



# Hilltown Community Health Center



## ANNUAL REPORT

| 2022 & 2023

Communities Engaged for Health

This past year, after nine years of extraordinary leadership, Hilltown Community Health Center said goodbye to our leader and dear friend, Eliza Lake. For nearly a decade, Eliza guided HCHC through many challenges and exciting transformations. During that time the Health Center grew from 101 employees to 148, our budget nearly doubled, and we opened our first new site in over 30 years, the John P. Musante Health Center in Amherst.

As CEO, Eliza personified the vision and culture of the Health Center, guiding the organization through the difficulties of the COVID pandemic, financial uncertainties, and sweeping changes in the health care labor market. Her focus on increasing access to quality health care services for our communities has enabled the Health Center to survive and thrive in a constantly changing and challenging environment.

Eliza's work benefited not just the Health Center but also the wider communities of the Hilltowns and the Pioneer Valley. She provided a steady and wise guidance to the organization, and will be greatly missed by the Board and the employees of the Health Center. We extend our best wishes to Eliza in her future endeavors.

Chair, Board of Directors

## OUR PATIENTS

# OUR MISSION

HCHC creates access to high quality integrated health care and promotes well-being for individuals, families, and our communities.

# DIRECTORS' LETTER

Dear Friend:

I am honored to present the Annual Report for 2022 and 2023 on behalf of Hilltown Community Health Center. As Chief Executive Officer, I am proud to reflect on our accomplishments and the positive impact we've had on the health and well-being of our community.

Nearly 75 years ago, HCHC was founded on a mission to create access to high quality integrated health care and promote well-being for individuals, families, and our greater communities. We remain steadfast in our commitment to this mission, and the past two years were no exception.

Key Highlights from 2022 and 2023 include:

**Expansion of Services:** Over the past two years we have expanded our range of services to address the evolving healthcare needs of our community. This included our healthcare for the unhoused program, adding revolving evening and weekend hours, launching a weight management and nutrition program, and the expansion of our Community Programs to include "food as medicine" CSAs, all of which have already made a positive impact on the lives of many.

**Patient-Centered Care:** We established a dedicated "practice transformation" team. Their primary goal is to identify and reduce barriers that hinder patient care. This multidisciplinary team collaborates closely to ensure our patients receive a holistic approach to healthcare. We have also utilized technological advancements to help with our patient-centered care approach. In late 2022 we successfully transitioned to a new electronic medical record and patient portal that augments this approach. Additionally, our upgraded phone system has allowed us to initiate a call center, streamlining communication and enhancing patient support. While not all transitions have been seamless, we remain committed to continuous improvement, and our patients and our mission remain central to every decision we make.

**Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI):** We've focused our care delivery model on hiring from within the communities we serve, providing care in a culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate manner, and going out into the communities with our health care providers and community health workers, to provide service to our neighbors that have historically been under-resourced.

**Community Health Needs Assessment:** In 2023, HCHC completed a formal assessment of the health and social factors that are affecting the health and wellbeing of our communities. The results of the assessment directly inform and improve our health care delivery model.

**Expanded Eye Care:** Thanks to a grant from the Association of Clinicians for the Underserved (ACU), HCHC purchased new mobile equipment to operate flexible eye care clinics at our Amherst, MANNA and our Worthington sites on a regular, year-round schedule. This equipment now allows our providers to offer direct visions services, comprehensive eye examinations, and prescription glasses.

These accomplishments would not have been possible without the dedication of our staff, the support of our community, and the generosity of our donors. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to every one of you for your unwavering support. Thank you for entrusting HCHC with your health and well-being. Together, we are making a difference in the lives of countless individuals and families in our community.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Purdy, Chief Executive Officer  
Lee Manchester, Board of Directors Chair

## 2022 & 2023 BY THE NUMBERS

148 

EMPLOYEES,  
FOCUSED ON THE  
HEALTH AND  
WELLBEING OF  
YOU AND YOUR  
FAMILY

73 

YEARS OF  
SERVICE TO OUR  
COMMUNITIES

10,000+ 

PATIENTS SERVED  
IN MEDICAL,  
DENTAL,  
OPTOMETRY, AND  
BEHAVIORAL  
HEALTH

7 

PRACITCE AND  
PROVIDER-BASED  
AWARDS FOR  
EXCEPTIONAL  
SERVICE

# unhoused

**(adj.) not having a dwelling place or shelter**

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For too many of our neighbors, "unhoused" is an adjective that sticks.

Over the past several years, the Hilltowns and Pioneer Valley have seen a surge in homelessness, with over 10% increases in every community in Hampshire and Hampden counties.


There are many causes for a person, or a family, to become "unhoused"... the unforgiving imbalance between labor and housing costs, the struggles of the national mental health crisis, substance use disorder, or the migrant shelter crisis.

Any way you look at it, our neighbors are struggling to keep shelter over

their heads, but HCHC is proud to be working to help alleviate the pressure on our local communities.

Enter HCHC's Healthcare for the Unhoused Program.

The Healthcare for the Unhoused Program, led by Dr. Jessica Bossie, is a compassionate initiative designed to provide comprehensive medical, behavioral (mental) health, and eye care and support services to individuals experiencing homelessness. Through



a network of dedicated healthcare professionals, including doctors, a substance use disorder (SUD) nurse, Behavioral Health professionals, Eye Care doctors, and social workers, the program aims to address the unique healthcare needs of this vulnerable population. Services offered may include primary care, mental health support, addiction treatment, and assistance with accessing housing resources.

By delivering care directly to those in need, regardless of their ability to pay or their housing status, the program seeks to improve health outcomes, enhance dignity, and promote stability for unhoused individuals within the community.

The program's work extends beyond the four walls of the health center. The team travels the length of the Pioneer Valley and across the Northern Hilltowns,

visiting camps in wooded areas, behind shopping plazas in Northampton, Worthington, and Amherst - areas full of individuals who may not trust the formal shelter system, are not eligible for the shelter system or unable to access the shelter system and therefore have unattended medical needs.

Additionally, the Program organizes health fairs in local parks, providing basic medical screenings, flu shots, and hygiene kits to those in need.

Through partnerships with shelters, outreach teams, and local organizations, the program's goal is to reach those who may otherwise face barriers to accessing healthcare, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to receive the care they deserve.

## ABOUT THE HEALTHCARE FOR UNHOUSED PROGRAM

Comprised of Dr. Jessica Bossie, her medical assistant Amber Goulet, Outreach and Enrollment Worker Natasha Rodriguez, substance use disorder nurse Pamela Stramese, and Health Insurance Navigator Buliah Mae Thomas, HCHC's team identifies patients experiencing homelessness and provides comprehensive medical care as well as helping them seek shelter, food, and the resources they need to live healthy lives. The Program's work is essential to our community's collective goal of having a healthy, equitable, and resilient community for all.



ANNUAL REPORT

# INCLUSIVE CARE

## THE ROLE OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION



## IT'S WHO WE ARE

**All Federally Qualified Health Centers, such as HCHC, exist for the purpose of providing care for medically underserved areas and populations, with no exceptions or exclusions. Since our founding nearly 75 years ago, inclusivity has been central to our mission, and it always will.**

through the framework of systemic inequity, oppression and White, European cultural dominance that spread post 1492. Finally, during her academic career she developed a minor in Spanish for the Health Professions, trained in global health and co-taught community health worker courses.

Debbie's approach to DEI at HCHC has been one centred on cultural humility and relationship building. She recognizes that each individual is at a different point in the DEI journey. She believes in calling people in, not calling out. She started by building a DEI blog that she publishes each week. The primary focus is health equity; however, it is a way to share knowledge of other cultures with the HCHC community. Her blog posts cover a variety of topics, from Latine health to Black maternal and infant mortality to having difficult discussions with patients. She also started creating internal and external social media posts to share health issues as well as cultural information with the greater community. She also started to develop training opportunities for staff that center on the HCHC mission and best practices when working with folks from diverse backgrounds, focusing on building a caring and affirming space where folks feel seen and respected for who they are.

Debbie has also extended this relationship building externally. She has laid the foundation for dialogue and collaboration with many organizations, both in the Hilltowns and Amherst. She has volunteered at and attended various events, as she believes it is important to go where the people are and learn from them. She also led and participated in two separate Root Causes initiatives sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. HCHC partnered with the Hilltown CDC, the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission and the Women of Color Health Equity Collective to engage the greater community in discussions of diversity, equity and inclusion.

HCHC has invested in DEI for the long-term. Numerous data support that disparities exist due to systemic inequities and that people will have better health outcomes when they receive the resources and supports according to their individual needs. Inclusion is good for everyone and HCHC will continue to promote and implement practices and initiatives that support the whole person.

# INFORMED MODEL OF CARE: HOW A COMMUNITY HEALTH NEEDS ASSESSMENT GUIDES OUR APPROACH

**In 2022, HCHC conducted a Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) to identify and analyze the health needs of our service communities, providing a comprehensive picture of the health status, needs, and resources available in the community, such as:**

Identifying common diseases and conditions affecting the community and the frequency of various health conditions, examining factors like socioeconomic status, education, employment, and housing that influence health outcomes, and evaluating the availability and accessibility of healthcare services, and identifies barriers to accessing care. The CHNA also examines behaviors that affect health and assesses the community's engagement in preventive measures, recognizes disparities in health outcomes and access to care among different population groups, identifies the most pressing health issues that require immediate attention and resources, and assesses the adequacy of healthcare infrastructure, including facilities, technology, and workforce, and identifies policy-related barriers and opportunities for advocacy and policy change to improve health outcomes.

## WHAT WE LEARNED

HCHC's CHNA points to common themes regarding the healthcare needs and barriers to care for residents of HCHC's service area.

While HCHC's service area offers numerous resources that support wellness and long-term health, not all members of the community have equal access to them. Growing numbers of residents in the service region are from communities of color, and the interaction between racial and economic inequalities has led to a string of unfavorable health outcomes that have been classified as priority health needs.

The COVID pandemic had significant effects on physical health, and the isolation and worry it caused only served to exacerbate the already dismal mental health outcomes, especially for youth. Young people are more at risk for depression, anxiety, and self-harm, especially if they identify as transgender or nonbinary. Community members still struggle to achieve their most basic requirements

for housing and food access, with food insecurity identified as a major contributor to poor health and long-term wellbeing.

As the housing market becomes more competitive due to smaller households, an aging population will pose greater difficulties. Housing burdens are significantly more likely to affect communities of color. Many households don't have access to buses or trains because of the service area's rural nature, which poses problems for public transit.

Transience and homelessness continue to challenge our health care system's ability to provide care for all members of our community and is only exasperated by the challenges community members are experiencing with rising housing and food costs.

## ADDRESSING NEED

HCHC's Senior Management and Board of Directors are utilizing the CHNA to inform decision-making around future changes in grant-writing, quality improvement projects/ charters, the scope of services and sites, and community partnerships. Key areas of focus that are being considered by the Board and senior leadership include:

**Limited Provider Availability:** Gaps in capacity equate to reduced access for our patients. HCHC's provider shortages mirror those experienced across other community health centers in Massachusetts and across the country. HCHC has instituted proactive recruiting methods, acquired grant funding for provider support, training, and education, and updated our Human Resources Department.

**Health Disparities & Chronic Illness:** BIPOC communities and other historically underserved groups encounter challenges in treating chronic diseases, which leads to increased usage of emergency rooms which can lead to subpar health outcomes. Directly addressing health equity issues that are related to historical and systemic barriers to care and any form of bias or discrimination is a priority for HCHC, and we've made important and meaningful accessibility updates to our phone system, website, and in-office translations services, as well as creating a staff position responsible for improving and sustaining a high level of care and patient experience.

**Food Scarcity:** Access to healthy food is essential to long-term health and wellbeing. HCHC is committed to our continued investment in our Nutrition and Weight Management services, community-based health education programs, and forming and promoting partnerships with local food banks, mobile farmers markets, and government service programs such as SNAP.

**Youth Mental Health:** Youth mental health is a serious and growing problem that must be addressed. HCHC is devoted to our School-Based Health Center (SBHC) model of care and is a proven interventions for young people struggling with mental health. Through partnerships with local school districts, such as Northampton's Smith Vocational and Agricultural School, HCHC can deliver an integrated and collaborative care model that can help students and families achieve better long-term health and wellbeing.

# MEETING THE NEED

## HCHC'S RESPONSE TO THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN THE PIONEER VALLEY

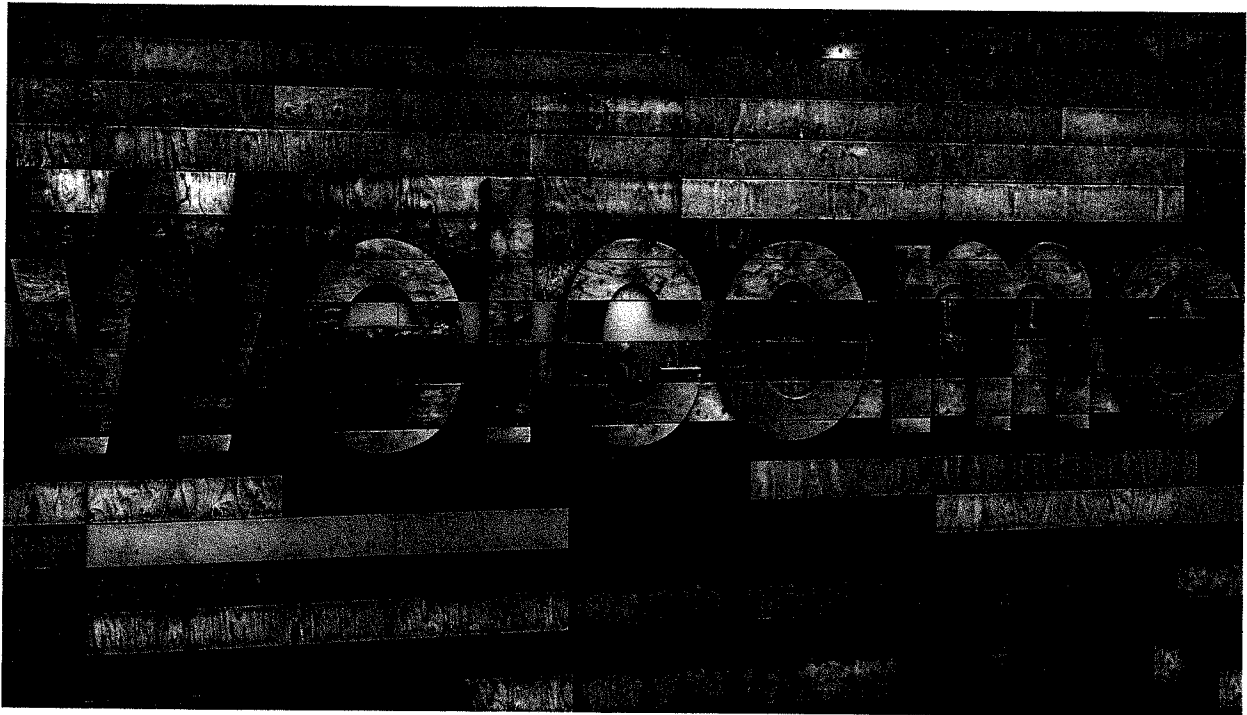
Northern states have become new homes for many refugees, bused in from various southern United States regions. These individuals and families, seeking safety and a fresh start, face an array of challenges that extend beyond the physical journey to their new locales. Language barriers, limited access to healthcare, and basic needs are significant hurdles that they must overcome as they adapt to their new environments.

Refugees frequently arrive with untreated medical conditions, both physical and mental, exacerbated by the stress of displacement. The unfamiliarity with the local healthcare system, coupled with language, and cultural barriers makes accessing medical services a daunting task.

In October of 2023, 14 refugee families from Haiti arrived in Hadley with no advanced notice to the town or local support agencies. Despite the lack of advanced notice, HCHC immediately responded by sending two Community Health Workers (CHWs), Natasha Rodriguez and Christopher Puffer, along with intern Clara Laurent to visit and communicate with the families and assess their health and basic needs.

HCHC's Community Health Workers are public health professionals who assist individuals and families by providing culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate health education, information and outreach in community-based settings. HCHC's CHWs are regularly on the frontline of the public health landscape, bridging the gap between individuals and health/human services, assisting people gain access to the services they needs, and providing direct services such as social support, health screenings, and informal counselling.

HCHC's Community Health Workers, in coordination with the National Guard, worked on the issue of transportation and long-term housing for the refugees.



Days later, the families from Haiti were received at the Musante Health Center in Amherst, where they had their first medical, optometry, and dental appointments. The families were also assigned to Primary Care Providers, who continue to monitor their care.

In addition to responding to their health related needs, HCHC's Health Insurance Navigators worked with the refugees to assist the families with securing health insurance. In the weeks and months following their arrival, HCHC's CHWs continue to assist the families with meeting their basic needs for clothing, food assistance, travel, and housing.

HCHC is proud to provide these essential, culturally responsive health and social care services to all community members who need them, regardless of their ability to pay or health insurance status, and we will continue to assist individuals and families with their integration into our local communities to ensure the health and well being of all our neighbors.

## 2022 & 2023

Robert Andres	Jaclyn Gauger
Anonymous	Jeffrey & Zoe Greenwood
John A. & Elizabeth S. Armstrong	Michelle M. Grobman
Matthew Bannister	Kenneth Hardy
Kenneth H. Barrows	Wilmot Hastings
Jeffrey D. Blaustein	Anna Hathaway
Paul Bockelman	Frances W. Henry
Deborah A. Bogoff	Marianne Hoag
Jennifer E. Booker	Cheryl M. Hopson
Nancy A. Brenner	First Congregational
David Broderick	of Huntington
Howard Bronstein	Patti M. Igel
Gillian G. Brown	Evan T. Johnson
Nancy Burke	Carol A. Jolly
Fred Byron	Lorraine M. Kerley
Rosamond Campbell	Sheila J. Kinney
Pamela B. Carpenter	Patricia M. Kirouac
Larry E. Cervelli	Janet D. Klausner-Wise
Jane P. Christensen	William A. Lake
Jason Costa	Richard A. Larson
Georgianna H. Dana	Beo Leong Lim
Susan Dion	Lee MacKinnon
Judith A. Dolven	Martin L. Manchester
Paul Duval	Douglas S. Marshall
Jack M. Eisenstadt	John Maruskin
Donald Ellershaw	Susan E. McIntosh
Sandra J. Epperly	Sondra Miller
Matthew E. Fishman	John Miller
Katherine Fite	Sondra Miller
Eileen Fitzgerald	Steven Monkiewicz
John S. Follet	Marlene Musante
Laurie Freitag	Maureen Napoles
Paypal Giving Fund	Sarah E. Neely
Alan Gaitenby	Gary & Deborah Niswonger

Eldeen Nugent  
Jonathan O'Keeffe  
Carlos Ortiz  
Barbara Pease  
Dale Peterson  
Kathryn Jensen, Ph.D.  
Roxanne A. Pin  
Harriet M. Plehn  
Barbara M. Porter  
Victoria B. Reed  
Susan Riter  
Margaret Robertson  
William P. Rohan  
Lee C. Root  
Lindsay Sabadosa  
Dawn Schile

Debora Schnappauf  
Margery A. Shaw  
Peter Siersma  
Linda J. Siska  
Ellen Story  
Paul A. Strasburg  
Eleanor H. Tejirian  
Royal E. Thern  
Joel M. Upton  
Paul W. Walter  
Mary M. Weitzel  
Lynn Winsor  
Walter R. Wittshirk  
Jonathan A. Wright  
PeoplesBank  
Whalen Insurance

***Creating access to high quality  
integrated health care and promoting  
well-being for individuals, families, and  
our communities.***

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COMMUNITY CENTER**

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