

Addressing Stigma in SUD at Father Joe's Villages - Village Health Center

San Diego, CA

We have taken a proactive approach to addressing Stigma in SUD here at Father Joe's Villages by reducing barriers to services for our neighbors experiencing homelessness. It is important to provide some background about the population we serve and the services we provide. Father Joe's Villages is one of Southern California's largest homeless service agencies. Our campus includes emergency shelter and transitional housing for women and children, families, people living with HIV/AIDS and other chronic conditions. We provide an array of services to our shelter residents and community members who are still experiencing street homelessness that are living within and around the Village Campus. Our "one stop shop" includes an adult day center, education and employment services, daily lunch line, licensed therapeutic childcare, and onsite Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC), the Village Health Center (VHC). The VHC provides Primary Care, Dental, Psychiatric, and Behavioral Health services including Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT), outpatient mental health and SUD treatment, individual and group therapy. Our MAT program began in 2018 and since then we have fully integrated the medical team and the AOD counseling team.

Action steps we have taken to address Stigma in SUD:

- We practice our organization's CREED – treating all people with Compassion, Respect, Empathy, Empowerment and Dignity!
- We use person-first language and avoid terms labels or negative terms. We acknowledge the injury caused by stigma and avoid stigmatizing language by creating a culture of acceptance and support.
- Aware of the injustices and health care disparities within our population. We practice trauma informed care.
- We created a welcoming environment by practicing warm hand-offs between providers and counselors.
- We trained front line staff, registration, and medical staff about harm reduction and SUD.
- We trained counselors to work with MAT clients towards recovery goals that did not focus on the "abstinence-only" model of recovery.
- We combined educational and interpersonal groups for MAT and non-MAT clients normalizing the experience of recovery.
- We implemented incentives to engage clients, such as medication lock boxes, snacks, etc. We are working presently on obtaining grants for Contingency Management resources to further enhance client motivation.
- We have multidisciplinary, integrated meetings biweekly that include Providers, Medical Assistants, Counselors, Triage nurses and other clinic team members to discuss individual patients, especially those who are high-risk.
- We have set strategic goals to connect MAT and SUD clients to other services in the clinic.
- Our Street Health team includes an AOD Counselor who provides education and resources for harm reduction (e.g. Narcan, sharps boxes, hard reduction kits, etc.) while building rapport and providing care on the street.