

Pocatello Free Clinic - Impact of Psychiatry

The Pocatello Free Clinic (PFC) is committed to closing the healthcare gap in southeast Idaho. It is an important component of the local safety net as it is the only free clinic serving a 5-county region in the area which has been operating for over 53 years. PFC serves as a permanent medical home to uninsured individuals living below 300% of the federal poverty level who do not qualify for Medicaid for reasons other than income or have an income too high to qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford other types of medical insurance, as well as a temporary medical home to individuals undergoing a mental health or substance abuse crisis, individuals on probation and parole, residents of the local homeless shelters, until they can be connected with the appropriate level of care. All services provided are free of cost to its patients, including prescriptions which are filled at the dispensary on site or made accessible to patients through a local pharmacy using a voucher system.

PFC operates in a mental health provider shortage area and serves a population with high prevalence of mental health conditions. In 2023, 30.9% of PFC patients had a confirmed mental health diagnosis and due to the increased prevalence of these disorders, PFC uses a behavioral health integration into primary care approach. Patients coming for primary care visits are screened for mental health symptoms, and a primary care provider on staff leads the management of patients with mental health symptoms, providing additional assessment and management, and coordinating behavioral health and psychiatry referrals as needed. Primary care services are provided by one of three part-time primary care practitioners in staff, family medicine residents or volunteer providers, behavioral health services are provided by a part-time counselor on staff or graduate social work students from Idaho State University under faculty supervision.

Thanks to the generous support of our funders, PFC has expanded its services to include dedicated psychiatry services by resident psychiatrists from University of Utah Health for our patients, marking a significant milestone in our commitment to comprehensive healthcare provision. While our primary care providers possess invaluable skills and training in addressing mental health disorders, the addition of psychiatry services has enabled us to offer specialized care for more complex conditions. This integration has proven instrumental in ensuring that patients receive tailored treatment approaches that align with their unique needs.

The collaboration between our primary care providers and psychiatrists has been transformative, fostering a dynamic exchange of expertise and resources. Our primary care team expresses profound gratitude for the invaluable partnership and support provided by our psychiatrists, who serve not only as trusted colleagues but also as crucial referral sources for cases requiring specialized psychiatric intervention. Together, we strive to ensure that every patient receives the comprehensive and compassionate care they deserve, promoting holistic well-being within our community.

Accessing psychiatric care remains a significant challenge for many individuals in our community regardless of insurance status, compounded not only by the shortage of providers but also by the prohibitive costs associated with such services. For example, the prevailing costs of psychiatric assessments at Health West, our local Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), where an initial assessment is priced at \$400, with follow-up visits costing \$370 each. This information serves as a reference point for understanding the financial implications patients may encounter when seeking

mental health care. In the period spanning July 2023 to March 2024, the psychiatric residents at PFC diligently carried out a total of 62 initial assessments (equating to \$24,800 based on the \$400 fee) and 80 follow-up visits (amounting to \$29,600 based on the \$370 fee). These numbers reflect the estimated cost of services rendered, totaling \$54,400 over a nine-month period. This data highlights the considerable value provided by our psychiatric residents in delivering accessible and affordable mental health care to our patient community.

The integration of psychiatric services at our free clinic has been instrumental in advancing our mission of providing holistic care to our patients. By addressing the often-overlooked mental health needs within our community, we have taken significant strides towards fulfilling our commitment to comprehensive healthcare provision. The addition of psychiatric services not only underscores our dedication to addressing the entirety of our patients' well-being but also reflects our unwavering belief in equitable access to quality healthcare for all.

We are immensely grateful for the generous support and funding that have enabled us to realize this vision. Without this support, our efforts to expand our services and meet the evolving needs of our patient community would not have been possible. The impact of this support extends far beyond the walls of our clinic, reaching individuals and families who rely on us for compassionate and comprehensive care.

As we reflect on the journey thus far, we remain steadfast in our dedication to serving our community with empathy, dignity, and respect. With continued support, we are confident in our ability to further enhance our services, break down barriers to care, and empower individuals to lead healthier and more fulfilling lives. Together, we are making a tangible difference in the lives of those we serve, and for that, we are profoundly grateful.