



WHITTIER STREET HEALTH CENTER  
Comprehensive. Compassionate. Community.

## Whittier Street Health Center update from the CEO



**December 3rd, 2018**

**Dear Friends,**

As another New Year rolls in, I feel honored to work with a dedicated, talented multidisciplinary team focused on providing high quality care for thousands of vulnerable men, women and children living in Boston neighborhoods.

During this last quarter, Whittier faced and overcame many challenges; yet we still managed to increase our services in areas with the greatest need. Most recently, we received a \$1 million dollar grant to implement an opioid prevention program for mothers. This award, in conjunction with our new Mobile Health Van launched in November, allows us to spread our outreach efforts to more homeless and opioid addicted residents in our service areas. We also opened the doors to our new Food Pantry in October to meet the food needs of 50% of our patients who suffer from food insecurity.

**Positioning Ourselves for the Long Term:**

Health and social disparities are increasing, funding is shrinking and health care centers nationwide are struggling to keep the doors open. Since 2002 Whittier has grown its annual budget from \$5m to almost \$30m in 2018 and has diversified its funding sources. However, like many US community health centers, challenges in funding the Affordable Care Act and the shrinking funding pipeline for public and private grants have forced Whittier – over the past two years – to make cuts to trim and balance its budget. Other community health care organizations are experiencing these same issues and have had to reduce staffing as well.

Several difficult decisions were made recently to ensure Whittier's continued financial stability so that we could continue to save, transform and improve the lives of our vulnerable and marginalized patient population and community residents. We have reduced staff, left some positions unfilled and eliminated some services which could not be financially supported – without compromising or sacrificing quality care. Specifically, we:

- Phased out the Urgent Care Department allowing us to fund several day/urgent care slots across primary care departments.
- Closed the orthodontics program to focus on wellness and prevention allowing us to increase access to much needed hygiene and general dentistry, especially for young children.
- Reduced excess capacity in the departments that were over-staffed.
- Implemented a hiring freeze due to the reduced of the number of patients assigned to Whittier with the transition to the MassHealth ACO model.

These steps allowed us to successfully resolve our recent budget deficit – the first in 17 years. We are at a break-even budget, and are working hard to manage our costs to remain viable and strong for our dedicated employees and patients.

The entire health care industry is shifting toward a system focused on eliminating unnecessary medical costs while improving care quality and patient engagement—Whittier is also transitioning and meeting its challenges head on.

#### **Making High Quality Care Priority One:**

For the past two years, Whittier has been moving toward value-based care, strengthening the family medicine and holistic care model and transitioning the behavioral health team into an integrated and care coordination model. More than **50%** of Whittier's revenues are from grants, contracts and donations. When that funding ends, programs and jobs - are in jeopardy. With this understanding, we are working hard to improve staff productivity and to find alternative funding sources to counter our heavy reliance on grants and contracts.

Our patients are our main concern. Patient safety and high-quality of care remain top priorities at Whittier and our outstanding work and adherence to best practices once again captured national recognition for our organization-wide compliance with state and federal guidelines and more stringent requirements. This year, we earned a perfect score of 100 in our compliance audit by Health Resource Services Administration - the federal agency responsible for health center funding. Additionally, Whittier is a Joint Commission accredited organization, recognized by the National Council on Quality Assurance as a Level 3 (highest ranking) patient centered medical home and adheres to all regulatory expectations.

Whittier's reach continues to spread. Our new satellite clinic, Quincy Commons, located on Blue Hill Avenue, Roxbury, is attracting new patients. Last month, we added behavioral health services onsite to help area residents find new ways to cope with their chronic conditions.

For 85 years, Whittier has been a beacon of hope for diverse populations. Approximately 40% of Whittier's pediatric patients and 35% adult patients are uninsured, 91% live below the poverty level and **no one** is denied access to care. With help and resources from our partners and donors we will continue to meet the needs of our underserved populations.

We are committed to using our capabilities, expertise, resources and partnerships to fulfill our mission in making our Boston community a healthier place for all.

Thank you for your continued support of our mission *to provide reliable, accessible and high-quality health care and support services for diverse populations, to promote wellness and eliminate health disparities and social inequities. We are honored to serve as a champion of health equity and social justice for the diverse residents of the communities we serve – 30,000+ annually.*

On behalf of the Whittier staff and our patients, I extend our best wishes to all this Holiday Season.

Warm regards,  
Frederica M. Williams

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<http://www.wshc.org/>

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