2020 WILL GO DOWN IN HISTORY as a year the world faced down an invisible, relentless foe called COVID-19. While the battle is not yet done, science responded with unprecedented speed to develop hopeful treatments and several promising vaccines to help in the fight. By year’s end, in the United States alone, approximately 20 million people had been infected, and the death toll was nearly 350,000.

On the front lines are America’s hospitals and healthcare workers, facing patient volumes of crisis-level proportions and, often, a lag in needed supplies and equipment. Connecticut’s hospitals worked closely together, facilitated by Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA), to share challenges and ideas, supply chains and equipment allocations, employee appreciation and support strategies, and public health messaging.

Hospitals stepped up to reconfigure units to care for critically ill patients. They purchased truckloads of extra personal protective equipment for employees and devised emergency strategies when, worldwide, supplies dwindled. Hospitals worked with the Governor’s office, and state and local health agencies to build and staff a massive statewide COVID-19 testing capacity, flexing to meet the changing needs of Connecticut’s residents. Late in the year, CHA convened hours of planning sessions with Department of Public Health officials and our hospital members, to organize and activate the COVID-19 vaccination plan for the state’s healthcare workforce. The plan called for the rapid, mass vaccination of more than 100,000 hospital and community-based healthcare providers in Connecticut by the end of January.

During these months, inequities in access to healthcare and other important basic services have become staggeringly clear. And the work of hospitals across the state to address the social determinants of health has become even more pressing. Many of the stories in this year’s Community Benefit Report address hospitals’ response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. Yet, other health needs continue to exist in our communities, even as we battle COVID-19. What is clear in these pages is the ongoing commitment to identifying and meeting the unmet needs of the communities we serve all across the Nutmeg State.

$233.9 million
Uncompensated care: Charity care/bad debt to provide services for those who cannot pay

$26.1 million
Services to improve the health of the community

$16.2 million
Donations to help support community organizations

$8.4 million
Community building to create stronger, healthier communities

$8.9 million
Research and other programs to advance healthcare for patients and the community

$5.3 million
Subsidized health services* to provide care needed by the community

* These data represent the most recently audited fiscal year, 2019, as reported to CHA by members.

$243.7 million
Health professions education

$794.7 million
Unpaid hospital care provided to Medicaid beneficiaries

$899.2 million
Unpaid hospital care provided to Medicare beneficiaries

$249.7 million
Unpaid hospital care provided to Medicare beneficiaries

$899.2 million
Unpaid hospital care provided to Medicare beneficiaries
Backus Hospital’s Rx for Health Program Has a Prescription That Anyone Can Love

The program, in its tenth year, provides “prescriptions” for nutritionally-at-risk families in the Norwich area that can be redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables at the weekly Farmers’ Market at Howard T. Brown Memorial Park. Farmer Vinnie Cofone offers multiple varieties of fruits and vegetables throughout the growing season in exchange for the prescription slips. Cofone, who owns Lakeview Farms in Griswold, has been the program’s farmer since its inception. He estimates he has 100 regular customers throughout the season.

“They come back, week after week,” he said. “Even after they don’t have any more vouchers, they come back and buy the vegetables.” The farmers’ market ran through the end of October. Everyone is sad at the end of the season, Cofone said, “but when they come back in the spring they are so happy to see us.”

In 2019, 120 families were enrolled in the program, with 73 visiting the farmers’ market at least once—a participation rate of 61 percent, according to Shannon Haynes, a registered dietitian at Backus Hospital who manages the Rx for Health program.

Besides fresh foods, registered dietitians provide families with nutrition counseling and education materials that cover an array of wellness topics, including ideas to stay active as a family, health tips for busy families, and healthy snack ideas for children and toddlers. Families also receive healthy recipes using the fruits and vegetables in season.

“As a program, the Rx for Health’s fresh produce, registered dietitians, and health screenings empowered families to make important dietary and lifestyle changes,” Haynes said. “The program enabled families to try produce that they would not have been able and/or willing to purchase.”

A 2019 survey of participants showed that tight finances affected how families buy food, including food choices.

Bristol Health EMT Is All Heart When It Comes To Her Community

It’s easy to see why emergency medical technician Patty Lizotte was named the 2019 Employee of the Year for Bristol Health Emergency Medical Services (EMS). Besides being a superb Emergency Medical Technician providing care for residents throughout Greater Bristol since 2015, Lizotte is dedicated to Bristol Health’s outreach efforts, as she is always present teaching Hands-Only Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) at dozens of community events. Lizotte, who began her career as an emergency medicine nurse, has been teaching Hands-Only CPR for about two years.

“Hands-Only CPR is a new approach of the American Heart Association,” Lizotte said. “Compressions save lives. With this new technique, you first shake the person to wake them up, call 911, and then push hard and fast. The American Heart Association has proven that survival rates have gone up 63 percent with Hands-Only CPR.”

“We use the feedback mannequins which is a fun way to teach this technique,” Lizotte said. “When you learn something like this, you are really receiving the gift of a lifetime.” All participants receive a certificate in Hands-Only CPR following the ten-to 15-minute instruction session.

Lizotte added that everyone is surprised that mouth-to-mouth resuscitation is no longer taught in CPR instruction. “The American Heart Association has proven that those breaths don’t go anywhere,” Lizotte said.

In addition to teaching CPR at dozens of community events, Lizotte is the exclusive CPR trainer for the Bristol Adult Resource Center, as well as many of the schools throughout Bristol. While she is an expert in different field protocols, Lizotte got to practice what she preaches when her husband suffered a severe heart attack at home in early 2020. It’s her training and ability to administer care without the equipment on her rig saved her husband’s life until an ambulance arrived.

“I absolutely love stepping into the back of that ambulance every day,” Lizotte said. “And there’s no better feeling than teaching something that can help save a loved one when they need it the most.”

Grants Cover Expensive Diagnostic Tests Essential to Treatment

Although mammograms are covered by many insurance programs, diagnostic tests, such as ultrasounds and biopsies, can be expensive and may not be, especially for patients who are un- or under-insured. The Hospital of Central Connecticut partnered with the Breast Cancer Alliance to fill this gap in women’s healthcare.

“Many programs will help cover mammograms, but not follow-up services, so people delay seeking care,” said Robyn Nichols, a Development Associate at The Hospital of Central Connecticut. “It is crucial to help individuals complete their care.”

Ultrasounds and biopsies are recommended after a suspicious finding on a mammogram. If a biopsy is needed, the cost can range from $600 to $1,500, depending on whether there are multiple areas of concern. These costs may be difficult or impossible to afford.

“The cost of biopsies increases year over year, and insurance often reduces what they are willing to cover, so it can be a battle,” Nichols said.

She said the program is especially important now, as COVID-19 has led to job loss and loss of health insurance for many people. “Early detection is so important, the earlier we can catch and treat breast cancer, it helps with long-term care and prognosis,” Nichols said.

“This is life-saving for people, and it can affect men, as well.”

Of the 55 people who completed the survey, Haynes noted, 15 (27 percent) said they were not able to make healthy choices for their family. Of these 15 people, 11 attributed it to money issues. The survey also revealed that within the past 12 months, 53 percent of families were worried they would run out of food before they had money to buy more. And 31 percent said they did run out of food and didn’t have money to buy more.

Also, 75 percent said that before their participation in Rx for Health, their children received a fruit or vegetable every day. At the end of the 2019 program, 100 percent of the families said their children were able to receive fruits and vegetables every day.
Making Children Healthier One House at a Time

Fredrik is a happy, healthy, and vibrant preschooler. He loves music, he is obsessed with soccer and football, and he always has a smile on his face. His parents, Josh and Marie Pinheiro, are thankful that Connecticut Children’s medical providers and Connecticut Children’s Healthy Homes Program worked together to help Fredrik overcome the health challenges he faced in his earliest years.

“When everything’s been through, he’s always had a smile on his face,” says Marie. “It amazes me how tough he is.”

Fred was two months old when he started struggling to keep his food down and soon after that, he started wheezing and coughing. At an age when he should have steadily put on weight, he barely gained a few ounces per week. Physicians diagnosed him with failure to thrive and acid reflux.

When Fred was 13 months old, he struggled to breathe and turned blue at his daycare. Paramedics rushed him to Connecticut Children’s. Physicians stabilized him and admitted him to the care. During the hospital stay, the family received another diagnosis: asthma.

Fred’s parents describe his asthma diagnosis as a breath of fresh air. Under the care of Connecticut Children’s, they started Fred on daily medication, including a twice-daily inhaler. When he gets sick, he also uses a nebulizer mask three or four times a day and has physical therapy on his chest. In addition to adjusting to Fred’s treatments, his parents also had to learn about asthma triggers and other health hazards and additional health concerns.

Healthy Homes removed the lead paint from their house — replacing the front and back doors, scraping and repainting the exterior, and repainting the shed and garage floor — and installed a drainage system to keep water out of the basement.

Over the past 17 years, Healthy Homes has secured more than $34 million in federal funding and $29 million in matching grants from community partners and state agencies. The funding has enabled the program to make more than 3,000 homes lead safe and healthy, protecting more than 1,800 children under the age of six. The program has also educated more than 38,000 people about the dangers of lead poisoning.

“To realize you have a dangerous issue in your house that you have to fix, and then to have somebody say, ‘We can fix it for you,’ is really shocking and at the same time, a relief,” says Josh.

Since the renovations wrapped up at Fred’s home, the basement has been water-free and there is improved air quality throughout the house. Most importantly, Fred is now thriving.

After Fred’s asthma diagnosis, Connecticut Children’s connected the Pinheiros with the Connecticut Children’s Healthy Homes program, which helps to address the critical link between housing quality and health. Healthy Homes visited their house and identified two health hazards. First, a leak in the basement, which could cause mold and moisture problems that might exacerbate Fred’s asthma. Second, they discovered lead paint in the home’s exterior, garage floor and shed, which could cause developmental delays, learning difficulties, and additional health concerns.

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Day Kimball Healthcare’s Cancer Center Addresses Food Insecurity in the Quiet Corner

In Connecticut’s quiet northeast corner, Day Kimball Healthcare (DKH) is heeding the call to help improve the health of its community by providing the best of medicines: healthy food. To support its cancer patients and their families struggling with food insecurity, DKH established “Caitlyn’s Cupboard,” a hospital-based food pantry. The idea for the hospital-based food pantry was born out of necessity. DKH’s Rose Bove LaRose Cancer Center clinicians discovered they were treating a population of patients who could benefit from a food pantry type of program. They wanted to make healthy, shelf-stable food easily accessible to their patients and families who were unable to afford it.

Nearly 117 DKH Cancer Center patients have already signed up to receive food through the pantry since its establishment in late March 2020. “Approximately 42 percent of cancer patients spend their entire life savings within two years after their diagnosis,” said Sward. “No one should have to choose between keeping their electricity on and buying groceries for the week.” Caitlyn’s Cupboard allows us to help eliminate some of those difficult choices for our patients and continue to care for them once they leave the hospital.”

Cancer Center patients who identify as food insecure can access the pantry. Sward schedules individual appointments with each patient to help them select foods tailored to their specific treatment plan, health needs, and dietary requirements.

Food Donation Feeds Hundreds of Connecticut Families

GREENWICH HOSPITAL
YALE NEW HAVEN HEALTH

During the height of Connecticut’s coronavirus pandemic, a generous community supported Greenwich Hospital as residents and business owners from Connecticut and New York came together to deliver 17,000 meals to healthcare workers. Moved by the outpouring of community support, Greenwich Hospital employees wanted to give back.

In July, Greenwich Hospital donated thousands of pounds of food to two community food banks: Neighbor to Neighbor in Greenwich and Caritas of Port Chester, New York. The food drive was organized by the Greenwich Hospital Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Council and all the food was donated by thankful hospital employees.

“The community response to the public health crisis was incredible and heartwarming,” said Diane Kelly, President of Greenwich Hospital. “This food donation is our way of thanking the community for supporting our healthcare workers during this unprecedented time. We will never forget their acts of kindness and generosity.”

“We are fortunate to be a part of an amazingly thoughtful community,” said Margaret Goldberg, Neighbor to Neighbor Executive Director. “We continue our good work knowing we are a catalyst for neighbors to help one another. The record number of unemployed and underemployed—those working, but barely able to make ends meet, and families facing financial crisis for the first time – all need Neighbor to Neighbor to help feed their families and maintain a basic quality of life that assures dignity and respect. Greenwich Hospital is a vital partner to the health and well-being of the Greenwich community and we are grateful.”

Demand for food has grown ten-fold since the start of the pandemic, said Patricia Hart, Treasurer of the Caritas Board of Directors. “The number of unemployed, underemployed and those sheltering in place have swelled the ranks of those who were already experiencing food insecurity,” he said. Caritas typically provides 4,000 meals a month at its community dining room and supplies groceries, meat, and fresh produce to nearly 400 families through its pantry. In contrast, Caritas distributed 12,000 meals in June.

“This food drive donation has been used to fill the hundreds of grocery bags and prepared meals we deliver to homes every week,” Hart said. “Community support is always essential. But during these difficult times, this donation from Greenwich Hospital employees is a visible and tangible sign of concern and care for our neighbors in need.”
Griffin Health Brings Healthy, Fresh Food to Valley Food Banks

Two years ago, Griffin and its healthcare partners in the Value Care Alliance started an initiative to better understand the need for social services by screening Medicare and Medicaid patients in their emergency departments and designated outpatient physician practices. Griffin staff screened 5,449 patients and 1,200 of them (22 percent) reported food insecurity issues. Griffin partnered with TEAM to address the food insecurity issue. They soon discovered that donations of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other healthy food options were scarce in the donations to food pantries and banks. Recognizing the need for food pantries in the Lower Naugatuck Valley to have better access and a more consistent stock of fresh and healthy foods, Griffin Health made a commitment to help TEAM facilitate and finance the monthly purchase of fresh, nutritious foods for the local food pantries. Additionally, Charmel has been engaging other members of the Greater Valley Chamber of Commerce about transforming this initiative into a model supported by the business community.

“Through this community collaboration, we are creating an effective model for addressing food insecurity. We know this model will improve the health and wellbeing of community residents and can be easily adopted by other organizations that want to truly make a difference,” Charmel said.

Hartford Hospital Uses Food as Medicine to Help Control Diabetes

Wholesome Communities Connecticut, a Wholesome Wave partnership with Hartford Hospital, is improving the affordability of fruits and vegetables for hundreds of low-income patients with diabetes.

The program empowers healthcare providers to write prescriptions for produce. The purchase of produce and all program expenses are funded by Hartford Hospital. The Wholesome Wave team worked closely with Hartford Hospital’s Adult Primary Care and Diabetes Life Care clinicians on program design and implementation.

More than 400,000 Connecticut residents struggle with hunger, according to the Connecticut Food Bank. Many times, they must choose between food and other necessities such as housing, utilities, and healthcare. Through Wholesome Communities Connecticut, registered patients facing food insecurity and unmanaged diabetes can receive $60 worth of Wholesome Rx vouchers monthly. They are redeemable only for fresh fruits and vegetables at C-Town and Hartford Mobile Market Stops.

Each month, participants can receive a $60 voucher “refill” by meeting program requirements, such as meeting with their clinician or attending nutrition education classes. (Data are collected and evaluated.) This “Inform, Activate, and Measure” approach ensures participants increase fruits and vegetables in their diets, with the goal of improving diabetes outcomes and reducing healthcare cost and use. The initiative has been a great success, with 330 people with diabetes participating in the program.

The program demonstrates the impact of directed purchasing power on fruit and vegetable consumption, healthy behavior change, and longer-term healthcare use. This initiative was built on Wholesome Wave’s successful three-year produce incentive program in Hartford and Vermont that was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“By making this commitment to move the needle on critical social determinants of health, like food insecurity,” said Bimal Patel, President of Hartford Hospital, “Hartford Hospital deeply impacts the city of Hartford and surrounding areas, taking a leading role alongside Wholesome Wave in growing the ‘food is medicine’ movement across the country.”

David Juros, Director of Program Partnerships with Wholesome Wave, has his eye on the future. “We are working to extend our work in Hartford to continue to help the population in need,” he said.

The program hopes to expand its reach soon by working with the Women’s Ambulatory Clinic, serving 300 to 350 women and their families.

Charlotte Hungerford Teaches Community Timely Hand Washing

Each year, Charlotte Hungerford Hospital staff members from the Community Relations Department visit local schools and attend health fairs to provide important hands-on health information and education to the public in an interactive environment.

For 2020, and just before COVID-19 arrived in the state, the health information was literally hands-on: The team chose to teach the importance of hand washing.

Ensuring that children and adults practice proper hand hygiene is one of the best and most fundamental ways to avoid getting sick and prevent the spread of germs. The team emphasized the importance of hand washing at home, at work, and in the community. The message: Washing your hands protects you and others from illness.

The yearly outreach highlights health and wellness, encompassing a wide range of topics for kids, adults, and seniors. Recent subjects include the amount of sugar and salt in processed foods, the importance of drinking water and choosing healthy alternatives to sugary drinks, and the many misconceptions and dangers of smoking and vaping.

For 2020, the team created an interactive display and snowball toss game to promote hand washing. They visited 17 classrooms in the local school district, which was experiencing an increased absentee rate due to the flu. The game, enjoyed by young and old alike, helps participants understand how touching surfaces and objects throughout the day exposes them to germs that cause infection, and how proper hand washing helps limit the transfer of bacteria and viruses.

A colorful display illustrates the five steps of effective hand-washing and the instances during the day when hand-washing is a must. Children were given masks to decorate and take home in an effort to educate them about the importance of wearing a mask to protect others when they are ill.

Packets containing bilingual information and games about hand hygiene were also sent home with the students for family members, reinforcing the message that clean hands save lives.

The team also took their show on the road to Hartford HealthCare’s annual Family Fun Fest at the Aqua Turf in Southington, where thousands of kids and families stopped by to learn more. With the arrival of the coronavirus just a month later, hand hygiene clearly was a great and timely topic choice and one that would be reinforced daily in the days and months to come.
Manchester Memorial Hospital Makes a Difference for Diabetes Patients

ECHO's Manchester Memorial Hospital is proud to be only one of seven organizations in the United States who received a grant from the American Diabetes Association to bring their Prevent T2 Diabetes program to the community in eastern Connecticut. Prevent T2 is a 12-month, free small-group lifestyle coaching program that uses a research-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention-approved curriculum to help delay or prevent Type 2 Diabetes. A trained lifestyle coach leads the program to help participants change certain aspects of their life, like eating healthier, reducing stress and getting more physical activity. The program also includes group support from others in the region who share similar goals and struggles. In the last fiscal year, ECHO’s Manchester Memorial Hospital was pleased to support 146 people in attending the program, completely at no charge.

When the pandemic lockdown prevented in-person contact with people who were either prediabetic or at risk for Type 2 diabetes, the team got creative. In May, the two lifestyle coaches with the Diabetes Prevention Program began scripting and recording weekly videos— from their own homes where they are both self-isolating—to help motivate their patients and keep them on track. The “Motivation Monday” video series provides helpful tips on topics such as healthy eating, exercise, managing stress and setting goals while confined at home during the pandemic. These videos are posted on various social media outlets and the website where program participants—and anyone else, for that matter—can view them. “We’re trying to motivate people to continue to be healthy during these difficult times,” said Amee Chandler, Lifestyle Coach. “When people are miserable, cooped up at home, unable to go outdoors, and exercise because of the weather, they may tend to overeat or drink a little too much and gain those extra COVID-19 pounds.”

Patient feedback has been tremendous: “Since being in the program, I’ve lost 22 pounds and still dropping! My activity level has increased and I’m feeling fit. My blood pressure has dropped about 20 points and I feel very confident that I can keep this going. By the end of this program, I am confident that diabetes will not be a part of my life. Thanks to ECHO and the Diabetes Prevention Staff!” John H.

“Thank you for all you have done. I have been doing 5,300 step walks for exercise and for the first time in many years the results of my last two blood tests (6-month period) shows that everything has been within the normal range. I have learned a healthier way of life through you and I am so so so grateful. Much gratitude and appreciation.” Kathy L.

Middlesex Health Joins Community Effort to Fight COVID-19

Alarmed by national statistics regarding disproportionate COVID-19 morbidity and mortality among members of the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) populations, the Middlesex County COVID-19 People of Color Health Initiative partners also worked collaboratively to secure funding and donations for 1,000 wellness packages, which were distributed between August and October. These packages included COVID-19 education and resource materials in English and Spanish; custom-made educational magnets to affix educational material to refrigerators; masks; smart thermometers; hand sanitizer; and soap. Some of the wellness packages also included gift cards for those with emergent basic needs due to the pandemic.

The wellness packages were distributed to Middletown churches with a large proportion of Black congregants, at a Cross Street AME Zion Church backpack event, through select community-based organizations and through targeted neighborhood canvassing. Along the Connecticut shoreline, wellness packages were distributed to the Spanish-speaking population through Bare Necessities, a diaper resource organization. Currently, the COVID-19 People of Color Health Initiative is working to ensure that members of BIPOC communities have the resources and supplies they need to remain safe throughout the duration of the pandemic. Middlesex Health has played a large role in sustaining this initiative and continues to be an actively engaged partner as the initiative moves forward.

Middlesex Health Fellowship; the Middletown Ministerial Alliance; the Middlesex County NAACP Branch; Community Health Center, Inc.; the Middletown Common Council; the Middletown mayor’s office; the Middletown Health Department; Middletown Public Schools; the Middletown Police Department; Middletown Parks and Recreation; the Community Foundation of Middlesex County; Middletown United Way; St. Vincent de Paul Middletown, among other community-based organizations.

Initiative members believe it is essential to proactively and aggressively work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among members of BIPOC communities, targeting those who are at higher risk, and the group quickly developed a mitigation strategy to assess and meet the most urgent needs for COVID-19 safety and prevention. The initiative created and widely disseminated culturally sensitive COVID-19 prevention and safety educational materials in both English and Spanish. From May through September, the initiative collected 16,250 surgical and cloth masks from donor agencies and community members and conducted targeted distribution to members of BIPOC communities. Distribution channels included canvassing neighborhoods and passing out masks at summer school lunch programs and through a network of churches with a large proportion of Black congregants.

By the end of this program, I am confident that
Norwalk Hospital Employees Make a Difference

As Norwalk Hospital responded to those affected with the coronavirus, the staff demonstrated that “together, we could make a difference.” The support from the communities served by Norwalk Hospital was overwhelming. In appreciation of the encouragement received, and in response to the community need for food for shelters and food banks—which was intensified during the pandemic—Norwalk Hospital and other Nuvance Health hospitals held food drives.

A Norwalk Hospital Employee Food Drive was held from May 4- May 11. The hospital collected one thousand pounds of food for Person to Person, local food pantries, the Westport Shelter and the Open Door Shelter. This activity was promoted to staff via flyers, electronic signage, and the employee newsletter. During the pandemic, Norwalk Hospital distributed ten Amazon tablets (from a $1,000 donation) to homeless shelters and outpatient substance use programs in Norwalk. This allowed clients to participate in virtual telehealth appointments from shelters and from isolation hotel rooms.

Maternity Care Center and Family Development Center Collaborate to Provide Care to New Families

Since 1974, ECHN’s Rockville General Hospital (RGH) Maternity Care Center has provided pregnancy-related medical and social services to thousands of pregnant women and teens throughout the region. Many times, these services are provided free of charge to offer programs that provide treatment and/or promote health and healing as a response to community needs. Located at Rockville General Hospital, the Maternity Care Center provides prenatal and postpartum care services to uninsured and underinsured women. At the center, women have access to a wide variety of services including:

- Assistance in enrolling in the Husky Medical Insurance Plan
- Gynecological exams
- Laboratory services
- Physical exams, health promotion, and maintenance

provided for those without housing who tested positive for COVID-19. Homeless clients also received ten cell phones through a corporate donation, enabling them to stay connected to Norwalk Hospital’s Community Care Team. Also, hundreds of hand-sewn masks were distributed to the Norwalk Shelter and local food pantries.

Saint Francis Hospital Launches First EMS Whole Blood Program

Saint Francis Hospital, a Level 1 Trauma Center, and American Medical Response (AMR) launched a new program allowing whole blood to be administered to a trauma patient while still at the scene of an emergency, or while in transport to the hospital. This is the first, ground-based emergency response program of its kind in New England. The program will provide a potentially life-saving service to the residents of Hartford and its surrounding communities.

“We are proud to team up with AMR to provide this valuable service to our local community,” said Dr. Stephen Wolf, Chairman, Department of Emergency Medicine, Saint Francis Hospital. “In a medical emergency or trauma situation, every second matters. Research is now starting to show that administering warmed, whole blood at the time of the medical emergency can significantly improve survival and recovery rates for the patient.”

Whole blood must be stored in a cooled location, but it is optimal to administer the blood to the patient warmed. The latest warming technology—a compact, portable, battery operated blood warming system—is a key component to the program and will be utilized by local AMR paramedics in order to administer the whole blood units to patients. This is the same technology used by military operations globally.

Whole blood is made up of several components, including plasma, platelets, and packed red blood cells. Usually, these separate components are carried and administered by some emergency responders, in order to follow Mass Transfusion Protocol, which requires a 1:1:1 ratio of each component. Research, however, is beginning to point towards whole blood, which already contains the necessary clotting factors and platelets, as a preferred treatment for patients experiencing some type of severe blood loss.

“We use blood and blood products in the care of patients who require the next step in the fluid resuscitation process as we transport them to a higher level of care,” said Chris Chaplin, Regional Director, AMR, Connecticut. “AMR is proud to join forces with Saint Francis Hospital and to make this meaningful investment in the equipment and training necessary to successfully launch this program. This is one more example of AMR’s dedication to providing the highest level of care to our patients.”

“Until now, this kind of treatment, whole blood and the equipment needed to administer it, was not available to our local emergency responders, but our collaboration has changed that,” said John Quinlavin, Emergency Services Manager, Saint Francis Hospital. “This launch is a demonstration of a true collaboration, combining the efforts of our own on-site blood bank, our emergency service leaders and physicians, and AMR, and it fulfills our shared mission to best serve our patients and community.”
St. Vincent’s Develops Safe Food Distribution During Pandemic

Over the past seven years, St. Vincent’s and its partners in the Health Improvement Alliance have been providing health screenings to area residents who are food insecure as a part of its Know Your Numbers (KYN) program. In January and February of 2020, the team was actively conducting screenings, reporting continued improvements in the general health of those screened at six local food pantries. The team had also piloted an education program at Bishop Jean Williams Food Pantry, where 20 participants were taking ownership of their health by monitoring their blood pressure, learning to cook healthy meals, and incorporating healthy habits into their lives. This pilot would then serve as a best practice that could be implemented more broadly across multiple locations.

When the coronavirus prompted widespread shutdowns of all but essential services in March 2020, the programs were halted. The team knew that the most vulnerable people in local communities would be disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 health crisis. The team needed to solve two problems:

- How to continue sourcing food distribution
- How to distribute it safely

With funding from the St. Vincent’s Medical Center Foundation and in partnership with the hospital food vendor, Compass, the Mission Services team packed 300 bags of food in advance of the first distribution day – a necessary solution since the volunteer program had been suspended. Through the foundation’s Giet Milk Fund and the generosity of Chabaso Bakery in New Haven, the team was able to provide a half-gallon of milk, a dozen eggs, and a loaf of freshly baked bread with each bag. Once the food was sourced, the team had to tackle the next problem: how to safely distribute the food.

St. Vincent’s Mission Services team, which includes Parish Nurse and Pastoral Care, developed a plan for safe food distribution to the community. The plan included:
- Process for pre-packing bags
- Staffing
- Detailed staff roles
- Drive-through and walk-up options
- Physical distancing protocols
- PPE, disinfectants, and other supplies
- Process for food distribution
- Timing

Through partnerships in the community, the team knew other food distributions were struggling to continue operating under the new pressures and requirements of the pandemic. After the process was tested and fine-tuned, St. Vincent’s shared it freely throughout the greater Bridgeport community – where it is still being used. As the pandemic continues to increase food insecurity throughout the region, St. Vincent’s relentless focus on feeding those in need has never been stronger.

Every lecture targets a topic that addresses the health needs of people throughout this region of Connecticut.
Community Wellness in a Pandemic

In 2010, Stamford Health came together with a diverse group of community organizations to form The VITA Health & Wellness Partnership. This network of local agencies assists the community through health-focused initiatives such as expanding access to healthcare, linking education with social services, expanding behavioral health services, and improving access to substance use, prevention, and treatment, among many other projects. Since its inception, VITA has gained national recognition, transformed Stamford’s West Side into a health-themed neighborhood, and expanded its impact city-wide.

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 began to spread across the globe, and Stamford became an early ‘hot-spot’ in the U.S. The VITA collaborative was faced with an immense challenge – to step up in support of its communities and shift focus from health and wellness programming to pandemic relief efforts.

Stamford Health, the NAAACP, and VITA members including Building One Stamford, Oak and the City of Stamford, came together to share information at a weekly virtual meeting called the VITA Community Table, which allowed more than 100 participants representing 50-plus nonprofits to share critical, timely information and to problem solve together. VITA also purchased and distributed more than 60,000 PPE items to frontline workers, volunteers, and low-income individuals in subsidized multi-family housing.

Recognizing that the Latinx and Black communities in Stamford were especially vulnerable to COVID-19, VITA directed its efforts towards these communities, partnering with New York-based Jackson Laboratory for Genomic Medicine (JAX), the Department of Public Health, and Hartford HealthCare. This much-needed state pandemic relief effort was enabled by the Connecticut National Guard, reconfigured John Dempsey Hospital to handle the resurgence in the fall and beyond.

And all the different ways of responding to the needs of their patients, employees, and the community during the pandemic put John Dempsey Hospital in position to be even better prepared to handle the resurgence in the fall and beyond.

“People came together in a way that I hadn’t seen before. It was so uplifting to see the dedication and care that our healthcare workers provided,” said Kathleen Silard, President and CEO of Stamford Health.

Waterbury Health: We are there for you.

In a year where it was vital to stay connected, Waterbury Health held Ask the Doctor sessions using its largest social media platform to connect to patients and community. Following a lock down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, that included medical facilities and outpatient procedures, Waterbury Health continued to provide comfort and companionship through hand-designed letters of encouragement for older adult inpatients.

Recognizing the importance of caring for those who care for the sick, as well as the staff who keep that care environment functional and safe, UConn Health made the availability of emotional support resources a priority.

And all the different ways of responding to the needs of their patients, employees, and the community during the pandemic put John Dempsey Hospital in position to be even better prepared to handle the resurgence in the fall and beyond.

“I’m extremely impressed with and proud of how we, as an organization, have met – and continue to meet – the sustained challenges of COVID-19 for both our patients and our staff,” says UConn Health CEO Dr. Andrew Agwunobi. “This year has served the Connecticut National Guard, reconfigured John Dempsey Hospital to handle the resurgence in the fall and beyond.”

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“A health care worker’s life is always at risk, but when you do something for someone else, their family, or your neighbors, it is so easy to forget that you are putting your life at risk for them,” said Maria Budzinski, a nurse at the COVID-19 floor. "When I think about my patients, I feel so grateful to be able to help them in any way. It's truly an honor to be able to do that."
COVID-19 Testing Van Reaches Underserved Residents

As the coronavirus took hold in Connecticut in late winter, the focus in large part was on the central and western parts of the state, where COVID-19 positive cases were skyrocketing. But in eastern Connecticut, positivity rates were low at the start. Hartford HealthCare community health staffers knew that COVID-19 would eventually spike in the eastern half of the state and typically underserved populations living in the rural areas around Windham Hospital would have difficulty accessing testing.

To address this need, the decision was made to bring testing to the people. “We had the Mobile Health Resource Center, which is basically primary care on wheels,” said Michael J. Davis, RN, BSN, MBA, NE-BC, Senior Director for Operations, Windham Hospital. “We were looking for ways to support the Windham community quickly. So, we repurposed the van into a mobile testing unit. It was the quickest way to meet the community’s needs.”

The van was parked weekday mornings at Windham Hospital from mid-May through mid-July. In the afternoons, it would drive to nearly Plainfield, to homeless shelters, meal centers, and other locations in the area. The van had bilingual staff and a translation service available.

Having the van outside the hospital “enabled the downtown community to be able to walk to testing,” Davis said, noting that often transportation issues are foremost to low-income residents. “And right away, the demand went way beyond what we had imagined it would be. We saw so many more people than we expected.”

“This really was such a team effort,” Davis said. “We saw there was a need, and we made it happen. So many different areas within the system came together to make this work. And the people were so grateful we were there.”

The mobile efforts at Windham were part of a system-wide move to reach underserved and vulnerable populations across the state with scheduled and pop-up testing sites at homeless shelters, churches, apartment complexes, nursing homes, schools, and other community-based locations. Put on the road in the early weeks of the pandemic, Hartford HealthCare’s two mobile units averaged about 300 tests a day. The mobile units did more than 106,000 COVID-19 tests in 45 communities through mid-December 2020 and received an important boost in July with a $400,000 grant from the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority.

The RVs carried all the supplies and equipment needed to provide safe and efficient asymptomatic tests. It took many hours and the collaborative effort of hospital and YNHHS departments to get the RVs on the road. From Information Technology, to Facilities, to Supply Chain, it indeed took a village for all the pieces to come together. The most important aspect, however, is the connection to community partners. Without the support and cooperation of religious organizations, municipalities, school systems, park facilities, and retail sites, all of whom provided space, the mobile Community COVID-19 Testing RVs program would not have been successful.

YNHHS teams of registered nurses, COVID-19 swabbers, registrars, and community health workers spent more than 90 days, in all kinds of weather, performing more than 8,000 asymptomatic COVID-19 tests. The importance of this work cannot be overstated, especially for the asymptomatic individuals who tested positive. The goal of asymptomatic testing is to identify and contact individuals who don’t know they are infected, to prevent them from unknowingly spreading COVID-19 to friends and family in their communities. This targeted prevention is a key goal of local and state health officials.

The cliché phrase “we are all in this together” was exemplified by the community collaboration that brought this program to urban neighborhoods, and was fulfilled when the Community Testing RV arrived in “hot spots” and was greeted by a line of individuals waiting for this important test. Responding to the needs of the community, especially during a pandemic, is the mission of each YNHHS hospital and would not have been possible without the dedication of the team and the partnerships in the community.

2020 COVID Timeline

- First Connecticut resident is diagnosed with COVID-19 on March 8
- Governor Lamont issues Declaration of Public Health and Civil Preparedness Emergency (PHE) on March 10
- Connecticut reaches its peak hospital transmission rate in the United States on April 22
- The Governor expands the ability of patients and doctors to use telehealth for healthcare visits and services on April 17
- Connecticut reports the lowest COVID-19 transmission rate in the United States on June 19
- The first dose of COVID-19 vaccine is administered in Connecticut on December 14
- Connecticut hospitals have served 21,329 COVID-19 inpatients to date and closed the year with 1,136 COVID-19 patients hospitalized on New Year’s Eve 2020 on December 31
About the Connecticut Hospital Association
The Connecticut Hospital Association has been dedicated to serving Connecticut’s hospitals and health systems since 1919. Through state and federal advocacy, CHA represents the interests of Connecticut’s hospitals on key healthcare issues in the areas of quality and patient safety, access and coverage, workforce, community health, health equity, and hospital reimbursement.

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