



ALBANY MED Health System

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SARATOGA HOSPITAL

COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN UPDATE

*Addressing Chronic Heart Disease  
and Mental Health, and  
Preventing Substance Use*



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## COMMUNITY SERVICE PLAN UPDATE

### *Addressing Chronic Heart Disease and Mental Health, and Preventing Substance Use*

As a New York hospital, every three years Saratoga Hospital with our regional partners participates in a community health needs assessment. We use that information to tackle our community's most pressing health-related issues. The most recent assessment was completed in 2022. Based on its findings, as well as on significant input from community-based organizations and other stakeholders, for 2022-2024 Saratoga County chose to focus on Heart Disease, Mental Health, and Substance Use. A detailed implementation plan was developed in **2022**. In this 2023 Community Service Plan Update, we report on our progress to date.

[Click to  
view the  
2022 plan](#)

Saratoga Hospital, as an affiliate of the Albany Med Health System (AMHS), is in the final year of the design and build of the single AMHS electronic medical record (EMR). From a community health standpoint, this will allow seamless integration of services and unparalleled access for both patients and the clinical team to real-time healthcare information. Outpatient physicians will be automatically notified when their patients have visits to any of the four affiliated hospitals so timely follow-up can be arranged. There will be an improved mechanism for identification and tracking of patients with high-risk social determinants of health. The clinical team will be alerted if there are social determinants of health that need to be addressed. Clinicians will have improved access to patient records across all specialties. Patients will have a single patient portal for results review, scheduling, and communication with the offices.

# Preventing Chronic Disease

## Heart Disease

Heart Disease has remained the number one leading cause of death in the United States and affects a substantial portion of the population of the community in Saratoga County. Approximately 697,000 people die of heart disease in the United States every year—that is 1 in every 5 deaths. High blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, and smoking are key risk factors for heart disease. By focusing on the well-being of a patient from all aspects of health, we can strive to reduce heart disease death in Saratoga County.

To help address this issue, in 2023 Saratoga Hospital implemented the following initiatives:

- We kicked off Heart Month in February with Wear Red Day to raise awareness of the personal and public health issues with heart disease. The hospital offered increased access to calcium score tests, which are used to assess a person's risk of cardiovascular disease, and also publicized on social media.
- Every year Saratoga Hospital Medical Group—Cardiology along with other hospital departments join the American Heart Association's fight against heart disease and stroke. The Heart Walk is the American Heart Association's premiere event for raising funds to help save lives from heart disease and stroke. The Cardiology practice runs a special fundraiser each month from February through May leading up to the Heart Walk in June. Our patients join the team and participate in our fundraising efforts while they learn about heart health.
- Saratoga Hospital is the proud recipient of the Mission: Lifeline® Gold Receiving Quality Achievement Award for implementing specific quality improvement measures outlined by the American Heart Association for the treatment of patients who suffer severe heart attacks. This involves collaboration between regional hospitals, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) agencies, and communities to form and enhance efficient and effective systems of care.
- The American Heart Association Target Blood Pressure (BP) program at Saratoga Community Health Center enrolled 91 patients with a diagnosis of hypertension (high blood pressure) to learn how self-monitor blood pressure while learning hypertension disease management skills.
- We continued to offer Nutrition Rx, a weekly multidisciplinary program for patients at our Saratoga Community Health Center who are working to improve their health through diet and exercise changes. The program also helps address food insecurity by supplying each participant with a weekly bag of fresh produce, donated by a local farm, along with recipes on how to use that produce. Data on improvements in participants in the following measures indicates that readiness to change is encouraging.
  - Body Mass Index (BMI), a measure of healthy weight
  - Hemoglobin A1c, a measure of blood sugar control in people with diabetes
  - Low-Density Lipoprotein (LDL), commonly referred to as the bad cholesterol that builds up in blood vessels.
  - Blood pressure control
- Through a \$15,000 grant from the Capital Region Food Group and partnerships with our local produce suppliers such as Pitney and Dennison Farms, Saratoga Community Health Center continues to provide nutritious food to patients through the medically tailored Nutrition Resource Center.

# Preventing Chronic Disease

## Heart Disease

- Saratoga Community Health Center offers physician-led group classes for patients throughout the year addressing management of chronic diseases and diabetes and addressing issues of obesity. BMI, HbA1c, LDL, and blood pressure levels are monitored for patient feedback and successful disease management.
- The second annual Creative Community Health and Wellness Day was held in October in conjunction with multiple community partners, including “Mark and Jill Sing the Blues,” Sight & Sound Vision Care for the Music Industry, Hudson Headwaters, 1of1 Custom Earplugs, and Caffè Lena. We offered the following services to those in the creative community living in Saratoga County:
  - Free vision care clinic including exams and eyewear
  - Custom molded earplugs
  - Blood pressure screening
  - Dietician consultation
  - Hepatitis C and HIV screening
  - Insurance navigation
  - Cancer screening services

# Promoting Well-Being and **Preventing Substance Use**

“Substance Use” here refers primarily to opioid misuse, but recognizes the role that alcohol, other illegal drugs, and even smoking play in leading to addictive behaviors with adverse health impacts. Community partners are particularly concerned about the continuing penetration of the highly lethal synthetic opioid, fentanyl, into the community. They fear that the ability to continue to manage the opioid crisis will be stretched to the breaking point if we do not put more effort into containing it now. Opioid misuse is both preventable and treatable. If it does occur, there are serious consequences, which can include:

- **Health factors**—death, disability, spread of infectious disease (HIV, Hepatitis), neonatal abstinence syndrome in newborns, increased medical costs
- **Social factors**—job loss, poverty, children being placed in protective custody
- **Community factors**—increased crime, increased need for law enforcement resources, increased use of emergency medical services

Saratoga Hospital takes a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to treating and preventing substance misuse. In 2023, we accomplished the following:

- Continued to provide Addiction Medicine services at our Saratoga Community Health Center, where we also can easily connect patients to high-quality affordable primary care, dental and behavioral health services to address all the patient’s health needs in one setting.
- In collaboration with Albany College of Pharmacy, Saratoga Hospital Medical Group has Clinical Pharmacists embedded in our practices to monitor patient opioid medication utilization and provide direct education to patients on risks of addiction. They work with our Physicians and Advanced Practice Providers to formulate patient-centered treatment plans.
- In collaboration with Healing Springs, we now have a Certified Recovery Peer Advocate available in the hospital to meet with patients and family members.
- We offer the continued use of the emergency department medication-assisted treatment protocol for initiation of buprenorphine (Suboxone) in patients being discharged. 58 patients thus far in 2023 have been prescribed this therapy.
- Continued collaboration occurs with the Capital Region Medication Assisted Treatment & Emergency Referral (MATTERS) program to establish patients with timely follow-up appointments with an addiction specialist. In January 2023, they did a virtual presentation to emergency department staff to educate and raise awareness of the program.
- Narcan Day, a free countywide training on how to recognize and provide lifesaving treatment for an opioid overdose, was held in August 2023, and had increased participation compared to 2022. The medicine Naloxone (Narcan) is the antidote (reversal medication) for opioid drug overdoses such as heroin, fentanyl, or oxycodone, all three of which are among the top causes of overdoses in Saratoga County. The overdose rescue kits which were given to participants include easy to follow instructions and the Narcan nasal spray device. 453 kits were distributed to individuals across 19 county locations, including a mobile unit. In addition to this, 190 kits have been handed out so far in 2023 through our other venues including the Community Health Center, inpatient Mental Health Unit, inpatient medical units, and by hospital Public Safety Officers in the Emergency Department Waiting Area. Fentanyl is the leading cause of overdose deaths in Saratoga County. Narcan administrations in the county have increased by 77% from 2022 to 2023 which is evidence of improved education and access. Although it is a multi-faceted measure, overdose deaths in Saratoga County have decreased by 21% from 2022 to 2023 (Saratoga County Department of Health, 2023)
- Creative Community Health and Wellness Day - This event offered free health and wellness services to the creative community residing in Saratoga County and also provided Narcan kits with training and Fentanyl testing strips to participants.

# Promoting Well-Being and **Improving Mental Health**

Mental health challenges are prevalent in New York State, with 14% of the 2021 population having a mental health condition according to the Saratoga County Community Health Hub (2022). Of those New Yorkers, approximately one quarter did not receive any treatment. Saratoga Hospital Emergency Department has remained relatively stable from 2022 to 2023 regarding the number of visits requiring specialty mental health resources. Saratoga Hospital takes a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to addressing mental health issues in the community.

In 2023, we accomplished the following toward improving well-being and mental health:

- Embedded Behavioral Health providers (Psychology and Social Work) within some of our outpatient practices
- Embedded Mental Health Crisis Nurse or Social Worker in the emergency department
- SHMG outpatient offices screened 29,000 patients for depression—10,000 more than in 2022.
- There have been 946 referrals from SHMG offices to Concert Health for telehealth mental health counseling.
- Held monthly meetings of the Behavioral Health Committee (Social Workers/Care Managers/Discharge Planners) in which we combine efforts with outside agencies and providers to foster working relationships with community providers and services such as Shelters of Saratoga, Code Blue, Crisis Residence, Rise Housing Services, Partial Hospitalization, and Intensive Outpatient Programs, as well as local substance abuse resources.
- The Saratoga County Communities of Excellence Coalition led by Saratoga Hospital and key community partners, established a priority to support Saratoga County School districts in identifying mental health needs and resource needs among students. Pilot projects are underway for the Corinth and Shenendehowa school districts with the goal of developing a navigation algorithm from school screening to a treatment provider efficiently.

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