



## Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless

Quarterly Newsletter

October - December 2020

### In The Spotlight

#### ACHCH Welcomes New Staff



**Lynette Ward**  
**Homeless Regional Coordinator**

Lynette has spent most of her professional life working in the non-profit sector. Over the last 20 years, she has worked with many of the hardest to reach populations, such as, women recovering from chemical dependency, clients with co-occurring disorders, and transitional age youth.

She has previously served as a Substance Abuse Treatment Specialist with the Alameda County Superior Courts Office of Collaborative Courts. It's been through her professional experiences that Lynette began to understand the barriers and complexities that these specialized populations face and why she chose to be an advocate and social change agent for these communities. She received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from San Francisco State University and is pursuing a Master's of Science in Social Work from Columbia University.

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**Phil Clark**  
**Homeless Regional Coordinator**

Phil joins Health Care for the Homeless as a Homeless Regional Coordinator for Mid-County. He has worked in health care and housing since 1986. His career started in London as part of the grassroots community response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, initially as a homeless advocate and HIV community case manager coordinating end of life care. Since then his focus has been on homeless, supportive housing development, workforce development, and hospice. Prior to joining ACHCH,



Phil was the Director of Programs at St. Mary's Center in West Oakland and has served as the Executive Director of Kaua'i Hospice. He is motivated by a deep commitment to justice, understanding community need, and supplying data driven best practices to vulnerable and disenfranchised populations.

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### **Phoebe Rossiter, RN**

Phoebe joins Health Care for the Homeless as a registered nurse with the StreetHealth Team. She has worked at the San Francisco Mission Neighborhood Health Center, a grassroots organization serving the Latinx population, and with the San Francisco Department of Public Health in Care Management for ten years.

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### **Tony Carroll Health Services Trainee**

Prior to joining Health Care for the Homeless, Tony worked with the Consumer and Family Engagement Team at Alameda County Care Connect. While at Care Connect, he planned and facilitated trainings for the Consumer and Family Fellows, managed the AC Rapid Response Resource Guide, and created the directory of Eastmont Center to assist providers in linking clients to nearby resources and increase collaboration among providers. Tony is currently completing his CHW certificate at City College of San Francisco and is dedicated to serving the county's most vulnerable population.



### **Makda Woldesenbet Community Health Outreach Worker**

Makda joins ACHCH as a Community Health Outreach Worker and recently graduated from UC Berkeley with a BA in Molecular and Cell Biology. She plans on pursuing a career in medicine with an MD/MPH. Makda's desire is to bring access to healthcare to underserved communities.

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### **Ghaly Ebid, RN**

Ghaly joins the ACHCH team as a registered nurse with the StreetHealth team.

## **Program Highlights**

# Flu Vaccine Campaign

The 2020-21 influenza vaccination program at ACHCH is in full swing throughout the program. ACHCH staff and staff at the Project Roomkey COVID hotels have all begun vaccinating people experiencing homelessness throughout Alameda County to protect people and prevent the spread of flu. Most of the 13 Street Health teams in Alameda County have begun administering the vaccine. ACHCH vaccinated over 200 people at shelters and at Project Roomkey hotels, a similar number of guests have received the vaccine. Vaccination against influenza is important for homeless people every year, to protect them from yet another threat to their well-being. This year it is particularly important, since the symptoms of influenza imitate the symptoms of COVID-19. If one of our homeless neighbors develops a fever or muscle aches, for example, not only do they experience physical suffering, they'll also require isolation for COVID-19, even if it later turns out to be just the flu. So, by preventing flu with vaccination, and thus these symptoms of flu, we can avoid isolating people unnecessarily.

## Homeless VOTE2020 Initiative

In September, Alameda County Health Care for the Homeless, led by the ACHCH Consumer & Community Advisory Board (CCAB), spearheaded a county-wide effort for homeless voter registration and get-to-vote awareness. This included collaborating with community partners, such as the Oakland A's, Alameda County Public Health Department, 211, Food Bank, and others in reaching thousands of people experiencing homelessness located in shelters, Project Roomkey, and outreach street settings. VOTE2020 created and distributed 1,600 voter registration forms and the CCAB's Homeless Voters Election Issues flyer. In addition to facilitating two virtual voter forums, ACHCH and their partners distributed 1,300 clipper cards to homeless services providers throughout the county. We are grateful for all who came together to support the thousands of Alameda County residents experiencing homelessness in exercising their right to vote.

## Dr. Sophy Wong - East Bay Getting to Zero

ACHCH is partnering with Dr. Sophy Wong M.D., Director of East Bay Getting to Zero, as our HRSA-funded PCHP (Primary Care HIV Prevention) project advisor. Dr. Wong grew up in the '80s when HIV was *the* epidemic of our time. As a school-aged kid, she saw news footage of people dying from AIDS and people organizing to fight for equity and better access to health care. Her



life changed when a high school history teacher had the class read *And the Band Played On* by San Francisco Chronicle journalist Randy Shilts. This made her dig more deeply into understanding the impact of health policy and advocacy as well as the urgency of the AIDS epidemic and its increasing disparities among poor people of color across the globe.

Dr. Wong experienced firsthand how HIV/AIDS directly impacted friends and mentors and the difficulties she and her friends had navigating the health care system around HIV testing, from complex insurance issues to language access to overwhelming stigma. She decided to do something about it and started out doing data entry at an HIV clinic, quickly becoming the assistant social worker for an HIV jail re-entry program, then a bilingual case manager for people living with HIV. Sophy then went to medical school with the specific aim to practice HIV medicine.

One of her medical school mentors, Dr. Jane Carter, supported her in working at an HIV-TB program in Western Kenya before HIV medications were widely available. Every day she saw firsthand people, her age or younger, die from HIV opportunistic illnesses. This was heartbreaking, especially knowing that while there was access to medications in the U.S., a vast majority of people in the Sub-Saharan Africa living with HIV did not. Dr. Wong became part of the HIV medication roll-out, working with local health care leaders and community workers to set up systems so people with HIV can get treatment. People who came in severely ill were now walking out of the hospital and rebuilding their lives. This taught Sophy the immense, life-saving impact of effective, accessible systems for prevention and treatment services.

In the Bay Area, the disparities are even more striking. People experiencing homelessness and complex health conditions sleep on streets next to multimillion-dollar homes and fancy offices. Providing people-centered, healing-engaged care and supportive housing here also has immense, life-saving impact. The reward of seeing fellow human beings turn their lives around with accessible and compassionate care is immeasurable. It keeps Dr. Wong motivated to continue doing this work 25 years later.

East Bay Getting to Zero (EBGTZ) began in 2017 as an all-volunteer, community driven initiative with the mission to advance health equity and promote healing for all people impacted by HIV in the East Bay region in



California. EBGTZ aims to reduce the incidence of HIV through collaborative and strategic implementation of evidence-based HIV prevention and care services and community mobilization. Their vision is to achieve zero HIV-related stigma, zero HIV-related health disparities, and zero new HIV transmissions by 2030.

Their biggest success to date is bringing together a wide range of community leaders and organizations in a Collective Impact effort. Together, their diverse networks have mobilized health care teams and community advocates to work together across the region. EBGTZ's efforts break down traditional silos across health care systems, community-based organizations, faith-based organizations, jails and schools so they can work collaboratively to end the HIV epidemic.

East Bay Getting to Zero has learned that when they work together in this way, even though it takes time and gets complicated and messy, they can really make an impact on HIV outcomes. Through collaborative problem-solving with 42 organizations, the EBGTZ linkage and retention working group has implemented rapid, warm-handoff linkages and access to HIV treatment since it formed in 2011. During that time, Alameda County HIV linkage rates have increased from 70% in 2012 to 78% in 2016 and viral load suppression rates have increased from 36% in 2012 (with missing lab data) to 68% in 2016. The EBGTZ PrEP working group conducted the first regional PrEP data collection in September 2017, and since then they have increased PrEP use rates in Alameda County by about 70%.

Through the EBGTZ initiative, Dr. Wong hopes to build sustainable systems of accessible, equitable, people-centered, healing-engaged and evidence-based HIV prevention, testing and care services for all communities across the East Bay region so they can get to zero new HIV transmissions and advance health equity.

**[Visit East Bay Getting to Zero](#)**

## **Our COVID-19 Response**

### **COVID-19 Community Testing**

ACHCH leads shelter and street-based COVID-19 testing teams both in rapid response to COVID-19 cases and in providing Community Care testing to “hot spots.” On November 1, 2020, the program rolled out a new ACHCH Community Care COVID-19 Testing team to carry out ongoing shelter and homeless site testing through the fall and winter months. To date, ACHCH and partners have provided over 2,211 COVID-19



tests in 157 homeless testing events with a positivity rate of 2.3%. ACHCH is also developing COVID-19 testing capacity among Street Health teams.

- We continually update our guidance and materials on our website to keep our community informed.
- Providers - please attend our weekly shelter and outreach provider calls.
- Visit our **website** for more information on COVID-19.

## Shelter Activities

ACHCH continues our work with the shelters in Alameda County to address COVID-19 through ongoing Shelter Health services, on-site assessments, and distribution of supplies. ACHCH continues to facilitate weekly shelter provider calls with an average weekly attendance of 65 participants to provide ongoing training, education, and resource sharing. To date, ACHCH has led COVID-19 rapid responses in 41 shelter and service sites with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases, including site visits, environmental scan, testing, direction, and coordination with Alameda County Public Health. We have distributed thousands of masks, hand sanitizer, and cleaning supplies to shelters across the county.



Visit our **website** to access the Shelter Health mobile van calendar.



## Street Health & Encampment Activities

ACHCH continues our work with county-wide outreach providers to coordinate outreach, distribute supplies, provide ongoing COVID-19 education, and expand field-based testing capacity. ACHCH facilitates a weekly outreach provider call with an average

attendance of 65 participants. These calls remain a critical aspect of our response and allows us to plan, coordinate, and educate. ACHCH has led rapid responses in 22 street encampments with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 outbreak situations throughout the county. Our response includes environmental assessments, mobilization and direction of outreach providers and partners, and support of residents to access Operation Comfort hotels. ACHCH has distributed thousands of masks, hand sanitizer, cleaning supplies, and protective gear to outreach providers and residents of county-wide encampments.

## Outbreak Response

Planning with homeless outreach partners, shelters, city and county staff, ACHCH developed and leads a COVID-19 Homeless Outbreak Rapid Response model:

- Environmental Scans - situational assessments of community conditions - conducted to inform response to each outbreak
- Guidance and partnership from Alameda County Public Health Department
- Rapid Response testing & coordination with outreach
- Flexible Response: offering isolation/quarantine hotel through Project Roomkey - or "enhanced shelter-in-place" with deployment of increased support and supplies in coordination with city and outreach partners



ACHCH has led rapid responses to 63 incidents of suspected or actual COVID-19 outbreaks in congregate settings (41 shelter and 22 encampments). Most rapid responses include coordination and education of providers, staff, and residents, contact investigation, and a rapid testing response. ACHCH is leading ongoing rapid response and community care testing at potential "hot spots" and has provided 2,211 COVID-19 tests.

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**Mental Health Services Act (MHSa)**  
Alameda County Behavioral Health

[Visit ACHCH](#)

[ACHCH Partners](#)



