

California Health & Wellness

Delivering Health Care in the Rural North



In California's rural north, delivering quality health care can be a challenge as well as an opportunity for innovation.

Through the expansion of Medi-Cal and Covered California, our state has made important and impressive strides in enhancing access to care.

Recognizing the unique circumstances of care delivery for rural populations, California Health & Wellness (CHW) is committed to identifying the complexities of health care access and investing in impactful solutions in 18 rural northern counties, where we serve approximately 135,000 Medi-Cal members.

Health Care in the Rural North—A Unique & Challenging Landscape

California's rural 18 counties are a complex landscape with multiple factors and systematic challenges that influence access to care.

REMOTE GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS DISTANT FROM CARE:

Rural residents need to travel greater distances to access health care providers, resulting in transportation and financial constraints for patients in the region.

LIMITED HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE — A LACK OF PROVIDERS:

A lack of available providers is one of the greatest challenges in rural health care. 20% of the U.S. population lives in rural communities, but only 10% of clinicians practice in these areas. California, in particular, is being impacted by physician shortages, with rural areas disproportionately affected.

PHYSICIAN SHORTAGE PROJECTED TO WORSEN:

Studies show physician shortages will continue to worsen in the coming decade as fewer enter into primary care and the majority of practicing physicians in the state are over 55 years old and will soon retire.

SHRINKING HEALTH CARE FACILITIES:

A lack of traditional health care facilities threatens many of California's rural communities. More than 25% of the state's rural hospitals closed over the past two decades and many still remain at risk of closing today.

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO CARE THROUGH EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS

As a leading managed care plan in the region with expertise serving Medi-Cal patients statewide, CHW understands the rural north's health care landscape. We are dedicated to breaking down barriers to care for patients. Today, CHW is deploying a comprehensive approach—addressing specific obstacles that impede access and making critical, forward thinking investments to augment system-wide deficiencies.



Actively Recruiting New Providers into Network:

CHW is proactively recruiting physicians and other providers to obtain contracts with more than a 60% return rate on its outreach efforts to expand its network.

CHW welcomes any qualified provider who meets the state's credentialing standards and accepts a reasonable rate. In rural counties, we often pay well above the Medi-Cal reimbursement standard to supplement limited availability. Since CHW's establishment in 2013, we have also added 3,090 core specialists to our network.



Augmenting Network with Providers from Surrounding Region:

Faced with a limited number of willing providers, CHW augments its network by adding physicians and providers adjacent to, or surrounding, the rural north to overcome shortages and increase access to critical specialists.

Since 2013, CHW added 11,970 providers outside of the core service area to the network. Using transportation benefits, members have access to these referral providers.



Transportation to Care:

To combat transportation obstacles, CHW is providing benefits designed to transport members reliably and safely to their health care visits including medical, dental, substance abuse appointments, pharmacy visits, ongoing care and hospital discharges.

CHW offers free services to members that include curb-to-curb and door-to-door personal drivers, wheelchair and gurney vehicles and group transit to care.



Training & Advancing Providers:

CHW is funding workforce development training for health care professionals to advance in their respective fields, expand care coordination approach and support an increased provider presence.

From 2017-2018, CHW invested \$2 million statewide in health care workforce development. In the rural 18, CHW recently funded programs to comprehensively train and onboard new hires, establish and coordinate learning labs for staff to grow their skills and expand the role of pharmacists in provider facilities.



Advancements in Technology:

Health care is evolving with technology playing a more central role. CHW is investing in telehealth solutions to overcome geographic barriers between patient and provider and improve care coordination — offering 6 innovative modalities of care including e-consultations, dermatology “store and forward” consultations, clinic-based, live-video specialist consultations, diabetic retinopathy screening, video-remote interpretation and project ECHO, an online professional development curriculum.

CHW offers these alternative approaches to care at 33 locations across the rural north. E-consultations expand access to more than 30 board-certified specialists through CHW's programs.



Local Staff & Resources in the Northern 18:

CHW maintains an office in Chico and supports more than 200 local employees committed to serving members of their community where and when they need it.



Investing in the Community:

An embedded member of the community, CHW continues to identify and invest in nonprofit organizations, local providers and other partners to directly address barriers to care through our community engagement and grants division.

From 2017-2018 our team awarded more than \$800,000 alone in grants in the rural north counties.

3,753 PROVIDERS RECRUITED
SINCE 2013 (3,090 SPECIALISTS)

11,970 OUT-OF-AREA
PROVIDERS CONTRACTED

33 TELEHEALTH SITES