

DEMONSTRATING COMMUNITY BENEFIT IN ACTION THROUGH THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

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Beyond the walls of hospitals and clinics exists an extensive network of organizations and collaborative efforts to create healthy communities and promote health equity. Often, behind the scenes, community health professionals and their partners work diligently to identify and address the root causes of illness and partner to create solutions that put the most vulnerable on a path toward health and wellness.

Community health work has been at the heart of Catholic health care for more than a century, working in collaboration with clinical programming, guiding community resource design and influencing legislation. Yet, this foundational work is often misunderstood and goes unrecognized publicly because it operates within the traditional and broader health care apparatus, where the focus tends to be on the provision of preventive and lifesaving care. Community health work also comes from a place of humility, where the focus is on lifting others up versus shining a light on the efforts themselves. For these reasons, it isn't well-known for its significant role and the value it provides within our communities.

At Providence St. Joseph Health, a national, nonprofit Catholic health system serving seven Western U.S. states, we view community health programs as an extension of our mission to care for all. Providence's legacy began with founding sisters determined to address the most pressing community needs, from providing health care to offering shelter to those experiencing homelessness. Our steadfast commitment to respond to community needs is one of the many ways Providence ministries, affiliates and caregivers live out our shared mission and serve as a vital safety net.

Providence's community benefit programs and its Annual Report to Our Communities reflect this commitment.¹ Every year, we publish and promote the community health improvement work

of Providence ministries and affiliates, telling the stories of the inspiring individuals we have the privilege to serve, as well as the caregivers and community partners who help bring our mission to life.

Providence takes a comprehensive approach to community benefit and its reporting to further connect our stakeholders to the mission and to support a more thorough understanding of the many ways Catholic health care provides for its communities.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNITY BENEFIT

Providence's more than 165-year legacy of investing in communities is rooted in a tradition of caring for those in need, with compassion and in partnership with the people we serve. We work to ensure basic health needs are met and strive to remove barriers to care, build community resilience and innovate for the future through proactive community health improvement programs; free and discounted, low-cost care; and subsidized services. In 2023, Providence ministries and affiliates provided nearly \$2.1 billion in community benefit programs and services.

Our approach to community benefit programming allows us to scale best practices across urban, rural and suburban markets throughout our ministry. Resources include tools and facilitation to support robust community

engagement; feedback on needs identification and prioritization; our Inclusive & Caring Language Guide; learning collaboratives on such topics as data analysis/interpretation and food insecurity; and data hubs that organizations can access to support grant writing and gain insights into their populations' needs.

This work is complex and requires the involvement of many collaborators. While community health may lead these efforts, there are deep partnerships with public affairs colleagues, our boards and service area executives, teams of caregivers and like-minded partners in the community.

We recognize that the challenges facing our communities go beyond direct patient care, and the solutions must go upstream as well. Communication is instrumental in extending the benefits of our programs. By elevating the work of our partners and amplifying the voices and experiences of those who benefit from these programs, we're drawing attention to critical needs and influencing and advancing social change.

STORYTELLING TO UNDERSTAND THE 'WHY' AND 'HOW'

A recent national consumer survey found that there's a significant lack of public awareness around community benefit.² However, when participants were presented with examples of community benefit, a majority agreed that the areas of focus — for example, financial assistance and housing — were valuable and aligned with how they would prioritize investment.

Storytelling is critical to helping people understand the "why" and involving them in the "how." To bring the mission to life for stakeholders, Providence uses its annual report and multimedia storytelling to highlight our community work and partnerships and to demonstrate our impact. Through the experiences of those who receive support from our community benefit programs, we can better articulate the challenges facing our families, friends, neighbors and co-workers and the solutions for a healthier community. Effective storytelling serves as a powerful call to action and change agent.

Teams across Providence come together to identify and share powerful examples of patients, caregivers and community partners collaborating to make communities healthier through strategic programming and focused investments. We showcase written and visual stories on our annual re-

port website with community benefit data from each service area and region we serve, helping to drive conversation and awareness across geographies, media outlets, communication platforms and stakeholders.

Local ministries and regions use content from the report website to build unique communication plans that reflect their programs, partnerships and audiences. For example, in Alaska, local data and stories of community benefit featured in the report are printed and distributed at local events; shared with caregivers in internal newsletters; made available to patients in clinics and hospitals; and provided to partners, donors, legislators and media.

Additionally, in Centralia and Olympia, Washington, local Providence teams recently launched community dialogue sessions to help identify and develop solutions around community health issues, including homelessness. Communication leaders use information and resources from the annual report to frame conversations with community members about shared health priorities and community health programs and their impact. Insights from these conversations go on to inform the hospitals' community health needs assessment process.

A large part of Providence's communication efforts is dedicated to the organization's 120,000 caregivers. It's important that those who support the mission see the impact their efforts and the community benefit programs have in the communities where they live and work. It also provides us with an opportunity to recognize the many people who have a hand in designing and supporting community benefit programs that touch thousands of lives. We leverage internal newsletters and our intranet to cascade stories and content, share materials across social media channels that caregivers follow, and use stories in meeting reflections and presentations.

Providence's annual report goes beyond reporting requirements for community benefit. Providence ministries and affiliates use it to inform and engage stakeholders in conversations about a wide range of programs and initiatives that represent our legacy of charitable, nonprofit Catholic health care, such as awarding grants, philanthropy, health equity, sustainability and advocacy. Community benefit is just one way we address challenging health care issues and give

back, and we make a point to put it all into context through the annual report.

CORE TENETS FOR AN INTEGRATED PROMOTION STRATEGY

Over the last several years, Providence’s community health investment and communication teams have developed a collaborative process for sharing our good works through the annual report. Several lessons learned have helped us create an inclusive, integrated and successful approach.

Cross-functional Engagement and Alignment

Community benefit programs intersect with many departments and teams. Identifying and bringing together key internal stakeholders to co-develop the annual report creates an inclusive, collaborative environment and ensures the content is representative of the various communities featured throughout.

Flexibility for Local Adaptation

Community benefit is designed to respond to the unique needs of a particular area. Similarly, communication must be tailored, relevant and meaningful to resonate with our audiences. Creating evergreen, universal content allows for easy adaptation and localization, while maintaining key themes and cohesion.

Surveying and Measurement

Community benefit investments are intentionally structured to be dynamic so they can best meet current and projected needs. The ways we communicate and disseminate the annual report are

equally flexible. Each year, we survey teams across Providence to understand what information and format would be most helpful in reaching target audiences. Additionally, we use data to further refine our plans and develop best practices, including determining which social media channels are most effective in driving traffic to the report website and how stakeholders prefer to receive report content.

A COMMITMENT TO PRESERVE OUR STORIES

Showcasing Providence’s community benefit investments through the annual report has become a hallmark of our communication with stakeholders and a tool to preserve our history. As the media and technology landscapes continue to evolve and our audiences’ preferences for receiving and interacting with storytelling and data change, our community health and communication teams will seek new, innovative ways to serve up content that resonates and meets people where they are, mirroring how we approach and invest in community benefit programs.

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NOTES

1. “2023 Annual Report,” Providence, 2023, <https://www.providence.org/about/annual-report>.
2. “2024 National Consumer Survey: Issues & Advocacy,” Jarrard, 2024, <https://jarrardinc.com/resources/national-consumer-survey-2024-request/>.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

www.chausa.org

HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, Fall 2024, Vol. 105, No. 4
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