Innovation Report

Washington Association for Community Health
Community Health Centers Advancing Quality Care for All

COMMUNITY HEALTH Care
MEDICAL • DENTAL • PHARMACY

Puyallup Health Center Designed for Patient Experience

Community Health Care's new site was created in response to the growing need for accessible, affordable, and comprehensive healthcare in East Pierce County.

Expanding Access to Patient-Centered Care



Fifty-six years ago, a group of physicians and concerned citizens founded Community Health Care (CHC) in response to an urgent need for health care in Pierce County. From a small beginning in 1969 with two volunteer clinics, CHC now offers services in seven medical and behavioral health clinics, five dental clinics, seven pharmacies, and three school-based health clinics. Even with this growth, CHC has remained true to its mission of providing care to the uninsured and underinsured.

In February 2025, CHC opened its newest location in Puyallup in response to the growing need for accessible and comprehensive healthcare in East Pierce County. Community members in the smaller towns and unincorporated areas have struggled to find care that is affordable, coordinated, and nearby. With Pierce County's rapidly growing population, CHC recognized this and expanded to meet their community's needs. The Puyallup Health Center was designed to help address access gaps by bringing together medical, dental, behavioral health, and support services in one place.

The Puyallup Health Center offers:

- Medical care for adults and children
- Behavioral health and substance abuse services
- Dental care, including emergency access
- Low-cost Pharmacy services
- Support for maternity and prenatal health
- Specialized foster and adoption care
- Prompt care for walk-in medical needs
- Assistance with non-medical needs such as housing and food
- Services are provided to everyone with or without insurance, regardless of ability to pay

Integrated Behavioral Health Services

One of the central features of the Puyallup clinic is the integration of a trusted community partner into the overall services provided. In addition to the behavioral health team at CHC, the clinic includes on-site office space for Comprehensive Life Resources which offers care for more complex behavioral health needs.

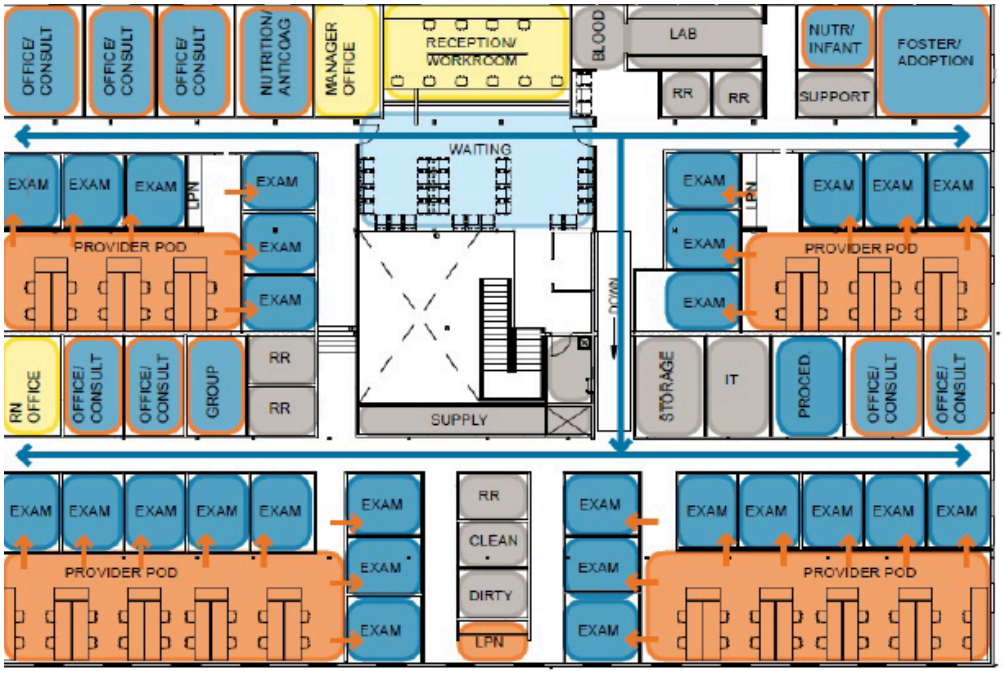
This setup allows patients to receive both physical and mental health services in one location, which is especially important when transportation is a barrier to care. Providers can easily coordinate care, and patients are connected to needed support through direct, in-person introductions between team members. This co-located model improves continuity of care and decreases the time that patients wait to seek mental health care.

A Team-Based Layout That Improves Care

The Puyallup Health Center uses a provider pod layout, a team-based design that improves how staff work together and how patients experience care. Instead of placing providers in separate offices across the building, the pod system brings members of the care team into shared central workspaces. These open areas allow team members to collaborate, ask questions, and make joint recommendations for patient care.

The new provider pod system allows CHC to offer 2,500 more patient visits per year.

Exam rooms are located around the outside of the pods, creating a layout that allows providers to move efficiently between patient visits while staying connected to their team. Each exam room has two doors (one for patients and one for staff) which helps maintain privacy while supporting communication behind the scenes.



This design also increases the number of exam rooms that can fit into the space. At Puyallup Health Center, the layout made it possible to add 10 more exam rooms than a traditional setup would have, allowing 2,500 more patient visits each year.

The provider pod system increases health access, supports better coordination, and results in a more connected experience for patients.

Specialized Care for Foster and Adoption Programs

The Puyallup Health Center also includes a dedicated space for children and youth in foster or adoption care. This program ensures that children entering the foster system receive the required medical and dental exams within the necessary timeframes, something that can be difficult to access quickly in many communities.

The care provided is grounded in a supportive and sensitive approach, which recognizes the emotional stress and uncertainty children may experience during major transitions. The space is designed to be calming and child-friendly. Rooms include soft seating, sensory-friendly decorations, toys, and welcoming touches that help reduce fear and anxiety during exams.

By offering a setting that prioritizes comfort and emotional safety, this program helps children engage more fully in their care. It also gives foster families and caregivers access to providers who understand the unique needs of children who have experienced instability or significant change. This is the second location for CHC's foster and adoption care program, expanding access to specialized services for families throughout East Pierce County.

Designed with Patients and Community in Mind

Based on CHC's deep understanding of community needs, the clinic was designed to support comfort for patients and teamwork among staff. The Puyallup Health Center reflects CHC's goal to respond directly to the needs of the communities it serves. By expanding services in this location, CHC aims to improve access and strengthen health outcomes for the Puyallup area.



"We built this clinic to be able to do what our mission is. To provide the highest quality healthcare with accessible and compassionate service. That's what we do, and that's what we built this for."

Dr. Jeff Smith, Chief Medical Officer

Washington Association for Community Health

The Association's innovation reports aim to support community health centers in leading innovation by identifying successful promising practices and communicating them to the statewide network.

Does your CHC have an innovation to share? Let us know!

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