with the state and community partners like UVM Medical Center, AALV and USCRI to identify barriers for marginalized groups. Recognizing that mandatory registration was a deterrent, we piloted a walk-in clinic for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) at the senior center in Winooski. There was the option to register, but walk-in access is what really made the model unique. This approach worked well, so we began offering walk-in BIPOC clinics at our Riverside Health Center in Burlington.

There was increasing interest in working with other underrepresented groups, so we then connected with

the Pride Center, Islamic Society, and most recently mobile outreach by our Homeless Healthcare Program team.

CHCB: How were the clinics received by patients?

Robyn: Initially, the people who came clearly wanted the vaccine. In the Islands, the firefighters and EMTs working alongside us were the friends and neighbors of people coming in, and were able to have productive conversations with anyone hesitant. At Riverside, we made it easy for patients to talk to their trusted health care workers, from front desk staff to medical providers, and understand that any vaccine-related risk is so much less than the risk of COVID.

CHCB: What about the clinics are you most proud of?

Robyn: In the beginning, this vaccine was like liquid gold and we took our role as stewards very seriously. The steering committee recognized this was a complex effort, and we initially met every day to work out the logistical and operational details. We had multiple conversations about optimizing the limited vaccine supply and ensuring we were using every single dose. In fact, we did administer over 1,000 shots without wasting a single one! I'm really proud of our staff for coming together and stepping up to make these clinics happen, and am truly impressed with how resourceful and committed our team is to meeting community needs.

A Note from Jeff

"As individuals and as an organization, it is time to take our health care off hold!" - Jeffrey McKee, PsyD, CEO

I am so thankful to be living in Vermont where all of our communities have responded so well to the pandemic, following safety guidance and leading the nation in vaccination rates. These efforts allow us to feel confident that we can resume so many of our personal and professional goals that had been put on hold over the past 18 months. As individuals and as an organization, it is time to take our health care off hold!

We recently completed a three-year strategic plan that recognizes the unique and vital role as the backbone

of access to the highest quality primary care, mental health, and dental care across the community. In order to better support the health of our community, our goals include creating a new practice location in Essex, expanding clinical services at our Riverside location, increasing access to dental services, creating improved access to affordable medication, and exploring opportunities to better serve the growing communities of Winooski and South Burlington.

This is an ambitious scope of work to be sure, but so critical to



improving the health of ALL within the communities we serve.

As you'll read, we have energetic and committed staff creating innovative ways to reach those who are often underrepresented, as well as exciting plans to use federal, state and philanthropic dollars to reinvest back into our community.

We're again moving forward, engaging our communities, and excited about the future.

—

CHCB Looks to the Future with Planned New Location

Though the COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges for CHCB, silver linings have begun to show. For 50 years, CHCB has proudly served anyone and everyone in our community. What started as a volunteer-based clinic, soon grew into an organization spread across eight locations in Chittenden and southern Grand Isle Counties. Our scope has expanded over the years, but we continue to ask ourselves the question: Who are we missing and how can we reach them? With that in mind, we applied and were approved for federal funding to renovate an existing building in the heart of Essex Junction to serve as our ninth CHCB location. These funds were made available in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure that organizations like CHCB have the necessary infrastructure to



continue our mission of providing the best care possible to all who enter our doors. Second only to Burlington, Essex is one of the most densely populated areas in the state, so we knew the need was substantial. This funding allows us to broaden access to an area with the highest volume of CHCB patients without a physical site, and we're excited about welcoming new patients who want to make CHCB their Health Care Home!

By establishing a CHCB site in Essex, patients will have local access to services unique to a Federally Qualified Health Center, including:

- Counseling/Psychiatry
- LGBTQ+ Specialty Services
- Discounted Prescriptions
- Laboratory Services
- Connection to Dental Care
- Addiction Recovery Services
- Financial Assistance Including Sliding-Fee Scale
- No-cost Nutrition Counseling
- Interpreter Support

CHCB Farm Share Program Brings Equity to the Table

Earlier this year, Stephanie Bergen, MS, RD, CD joined CHCB as our new Registered Dietitian overseeing Nutrition Services, which are offered to patients at no cost. On an average day, the Registered Dietitian works with patients to achieve health goals for issues such as diabetes, high blood pressure, developing a healthy relationship with food, and even cost-effective meal planning. They also work closely with newly-arrived immigrants and refugees to help navigate the local food system and coach them on how to cook with items they may not have had access to in the past.

Since the onset of the global pandemic caused by COVID-19, food insecurity has increased drastically. Even in Vermont, where our pandemic response has been swift and effective, it has not been uncommon to witness

miles-long lines of cars idling outside of local food distribution events.

This year, in partnership with Vermont Youth Conservation Corps and Blue Heron Farm, Stephanie helped to launch a new Farm Share Program for patients identified as being at highest risk of experiencing food insecurity. Stephanie collaborates with medical providers across each of CHCB's locations to identify and connect with these patients and enroll them in the Farm Share Program with the primary goal of increasing equitability of, and access to, nutrient-dense, fresh produce.

"I'm honored to support our community every day, and our farm share program is no exception. The program provides fresh produce to our patients experiencing food insecurity throughout Chittenden



CHCB Registered Dietitian, Stephanie Bergen, MS, RD, CD

and Grand Isle counties, while simultaneously supporting local agriculture," Stephanie explained.

She also distributes educational materials to patients on how to prepare, cook, and enjoy the specific items distributed within each weekly farm share to encourage optimal outcomes that reduce food waste.

"I look forward to continuing to nourish our community and play our role in alleviating community food insecurity."

A Prescription for Supportive, Integrative Care



CHCB Clinical Pharmacist, Emily Sutton, PharmD

Emily Sutton, PharmD, has been working with CHCB patients for many years through a relationship with the Albany College of Pharmacy. When the local ACP campus recently closed, it afforded us the opportunity to bring Emily on in a new Clinical Pharmacist staff position. Over the years, Emily has helped our patients to ensure they understand their medications, how to properly take and store them,

"Emily has absolutely improved the care of my patients." - Andrea Solomon, PA, CHCB Medical Provider

and how to access prescription discounts. She also works very closely with providers to help reconcile complicated medication lists, understand medication interactions, and monitor patient progress.

As a Clinical Pharmacist, Emily's work is very focused on direct patient care and consultative support for providers. "Emily has absolutely improved the care of my patients. She is so dedicated to the work we do," shared CHCB medical provider Andrea Solomon, PA. "Her work has allowed us to take care of patients who we previously would have had to send to specialists."

"I am here to help all CHCB patients

and providers choose and use the best and safest medications to treat their conditions," Emily said of her work. "I help folks on an individual basis and as a larger population to find ways to improve health through medications. We work as a team to decide what medications to start, stop, or change based off of each person's set of circumstances."

Emily is a vital partner in the management of some of our most medically complex patients. "She manages many patients who have diabetes, and educates providers about new medicines and the data behind them," Andrea added. "She is just amazing."



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Fiscal Year 2021 Highlights



120,381
patient visits



609
patients received
treatment for
opioid addiction



51,104
medical & mental
health visits
were conducted
via telehealth
technology



1,843
individuals
experiencing
homelessness
received no-cost
health care



\$331,054
was subsidized
through the
Sliding-Fee Scale
Financial
Assistance Program

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