



## Neighborcare Health Mobile COVID-19 Assessment and Testing (CAT)

### Situation

The Mobile COVID Assessment and Testing (CAT) Team at [Neighborcare Health](#), Seattle's largest Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) or community health center, is a new team created to combat COVID-19 in our most vulnerable patient populations who live outside and in congregate settings with shared spaces. The mobile team, consists of registered nurses, health care providers (doctors and nurse practitioners), and support staff. The team travels to different locations throughout Seattle (shelters, encampments, permanent supportive housing buildings, drop-in centers, etc.) to offer COVID-19 testing on site and coordinate with Public Health – Seattle & King County's Isolation and Quarantine (I&Q) Units for symptomatic and/or COVID-positive patients who are unable to self-isolate.

### Background

Neighborcare Health's Homeless & Housing Programs provide health care via alternative models and within nontraditional locations to reach currently or formerly homeless individuals and those not ready to engage with a traditional primary care clinic. Aligned with Neighborcare's overall [mission and values](#), we aim to provide our clients with quality, patient-centered health engagement and care in order to improve health and/or relieve suffering. We are the health partner of choice for two evidence-based interventions in Seattle that directly or indirectly address the homelessness crisis: Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD). Our clinics are embedded within housing and shelter and/or co-located with other social service providers and don't feel like traditional clinical settings, while continuing to provide high quality clinical care.

We provide services in 17 housing and outreach locations throughout Seattle in addition to operating 5 clinic settings. Exemplifying our core values of social justice, harm reduction, and trauma informed care in every interaction, we partner with our patients to build relationships, increase trust, and reduce suffering. Through that work we build a bridge for vulnerable people to feel safe in receiving health care, often on their terms and on their turf. Our patients describe the environment of our spaces and the clinical care they receive as "a breath of fresh air."

### COVID-19 Assessment and Testing

The residents at our Housing and Street Outreach partner sites (not always Neighborcare patients) are placed in these housing units because of recent or long-term homelessness combined with health complexities and multiple chronic conditions, putting them at high risk for severe complications if infected with COVID-19. The congregate settings of these sites also make it difficult for people to self-isolate to slow the spread of COVID-19.

In these settings, Neighborcare deems it medically necessary to test as many people as we can—with or without symptoms — to identify individuals who have the virus so they can receive medical care and the support they need to protect the entire community from a larger outbreak. It is also important to anticipate a possible need to return and retest people at the sites based on positive cases as well as specific population health needs and patterns identified in these vulnerable communities. As positive cases are identified, the CAT team works with both Public Health I&Q and the housing site leader when appropriate to assist the patient with a safe place to self-isolate.

In addition to proactive and responsive testing in these settings with our current partners, we are also partnering with Public Health, Seattle Housing Authority, and community service organizations to respond to early data suggesting a growing racial and ethnic disparity in testing access and care. We are expanding our mobile testing team capacity by pivoting primary medical clinic staff to support mobile testing efforts. Cross-training our teams that



are accustomed to working in more traditional clinical spaces allows us to expand the program and create additional partnerships with organizations to expand our reach in addressing COVID-19 among vulnerable populations.

### **Recommendation**

Universal testing is the best approach to combat COVID-19 in congregate settings within vulnerable patient populations, including homeless encampments, shelters, permanent supportive housing communities, and other vulnerable communities requiring targeted outreach.

Community health centers (CHCs) can adopt a similar model to target COVID-19 testing and prevention strategies in the communities they serve by leveraging existing partnerships with organizations who have presence in these communities. If provider resources are available, CHCs have the opportunity to capture revenue by leveraging provider time to conduct a general assessment before testing for COVID-19.