

Chambers County Public Hospital District #1 – Anahuac, Texas



Conversion of Public Hospital District’s Primary Care Clinics to Federally Qualified Health Centers

Overview: Chambers County Public Hospital District #1 (The District), located in Chambers County Texas on the upper Texas Gulf Coast, is approximately halfway between Beaumont and Houston. Composed of Bayside Community Hospital in Anahuac, Bayside Clinic in Anahuac, and West Chambers Medical Clinic in Mont Belvieu, The District is a provider of primary, general acute, and public healthcare programs and services for area residents. The hospital opened in 1950, followed by the founding of Bayside Clinic in 1996 and West Chambers Clinic in 2005.

Chambers County was designated by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as one of the 200 poorest counties in the United States in 2006. With a very limited tax base to support the healthcare needs of its community—in both of level of care and range of services, the designation did not come as a surprise to District leadership. District leaders had applied for federally qualified health center (FQHC) status for its clinics in previous years but had not met all criteria. In May 2007, after comprehensive preparation, hospital leaders filed a single application for both clinics. They received HRSA’s Notice of Grant Award in September 2007. Now, Bayside and West Chambers Clinics provide medical, mental health and substance abuse programs, as well as oral health services, at their sites in Chambers County and/or through collaborative arrangements with partner agencies.

Impact: Mental and oral health services were previously unavailable to the uninsured and underinsured populations. The District is now able to provide the appropriate breadth and level of services to effectively serve community residents. In addition, provider staffing has grown from 4 to 6.5 since funding was acquired, creating more access. FQHC days/hours of operation vary with the season, including “expanded” hours—opening early some mornings, staying late some evenings, as well as being open on Saturday mornings to accommodate those who are not able to get to a doctor’s office between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

The District’s model, which includes the hospital, allows for access to emergency department services, as patients have already been identified and “enrolled” in District assistance programs. Referrals are made to other providers as they would be in any doctor’s office, with The District

funding those costs, to a point. Clinic providers attend patients' needs across the entire continuum of care available at/through the District's operations. They handle call at the ED as well as provide inpatient professional services. The organization bills for those services, when possible; those funds are used to offset the expenses of the operation.

Nationally, patients average 3.14 visits to the clinic per year; Chambers County patients average 2.4 visits per year. Statewide, the average preferred cost per patient per year for Texas' PHC program is \$200; The District's patients average \$147. This shows District leaders that they are managing patients appropriately, in a timely manner and lower cost.

Challenges/success factors: When applying for FQHC designation, District leaders kept in mind that every entity has its own rules, expectations, deliverables, and use of funding. District leaders made sure they submitted all information requested—in the format required.

They also realized that optimal board composition is key to effective governance and operations. The hospital board is composed of five members elected by the public. Prior to applying for FQHC designation, hospital board members identified individuals in the community, most of whom were users of clinic services, to serve as the required separate co-applicant board. Several of these individuals were already serving on a hospital advisory committee. The clinics' executive director also participated in the formation of this board, now called the Chambers Community Health Center Inc. Board. Two individuals are on both the hospital and FQHC board to enable continuity and information exchange as well as a more collaborative approach in governance and operations.

Future direction/sustainability: The Chambers Community Health Center board is currently working on establishing appropriate staffing levels at the clinics. They are also looking at their dental care and mental health services. Currently, they have contracts with two separate agencies. With a grant received from the Texas Primary Care Office (PCO), they are collaborating with the Texas PCO to determine how to bring mental health services to the clinic.

Both boards are currently engaged in a triannual formal review of the District's strategic plan. A combined-board meeting has been planned; they are hoping to meet two times a year to discuss growth and long-term viability as a whole.

Advice to others: Obtaining FQHC designation is a long, difficult process. Make sure to:

- Prepare to commit several years to the process.
- Have patience and do your homework/research, including gathering demographic data to determine how your community compares with what is expected of populations served by FQHCs.
- Seek out assistance from your state's primary care office and primary care association.
- Hire a professional to write your grant application if you do not have a lot of experience writing these.

Your efforts will be rewarded; the FQHC model holds great potential for increasing access to care and raising care quality levels in rural communities.

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