

### The Importance of Housing for Health

Housing is a critical determinant of health. The availability of high quality, secure housing is a basic need that, if not met, will limit the ability to improve the health of an individual. The consequence of insecure housing is an overreliance on emergency medical and social services such as high emergency department utilization, a high number of 9-1-1 calls, and a higher risk for inpatient services.

Jefferson County is in the midst of a housing crisis; with Port Townsend becoming an increasingly popular retirement community, working families are unable to find even rentals in the area that are affordable. The shortage of low-income housing is also a huge problem in Jefferson County. According to the Peninsula Housing Authority, only 20% of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 rental vouchers that are available to Jefferson County households are currently being used, due to the shortage of units available at HUD's Fair Market rents.

### The Healthcare Cost of Housing Vulnerability

There are significant financial implications in the health care system associated with providing stable and safe housing to high utilizers. A Massachusetts pilot program, *Home and Healthy for Good*, provided permanent supportive housing to 766 individuals. Prior to being housed, the annual cost per person was over \$33,000. After one year in the program the average cost per person was \$8,600. The *Home and Health for Good Program* cost approximately \$15,000 per individual, leading to a savings of over \$9,000 per participant. Once hospital systems move fully to value-based care and onward to capitation, these savings are significant and will be main drivers of engagement in social determinant of health interventions.

### The Role of Jefferson Healthcare

In 2017, Jefferson Healthcare received a small grant from the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) through the population health flex fund to explore the role of hospitals in housing. From this initial work, additional grant funding was awarded to JH and a housing pilot program began in 2018. Partnering with the Olympic Community Action Program (OlyCAP), Jefferson Healthcare has subsidized one of the low-income housing units in Port Townsend that was set to close due to a lack of funding. Vulnerable patients of Jefferson Healthcare have been moved into the complex and are being supported through wraparound case management by the hospital, OlyCAP, and other community agencies such as the local mental health and substance use providers.

### Future Benefits

This opportunity was pursued as a pilot project that aimed to keep low-income housing in our community while allowing JH to refer patients who are high utilizers of our emergency room and inpatient services to housing resources.

We anticipate a number of health and financial benefits associated with this pilot program.

- Reduction in number of Emergency Department visits
- Reduction in inpatient stays and readmissions
- Increased penetration of mental and social health services for housing vulnerable patients
- Increased utilization of preventative care

Understanding the financial impact of this program and modeling that impact for future value-based contracts will be a critical component of this work.

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