



Western North Carolina Community Health Services

WNCCHS HISTORY

Western North Carolina Community Health Services, Inc. (WNCCHS) is a private, non-profit, tax-exempt corporation based in Asheville, Buncombe County, North Carolina.

During the last decade of the 20th century, Buncombe County experienced significant growth. The decade was also marked by explosive growth in health care costs. These trends were accompanied by sustained increases in the number of uninsured persons, placing the local health care safety net under unrelenting strain. This combination of factors made clear our community needed additional financial resources—particularly for preventive and primary health care.

In late 1993, a group of community activists, led by Carlos Gomez, Minnie Jones, and Dr. Polly Ross, formed a non-governmental organization (NGO) that met the definition of a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC).

The idea was to leverage local resources with those provided by the Federal government to FQHCs.

The process to FQHC status was long and hard. The timeline below provides a summary of our history through major milestones.

December of 1993: Obtained non-profit corporation status in North Carolina.

February of 1994: Obtained tax-exempt recognition from the Internal Revenue Service

April of 1994: Opened the Kenilworth Wellness Center (a day health program for persons with AIDS) at the Kenilworth Presbyterian Church, Asheville, NC.

March of 1995: Received funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), through Part C (then Title III-b) of the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Treatment Modernization Act (then Ryan White Care Act), to provide comprehensive HIV medical care to persons living in the seventeen westernmost counties of NC. We hired the first paid staff. We served approximately 200 unduplicated patients by the end of the year.

April of 1996: Opened the Minnie Jones Family Health Center in the Pisgah View Apartments—Buncombe County's largest public housing development. We served approximately 400 unduplicated patients by the end of the year.

November of 1998: Inaugurated the Ridgelawn Health Center, a newly built, 4,000 square feet clinic in West Asheville. We opened our services to all persons—regardless of diagnosis. We served approximately 1,000 unduplicated patients by the end of the year.

November of 2002: Obtained designation as a Federally Qualified Health Center Look-Alike. We served approximately 2,000 unduplicated patients by the end of the year.

September of 2007: Obtained Section 330 (Community Health Center) funding from HRSA's Bureau of Primary Health Care. We served approximately 4,000 unduplicated patients by the end of the year.

January of 2010: Entered into a partnership with Buncombe County government to provide comprehensive primary health care to low-income County residents. By December 2010, we will provide medical, dental, and behavioral health care to more than 18,000 County residents.



United Way of Asheville
and Buncombe County



Western North Carolina Community Health Services

Vision

To create an ambulatory health system based on the principals of human rights and social enterprise.

Mission

To improve the health of our patients by providing affordable and sustainable primary health care.

Values

Health Equity means we strive for the “highest attainable level of physical and mental health” for all our patients; making special efforts to equalize access and outcomes for those who are most disadvantaged.

Social Solidarity means we embrace human diversity while striving for community cohesion. It also means we work systematically to lessen financial hardships for our patients—especially those who are most disadvantaged.

Personal Responsibility means we believe patients and/or their caregivers must be our full partners through informed decision-making, adopting behaviors that reduce harm and promote health, and by contributing their fair share to the cost of care.

The key principals of health care as a human right are listed below.

- 1) The right to health does not mean a right to be healthy—which among other factors depends on genetics, individual susceptibility to illness, and adoption of risky/unhealthy lifestyles. The right to health does mean the creation of conditions which assure to all members of the community medical service and medical attention in the event of illness. The human right to health and health care is established and defined in the following international documents: Universal Declaration of Human Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health.
- 2) The right to health has four essential elements: availability, accessibility, quality, acceptability. These four essential elements are the standards by which we evaluate our work.
- 3) The right to health is subject to progressive realization. Achieving the right to health requires commitment of significant financial resources that may not be available to the same degree in all circumstances. Realization of the right to health also requires maximum community participation and individual self-reliance; making fullest use of individual and institutional resources at the local and national levels.

The key principals of a social enterprise are listed below.

- 1) A social enterprise is the result of collective dynamics involving people belonging to a community or group that share the same vision, mission, and values.
- 2) A social enterprise is created voluntarily by community members and is managed by them—and not directly or indirectly by public authorities or private companies. The financial viability of a social enterprise depends on the efforts of its members.
- 3) A social enterprise promotes a sense of social responsibility at the local level. It involves the users of the goods and services it produces in its decision-making structures. Moreover, a social enterprise serves as a vehicle of social inclusion, ensuring that traditionally marginalized populations participate in all the benefits of the enterprise.