

## Spotlight on Success Fair Haven Community Health Care



Fair Haven Community Health Care (FHCHC) in New Haven, Connecticut, was established in 1971 by Latino activists to provide equitable, high-quality, and culturally responsible patient-centered care to improve the health and social well-being of the communities it served. Now, with 15 sites in New Haven, Branford, and East Haven, FHCHC serves almost 27,000 patients who made more than 87,000 visits in 2020.

FHCHC has been accredited by the Joint Commission's ambulatory health care program since 1999 and, says their Corporate Compliance Officer, "we are so proud of the fact that we were one of the first federally qualified health centers in the state of Connecticut to attain Joint Commission accreditation."

FHCHC's path to Primary Care Medical Home (PCMH) Certification began in 2015, sparked by a program assistance letter from the Bureau of Primary Healthcare. From the very start, materials from the Joint Commission proved invaluable, especially the optional Self-Assessment document. This tool is meant to help organizations conduct a self-assessment to identify gaps, which will help organizations target their efforts and prioritize where they need to be dedicating resources. And

then, they'll be able to identify a readiness date for the onsite survey.

"It is an incredibly meaningful and very meaty tool," said their Corporate Compliance Officer. "It helped us take a look at ourselves in terms of how we involve patients in their own care, what we do to really demonstrate respect for their right to make decisions, and how to involve them with the interdisciplinary team and develop treatment plans."

It also includes self-assessment around serving patients in their preferred language, which was especially relevant for FHCHC. More than half of their patients speak Spanish, and there were other considerations, too.

It was crucial that FHCHC consider how to educate their patient population most appropriately, including what learning mechanisms are most effective, determining health literacy, and addressing the comprehensiveness of care.

### First Steps to PCMH Certification

FHCHC convened an ad hoc interdepartmental committee to focus on preparations for PCMH certification. The departmental leaders involved included Compliance, the Chief Medical Officer, Human Resources, Nursing, Operations, Patient Access, and Quality Improvement. The committee met weekly and prioritized obtaining buy-in from other stakeholders.

They also received standards from the Joint Commission specific to PCMH, selected representatives from various areas within FHCHC to participate in monthly webinars and engaged Joint Commission Resources to conduct a mock survey.

“We found that to be incredibly helpful,” said their Corporate Compliance Officer. “We would strongly suggest that any health center considering this process to make use of those resources.”

“We made sure to engage our Board of Directors,” she added. “Because we were already Joint Commission accredited, most of our board was already very familiar with the process, plus we had had a reaccreditation visit fairly recently. But we gave a special presentation to the board about what we felt would be the added value of seeking the PCMH certification, to make sure that they were on board, too.”

The organization had something of a head start in that they were already compliant with requirements established by the Bureau of Primary Healthcare. The guidelines described there overlap somewhat with the Joint Commission’s, but there were differences.

For instance, the Joint Commission’s reaccreditation visits are unannounced, much of it is spent within direct clinical care settings, surveyors may join the patient encounter, and there is more emphasis placed on reviewing infection prevention and control processes.

“We also wanted to make sure that our staff understood that the work they do one-on-one with patients is very significant for Joint Commission review,” said their Corporate Compliance Officer.

### Continuous Readiness for Accreditation and Value-Add

The accreditation committee has very broad representation throughout the system, and it is informed by the SAFER® Matrix analytics derived from the most recent Joint Commission visits. This accreditation committee is charged with keeping abreast of Joint Commission requirements and activities to support both ambulatory care accreditation and PCMH certification. As a result, they developed a fly wheel to visually represent the various components that must all work in sync to support continuous readiness activities:



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### Primary Care Medical Home Certification

The Joint Commission’s Primary Care Medical Home option recognizes organizations providing superior access to primary care for patients and offers the potential for increased reimbursement. Built into the ambulatory on-site accreditation survey, organizations successfully completing this process will be both Joint Commission-accredited and certified as a Primary Care Medical Home.

Gaming is incorporated into the overall approach, with raffles and quizzes to engage employees, and all staff meetings are regularly held to keep readiness top of mind. The Board of Directors is kept informed, and engaged, on an ongoing basis.

The value-add that FHCHC enjoys through accreditation is the “gold seal,” as their Corporate Compliance Officer describes it.

“It means a lot to the public, patients, and the payers we are involved with, who may be outside of government-funded health programs, such as commercial insurers,” she says. “It’s a demonstrable symbol of our health center’s commitment to quality.”

Accreditation is also helped by FHCHC’s readiness for operational site visits by the state.

“The Joint Commission’s findings for PCMH and ambulatory healthcare can really help you feel confident about your ability to respond to any external regulators reviewing your operations,” said their Corporate Compliance Officer. “You can participate in those activities knowing that you’re already doing a great job.”

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### Primary Care Medical Home Certification

The Joint Commission is here to help you prepare for Ambulatory Care Accreditation and PCMH Certification through:

- Access to a dedicated Senior Contract Manager and Account Executive
- Educational webinars
- 2-day onsite preparation visits via Joint Commission Resources
- Scholarship opportunities for educational conferences
- Joint Commission Resources publications