

The Value of Health Systems During the COVID-19 Pandemic **Spectrum Health – Grand Rapids, Mich.**

Responding to the Pandemic: Information, Care Expertise and Vaccines

Enabling easy access to vaccines for all. We continue to focus on vaccinating as many people in our communities as possible and making the process simple and accessible. For example, soon after launching public-facing vaccine scheduling, we expanded our process to include a call center option that accommodates 240 languages. Collaboration and coordination are also essential without a centralized vaccination system in place. We helped launch a collaborative made up of other local health systems, pharmacies and health departments to coordinate vaccination initiatives across the 16 counties we serve.

Thus far, Spectrum Health has taken a two-pronged approach: mass vaccination clinics (e.g., at a convention center in downtown Grand Rapids vaccinating over 12,000 people on a specific day; with a capacity of more than 20,000 doses per day) and mobile clinics in neighborhoods.

We also launched a weekly **community COVID-19 vaccination series that addresses the needs and questions of specific populations**, such as Black, Brown and Asian communities, older adults, rural and agricultural communities, new Americans and migrant workers, people with disabilities, and religious leaders. View the series [here](#).

Now that vaccine supply is starting to outpace demand, we are pivoting resources into outreach to under-vaccinated communities. At all stages of the vaccine distribution process, our goal is to maintain a collaborative, effective and equitable approach that provides accessible pathways to receive vaccinations.

Keeping our communities informed was a priority. Early in the pandemic, we put together a coordinated and proactive system response plan that enabled us to mobilize quickly everything from screening to testing and curbside services. We launched regular and transparent communications to educate and engage our consumers and business, education and religious leaders, as well as our own team members, on science-based prevention and safety measures. We implemented weekly and monthly communications, such as town halls, video calls, community outreach efforts, comprehensive online resources with translations for our non-English-speaking populations, and PSAs. We offered expertise in infection prevention to employers with a toolkit to keep employees and consumers safe. We also provided guidance for schools with a series and resources on our [website](#) to keep students, teachers and staff healthy. The pandemic underscored the importance of community connections and our shared responsibilities for each other's health and safety. This took significant resources to provide regular updates and education in a variety of formats and in non-English languages.

Maintaining and Expanding Access

One way Spectrum Health directly impacts health inequities in West Michigan is through our Healthier Communities programs, which are designed to reach the highest level of health equity possible with the people, neighborhoods and regions we serve.

Soon after COVID-19 arrived in Michigan, our health system saw significant racial and ethnic disparities in infection and hospitalization rates, with certain ZIP codes bearing the brunt of the pandemic. In response, our Healthier Communities team stepped up their community outreach efforts in these areas. In two specific ZIP codes, our teams distributed 9,625 packets of masks, hand sanitizer and education materials; conducted 3,236 screenings for COVID-19, social determinants of health and mental health; and distributed \$51,120 in financial assistance from the Spectrum Health Client Assistance Fund (developed in partnership with True North). We also reached out to partners like Grand Rapids Urban League, Grand Rapids African American Health Institute and the Hispanic Center of Western Michigan. Working together, these trusted ambassadors reached our hard-hit communities with critical messaging about COVID-19 prevention and healthy behaviors.

Within months, the disparities decreased, and, in some cases, disappeared because of the partnership and collaboration we were able to muster as a system — uniting health professionals and the community, clinical expertise and community expertise.

Fueling Innovation

At Spectrum Health, we recognize innovation is not only about technology. Sometimes innovation consists of altering systems or processes that have been working well to bring about something better.

One example of this type of structural innovation is the creation in 2020 of a new standing committee on our System Board of Directors to help oversee our work in health equity, and the creation of a Health Equity Advisory Council composed of dedicated and passionate equity advocates from across our system. These new councils help guide and monitor our health equity efforts at the system level and inform more targeted strategies.

This new approach to health equity is a reflection of how much the definition of health care has changed in recent years. What used to be a matter of treating infections and mending broken bones has grown to encompass new dimensions of understanding: the crucial importance of mental, emotional and behavioral health, and the impact that social determinants of health have on our overall health and well-being.

Addressing health inequities is aligned to our mission to improve health, inspire hope and save lives, making a positive impact on our communities.

Coordinating Care to Meet People Where They Are

One of the biggest changes we're seeing as a result of COVID-19 is a momentous shift from sick care to well care, from treatment to prevention, and from fee-for-service to value-based payment and reimbursement models. This is a shift that is occurring throughout the field but because Spectrum Health is as an integrated system, we have more flexibility to execute these changes.

Early in the pandemic, we benefited from insights from the health plan side of our business, Priority Health, to help our members stay healthy and access care. Using predictive analytics, we proactively reached out to more than 47,000 health plan members at higher risk of COVID-19 infection, offering personalized support in conjunction with care management teams to educate, inform and motivate behavioral change.

We expanded our lifestyle medicine program with a dedicated specialty practice that prevents, manages and even reverses chronic disease using an evidence-based approach, and are working to implement both individual and group virtual visits.

We're growing access to behavioral health services through innovative partnerships, and integrating behavioral health at all touchpoints, including virtual visits.

We're also improving the quality of our virtual visits by partnering with TytoCare to provide Food and Drug Administration-approved at-home exam kits that allow our Spectrum Health providers to conduct an ear exam, look at a patient's throat, check heart rate, assess breathing, take a temperature and more.

As we move from a health care model that treats illness to one that supports whole-person health, these are examples of the positive impact we can make for those we serve. And it grows exponentially, because we have the people and processes — through our integrated system — to improve health outcomes and lower costs.