



No Place Like Home Mercy Care Invests in SDOH for Arizona Medicaid Members

Mercy Care, as the first Regional Behavioral Health Authority in Arizona to deliver integrated health services to persons with a serious mental illness designation, knows that housing plays a major role in members' health and well-being.

The successful delivery of integrated health services for all Medicaid populations includes an emphasis on social determinants of health, or SDOH. SDOH are factors that contribute directly or indirectly to an individual's overall wellbeing, such as housing, education, access to healthy food, safe neighborhoods, reliable transportation and access to healthcare. Access to healthcare, however, accounts for only about 10% of the factors that influence a person's wellbeing. Non-healthcare factors account for 90 percent of those factors.

In other words, a person's ZIP code is a better predictor of their health and wellbeing than their genetic code.

The greatest SDOH for all individuals, including those eligible for Medicaid, is stable housing. That's why Mercy Care has integrated housing security into the care delivery for its most vulnerable populations.

According to independent research on Mercy Care's SDOH work, conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago, integrating housing as an aspect of healthcare service delivery improves members' health and wellbeing. The NORC research shows that Mercy Care's supportive housing led to the following health outcomes*:

- 20% decrease in psychiatric inpatient hospitalizations
- 23% decrease in behavioral health services costs
- 46% increase in behavioral health facility costs
- 24% decrease in total cost of care

**Source: "A Case Study and Evaluation of Programs Addressing Social Determinants of Health for Individuals with Serious Mental Illness," NORC at the University of Chicago, 2018.*

To impact housing as a SDOH, Mercy Care's housing programs ensure a full continuum of support for members. This includes move-in assistance and eviction prevention resources, short-term rental assistance, temporary housing and Permanent Supportive Housing.

In 2018, Mercy Care, the City of Phoenix and Community Bridges Inc. collaborated to renovate an existing building to provide new, temporary housing for homeless individuals who have received their housing voucher and are awaiting their permanent supportive housing. This temporary housing, called The Bridge, also provides wrap-around services to help clients make a successful transition from homelessness to permanent housing.

Since 2014, Mercy Care has been improving and expanding housing options for Medicaid members in Maricopa County. This work is the result of multiple cross-sector partnerships between Mercy Care and others, including:

- Local government entities, such as the City of Phoenix, the City of Tempe, Maricopa County Housing Authority, AHCCCS, the Arizona Department of Housing and the Arizona Department of Corrections
- Integrated service providers, such as Community Bridges, Inc., Native American Connections, La Frontera Impact and others
- Community partners, such as the Arizona Behavioral Health Corporation and Catholic Charities

Increasing stable housing for Medicaid members requires stretching every housing dollar and taking advantage of federal and state funding. Using a combination of subsidies and vouchers, and by creating new approaches to Project-Based, Scattered Site, and Permanent Supportive Housing, Mercy Care has achieved positive outcomes on behalf of all eligible Medicaid members in Maricopa County:

1. Expanded from 107 subsidies in 2014 to more than 3,500 subsidies in 2019.
2. 96% retention rate for Project-Based and Scattered Site housing programs, creating new housing opportunities and supporting members in becoming successful tenants in the housing of their choice.
3. Expanded access to Permanent Supportive Housing for more than 3,700 members.
4. Delivered housing to 50 individuals as part of the Hand in Hand program, which serves SMI and GMH/SU members who are involved with the county jail system.
5. Created its first Rental Assistance Demonstration project to preserve and improve public housing through investments of the SMI Housing Trust.
6. Produced a 24% decrease in healthcare costs for members with SMI determinations.

"Trailblazing"

In addition to the NORC research Mercy Care has received other national recognition for its work. The Journal of Housing and Community Development called the collaboration "trailblazing" in a January 2019 article.

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