

ANNUAL REPORT 2019

NEW HORIZONS



VISION

Everyone has the opportunity to live their healthiest life.

MISSION

To increase the years of healthy life in the people and communities we serve.



VALUES

RESPECT

We treat people as we would want them to treat us and strive to understand and reconcile our differences. We practice professionalism and kindness with each other.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We accept responsibility for our work, invest wisely, and do what we say we will do.

INTEGRITY

We strive to make honest, responsible decisions and act in alignment with our mission, vision, and values.

COLLABORATION

We work alongside our patients, staff, and community partners to improve health.

INNOVATION

We adapt to the ever-changing needs of the future.

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(through Jan. 26, 2020)

DEAR FRIENDS and PARTNERS

As one of the newest members of the Unity Care NW team, I am thrilled to introduce this reflection on 2019 and overview of some of the “new horizons” that lie ahead of us. Thank you for your support and partnership that are so fundamental to our ability to serve the needs of our community.

From Unity Care’s founding in the 1980s as the Interfaith Community Health Center, our work has been guided by deeply-rooted principles including community partnership, social justice, equity and compassion, and health care as a human right. In 2019, we revised and reconnected with our vision, mission, and values. We celebrated the expansion of our facilities and services in North Whatcom County. Our clinical teams provided care to 21,446 individuals – nearly 10 percent of the entire population of Whatcom County. Our patients sought care for everything from tummy aches and toothaches to life-altering diagnoses and life-threatening diseases. Our staff delivered consistently excellent care and service in an environment that our customers describe as welcoming, inclusive, respectful, and culturally sensitive.

The advent of COVID-19 has brought a new level of clarity regarding Unity Care’s essential role in our community. We are humbled by the generous support and sustaining partnerships that we have benefited from during the early months of this pandemic, and we are grateful for the numerous

opportunities we have had to experience how deeply resilient we are as an organization and a community.

Through the dedication and innovation of our staff, collaborative relationships with community partners, and the generous backing of our supporters, Unity Care is continuing to grow our reach and our impact throughout our county. In the following pages, we are happy to share with you just a few of our remarkable services, patients, and care providers, and to provide several glimpses into the ways that we are providing support both within our health centers and throughout Whatcom County.

We are enormously grateful to our partners, donors, and volunteers who are helping guide our growth and secure our future. We remain committed to caring for all who seek our care, regardless of their ability to pay. Thanks to your support and investment, we are increasing the years of healthy life in the people and communities we serve.

Here’s to the continued pursuit of our vision: a future where everyone has the opportunity to live their healthiest lives.



Jodi Joyce
Chief Executive Officer



2019: THE YEAR IN REVIEW



- **The North Whatcom Health Center opened on July 1, 2019**, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony held in June. Thank you to the foundations, local leaders, legislators, donors, and other funders who made this new facility a reality. Since opening last July, the North Whatcom Health Center has already provided care to nearly **1,000 new patients**, and our new pharmacy had filled **over 1,100 prescriptions** by the end of 2019.
- The National Association of Community Health Centers renewed Unity Care NW's **Bronze Level Advocacy Center of Excellence status** in recognition of our advocacy work promoting the mission of community health centers.
- Our Child and Family Counselor began a program offering **behavioral health services onsite at Carl Cozier Elementary School** in Bellingham. We are assessing the feasibility of expanding school-based behavioral health services with the recent addition of a second Child and Family Counselor.
- During National Health Center Week, we screened "**Broken Places**," a film highlighting childhood adversity and resilience. We were pleased that the film was so well-received by the community.
- We launched a **Whatcom Veggie Rx program** for patients living with diabetes, in partnership with the Bellingham Food Bank, PeaceHealth, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, the Community Food Co-op, and Community Health Plan of Washington. Participating patients have received monthly \$40 vouchers redeemable for fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables at Community Food Co-op locations. In its first year, the program served **67 patients**, 45 of whom experienced improvement in their blood sugar level as a result of program participation.
- After revisiting our Mission, Vision, and Values statements in 2018, Unity Care NW staff collaborated in further defining our **Values in Action**, describing how we apply our values in our work with patients, the community, and each other.

THE YEAR AHEAD: 2020

- ➊ Our immediate priority is to help our **patients and community rebound from the COVID-19 crisis**. We will be assessing community needs and revisiting our 2019-2024 Strategic Plan to best position our health center to respond to anticipated preventive care and treatment needs.
- ➋ We are **expanding our Whatcom Veggie Rx program to serve a total of 100 patients in 2020**, thanks to \$15,000 in funding from a CVS Health Community Grant, part of CVS Health's commitment to building healthier communities, the Whatcom Community Foundation, and the many donors who contributed to this effort at last September's Eat Local Gala.
- ➌ We plan to **expand our behavioral health services for children and families** and look forward to providing school-based services at **Carl Cozier Elementary** and **Roosevelt Elementary** in Bellingham when schools are back in session and it is safe to do so.
- ➍ In partnership with PeaceHealth, the Opportunity Council, and Whatcom County, we continue to explore **expanded services for those experiencing homelessness**, part of our 2019-2024 Strategic Plan. **"The Way Station"** will offer medical respite beds, primary medical and behavioral health services, and hygiene facilities, including laundry and showers.
- ➎ We will continue to **expand our Substance Use Disorder services**, including the provision of Medication Assisted Therapy to treat opioid dependence.
- ➏ We will continue to **build our telemedicine capacity in our medical and behavioral health departments**. Our experience with behavioral health telemedicine visits has been particularly successful in the first months of 2020, and we look forward to expanding access to such services in the coming year.
- ➐ Our **Pharmacy staff is launching prescription delivery services** in several parts of Whatcom County for those patients facing transportation or other challenges.



INNOVATION

Community health centers have always served as a testing ground for innovative approaches to care.

The integration of primary medical, dental, behavioral health, and pharmacy services enables our staff to work collaboratively to address the health needs of the whole person. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, we are charged with improving the health of the people and communities we serve while simultaneously reducing the cost of care. We live up to that expectation. The nation's community health centers provide quality care to each of their Medicaid patients for 24 percent less cost, compared to other health care providers.

Over the past several years, we have implemented numerous programs that take innovation a step further. We have embedded case management and behavioral health staff within our primary care teams to ensure that our medical providers have at-the-ready assistance in connecting patients to social and behavioral health supports. Our Chronic Pain Management program introduced alternatives for pain management, including yoga and QiGong classes and acupuncture services, to improve patient well-being while reducing the risk of opioid dependence. Our Outreach and Enrollment staff assist members of our entire community in accessing affordable health care insurance. In collaboration with community partners, we have introduced the Parkscriptions program to encourage the health benefits associated with time spent outdoors.

A highlight of the past year was our Whatcom Veggie Rx program. The program, launched in partnership with the Bellingham Food Bank, PeaceHealth, Sea Mar Community Health Centers, the Community Food Co-op, and Community Health Plan of Washington, is designed for patients living with diabetes and experiencing food insecurity. Participating patients received monthly \$40 vouchers redeemable for fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables at Community Food Co-op locations. In its first year, the program served 67 patients, 45 of whom experienced improvement in their blood sugar level as a result of program participation. One participant was able to stop taking insulin as a result of his participation. We are now expanding the program to serve 100 patients in 2020.

We were thrilled to bring whole-person health care to Ferndale in 2019, with the addition of on-site pharmacy and lab services and expanded medical, dental, and behavioral health services at the new North Whatcom Health Center. We look forward to continuing our efforts in 2020 to bring health care home with prescription delivery services and telemedicine offerings. As we look to the future, we will continue to innovate to improve the health and well-being of our patients and build the conditions for healthy life throughout our community.

RESILIENCE

Fostering resiliency to improve health outcomes
is at the foundation of our approach to care.

We seek both to heal the effects of trauma and adversity and to prevent their occurrence. Through our whole person care model, our medical providers work with our behavioral health counselors to care for the body and mind.

We have long recognized the lifelong effects of toxic stress and trauma on health and child development. They affect the immune, hormonal, and cardiovascular systems, and the developing brain. They can impede learning, increase the risk of autoimmune disease, and change the physiology of the developing body. They are a risk factor for lifelong health issues, including depression, cancer, and cardiovascular issues, as well as poor socioeconomic outcomes, including poverty, unemployment, and diminished educational outcomes.

This year, we launched a program at Carl Cozier Elementary School in Bellingham that brings a child and family counselor into the school once a week. By providing on-site care to those children experiencing behavioral challenges, our

goal has been to support parents who may have transportation or work challenges that limit their ability to get their child the care they need. We are also able to connect families to additional counseling resources as needed.

In 2020, we plan to expand our children and family behavioral health services, with the recent hiring of a second child and family counselor. Our Behavioral Health staff also offer a variety of counseling options and support groups to help build resiliency. Although we cannot yet determine what the school year will look like in the fall, we look forward to returning to Carl Cozier and to expanding our school-based services to Roosevelt Elementary School in the future.

As we weather the storm brought on by COVID-19, we cannot know what the future holds. But we know what it takes to build resiliency – social connection and a recognition of our interdependence, helping yourself by helping others, self-care, maintaining a daily routine, holding onto hope. Together, we can foster resiliency.





PATIENT

“She is a true healer.” That’s how Soonja Nienaber describes Muriel Handschy, her medical provider at Unity Care NW for many years.

Soonja, a patient at Unity Care NW since the early 1990s, came to the U.S. from Korea in 1980 to join her family who had also immigrated here. She became a U.S. citizen in 1986.

When she first arrived in the U.S., her husband was unable to work. Soonja struggled to make ends meet and provide for her young son. “I was the primary breadwinner,” she says. She worked hard, took English as a Second Language classes at Whatcom Community College, earned her high school diploma, and always held a steady job. She was grateful to find a health home at a community health center, a place where she could receive quality health care, regardless of her family’s income.

Soonja particularly valued her relationship with Muriel. “There is something very special about Muriel,” Soonja says. “She protected my health in so many ways, even making sure I could access the blood pressure medicine I needed. She made the impossible possible.” Muriel not only helped Soonja to treat her blood pressure, but she recommended ways to manage her



borderline diabetes, reduce stress, and improve her diet.

Soonja is still taking Muriel’s recommendations to heart. She has become a regular attendee at Unity Care NW’s Friday afternoon yoga class, which is free and open to all of our patients. She has also attended our QiGong classes, and she receives acupuncture treatment. “It has really helped me with relaxation.” (Note to readers: As we go to press, our QiGong and acupuncture services have been temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 outbreak. We are currently offering free virtual yoga classes weekly. We look forward to resuming in-person services as soon as possible.) Soonja has also found that staying active in local chorale singing groups has been an outlet for her to decrease tension. As for diet, Soonja says she enjoys the monthly recipes she finds on our lobby bulletin board.

Today, Soonja has a new primary care provider, but she continues to be appreciative of the whole-person care and encouragement Muriel provided.

PROVIDER

Muriel Handschy first came to Unity Care NW (formerly Interfaith Community Health Center) in 1991 as a nurse practitioner student.

After graduating a year later, Muriel returned and asked for a job. She was the third provider to be employed by the health center, joining two other nurse practitioners. At the time, there were a total of 10 employees, including the executive director, two medical assistants, a nurse, a combination front desk, medical records, and billing staff person, and a dentist. In 1997, mental health care was added to the services offered, which Muriel found to have “as much impact on me as it did on our patients. I now had a partner in caring for the acutely and chronically mentally ill, whereas before the start of the program, I was on my own to figure out their care.”

Another pivotal point in Muriel’s career came in 2010, when the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was enacted. “Prior to the ACA,” Muriel reports, “about 35 to 40 percent of our patients were uninsured. We always struggled to make sure we could meet all their health care needs. With the ACA, our uninsured rate went down to

5 percent. It was stunning. Patients were able to access the care they needed, and not go broke in the process.” It took time to work through the backlog of health care needs, but patients now had insurance.

Nearly 30 years later, Unity Care NW has now grown to almost 300 staff, and Muriel is now a Senior Adviser, as well as seeing patients on a “float” basis. She is proud of the care she has provided over the years and fondly remembers relationships she had with patients like Soonja. “Soonja was a joy to work with. She was always willing to put in the personal effort to improve her health. I looked forward to seeing her on my schedule.”

Muriel has dedicated her career to the work and mission of our community health center. “The mission is what makes Unity Care NW a unique place to work,” Muriel says, “and what keeps some of us around for so long.”





UNITY

Although It is a coincidence that Unity Care NW's Bellingham health center is located on Unity Street, it is not coincidental that we chose "Unity" to be part of our name.

The concept of unity is central to both our approach to health care and to our mission. The model of care embraced by community health centers recognizes the complex health needs of our patients and acknowledges that the provision of health care is only a small part of what determines how healthy people can be. Our approach to care – including primary medical, dental, behavioral health, and pharmacy services – works to improve the health and well-being of the whole person. Our pharmacists working with our medical and behavioral health providers help ensure that prescribed medications are safe and avoid dangerous side effects. Our dentists working with our medical providers can mitigate the oral health manifestations of some diseases, and vice versa. When our medical providers have access to case management resources at their side, they are better able to provide for the social and economic needs of the patient to improve health outcomes.

"Unity" also defines our commitment to improving the health of our entire community now and into the future. With the creation of our new Population Health Program, we are expanding the public health strategies that we apply to our work, examining those factors that affect the health of the people

and communities we serve. We recognize that health outcomes are not just the product of individual behaviors or predispositions. They are also shaped by the conditions in which we live, work, learn, and play. Poor health can result from poverty, poor nutrition, lack of safe and stable housing, unemployment, and chronic stress and anxiety.

That's why we prioritize our partnerships with those who share our commitment to building a healthier community. In the past year, we have continued our partnerships with Recreation Northwest's Parks Prescription Program, the Whatcom Veggie Rx collaboration, and the Whatcom Housing Alliance. We are also looking at how we can better meet the health needs of those experiencing homelessness. We are partnering with PeaceHealth, the Opportunity Council, and Whatcom County with plans to create "The Way Station," which will provide medical respite, medical care, long-term housing supports, case management, and hygiene services, including laundry and shower facilities.

This is a time that calls for unity. Changing lives both inside and outside the exam room is what Unity Care NW is all about.

MISSION-DRIVEN

Community health centers like Unity Care NW have long played a central and critical role in the U.S. health care system.

The community health center model got its start during the 1960s, as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty." Today, the nation's community health centers serve one in 12 Americans. In Whatcom County, Unity Care NW and Sea Mar Community Health Centers together serve approximately one in 6 Whatcom County residents.

For over 50 years, we have been called upon to do more to serve the health care needs of our communities, and we have answered that call. Whenever and wherever community members have found it hard to be and stay healthy, our job has been to make it easier. When parents and their children find it difficult to get to the dentist or get the mental health counseling they need, we bring the care to them, as we have with our Mobile Dental and our school-based behavioral health services. When patients can't afford their prescription medications or health care visits,

we help them enroll in health care insurance and provide them with access to discounted care and other assistance programs to reduce the cost of care. When a patient in an exam room is struggling with anxiety and depression and doesn't know where to turn, our behavioral health and case management staff step in to help. When we see patients struggling with food or housing insecurity, poverty, and health inequities, we turn to our community partners and ask "What can we all do about that?"

The coming months will present many challenges, but we have a mission-driven history of innovation, perseverance, and dedication to guide us. We are fortunate to have many resources to draw upon as we look out towards new horizons: a community-governed board of directors, our dedicated staff, and a caring and supportive community. Community health centers were created for times such as this.



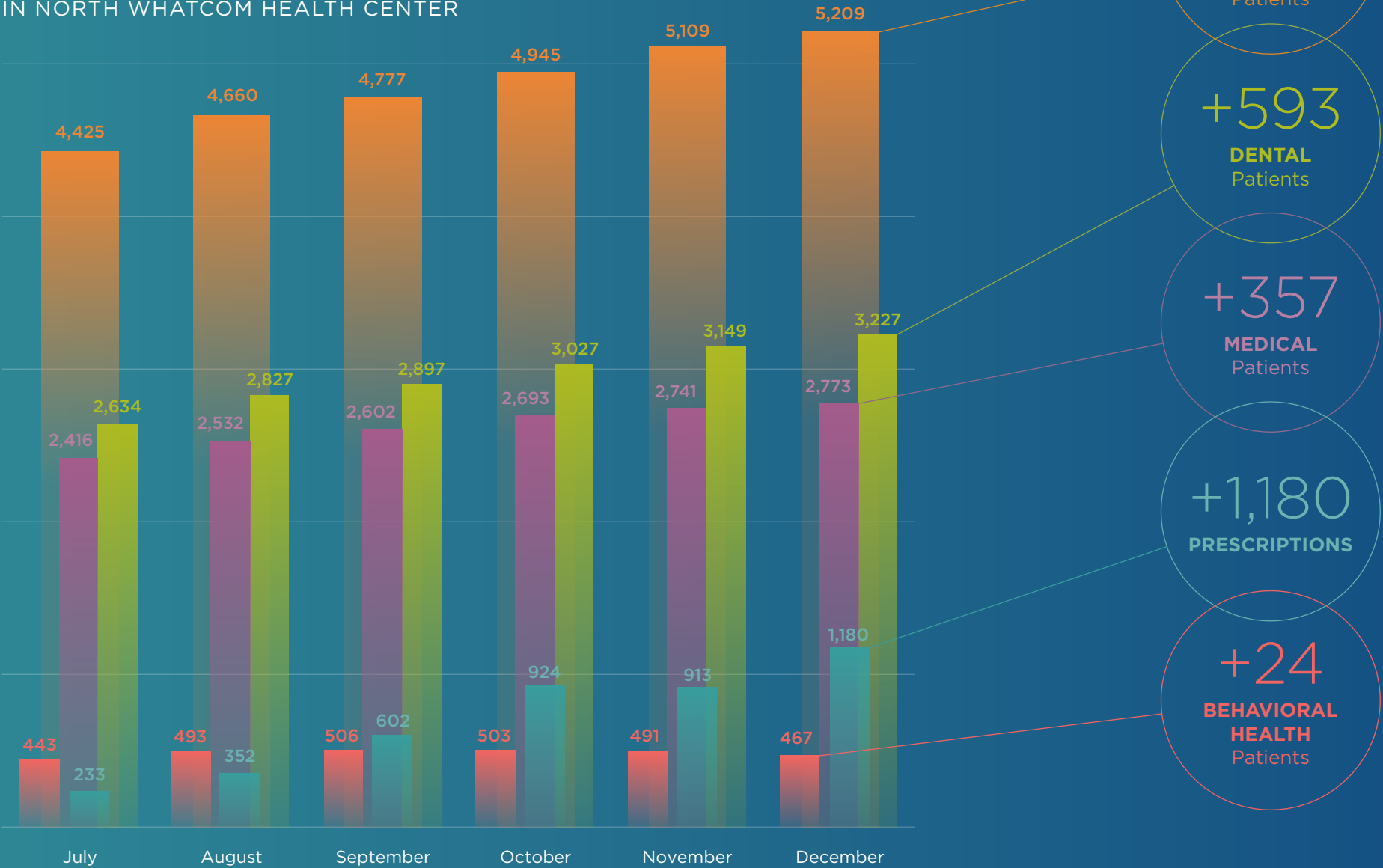
FERNDALE FORWARD

With the long-awaited North Whatcom Health Center opening its doors in July 2019, we were excited to realize increased capacity to meet the health care needs of Whatcom County residents. The new facility expands our medical, dental, and behavioral health services, and, for the first time, offers on-site pharmacy and lab services in Ferndale.

Through the summer and fall, the number of patients we were able to serve increased steadily. This rapid rate of growth speaks to the health care needs of north Whatcom County, more of which will now be met with this new facility. We look forward to engaging with our north Whatcom County partners and welcoming more new patients to our health center.

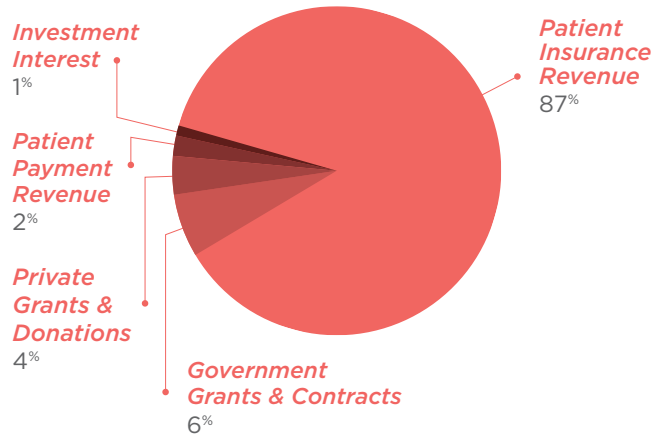
On the other side of this crisis, we expect to see equally dramatic shifts in patient demand for our health care services. We will see pent-up demand for routine medical and dental care, as well as the likelihood of significant behavioral health needs. As always, we will be there to deliver.

2019 GROWTH IN PATIENTS SERVED
IN NORTH WHATCOM HEALTH CENTER

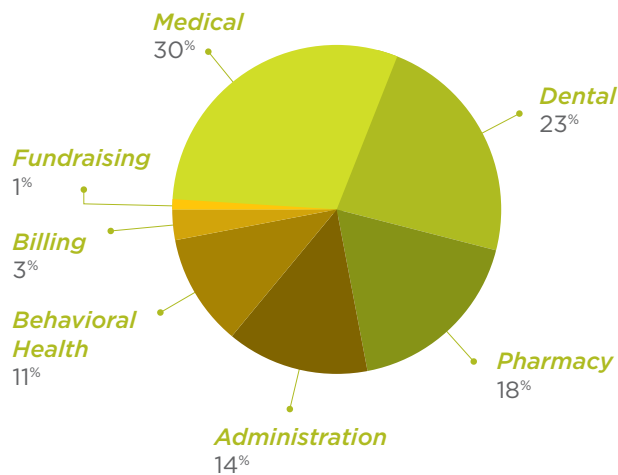


FINANCES

Revenue - \$36,435,373



Expenses - \$34,122,451



THANK YOU to our 2019 CONTRIBUTORS

Your donations support our patients while expanding the options for anyone struggling in our community to live healthier lives.

HEALTH CARE CHAMPIONS

A special thank you to our year-round sponsors:

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 Administration

All efforts were taken to ensure accuracy
 of this list. Please contact our Planning &
 Development Department with questions
 or concerns: Development@ucnw.org
 or (360) 788-2628

*"I was treated like an individual and not a number.
They saved my life, and I cannot put a price on that."*

- Unity Care NW patient



BELLINGHAM

Medical & Dental Services

220 Unity Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 676-6177

Adult Dental, Behavioral Health, and Administration

1616 Cornwall Ave. Ste. 205
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 676-6177

In-House Pharmacy

218 Unity Street
Bellingham, WA 98225
(360) 752-7406

FERNDALE

Medical, Dental, and Behavioral Health Services

6060 Portal Way
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(360) 676-6177

In-House Pharmacy

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Ferndale, WA 98248
(360) 752-7408

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