



### Community Health Center in Southwest Ohio Pivots Quickly to Serve Families during the Covid-19 Pandemic

July 30, 2020

#### Meet Dr. Jennifer Feldman...



Dr. Feldman, a pediatrician, is the Medical Director for Centerpoint Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center in Southwest Ohio that serves both urban and rural populations.



At the beginning of Ohio's Stay-At-Home order, the Center quickly initiated telehealth, realizing its benefit for keeping in touch with families sheltering at home. There have been some issues with patients who live in areas who do not have adequate broadband internet or access to a computer. Despite these issues, telehealth has benefited families by removing barriers to care such as transportation. Further, telehealth has enabled Centerpoint to maintain capacity at 60-70% of its pre-COVID patient level across its adult and child populations.

Despite the center's drop in services, the center maintained much of its staff capacity. The center paused regular dental services during the "Stay at Home" order, except in cases of emergency. As result, some dental staff were furloughed for a period of time and have since returned to work.

**Hamilton County saw a 49.5% drop in immunizations.\***

Jan.-May 2019- 416 immunizations

Jan.-May 2020- 210 immunizations

*\*Data provided by Hamilton County Health Department*

#### Children's well-care

The first COVID-related adjustments Centerpoint made were to separate well-child visits in the morning and sick visits in the afternoon. The health center never stopped immunizations, although some families were unwilling to come in due to fear of exposing their children to the virus. Centerpoint postponed the well-child visits for older adolescents who didn't require immunizations, and just restarted them on June 1st. However, Centerpoint continues the practice of separating well visits from sick visits.

Now that many of the stay-at-home restrictions have been lifted, clinic staff have begun to reach out to patients who didn't show up for visits or whose appointments were cancelled, reassuring them it is safe bringing their child into the clinic. Centerpoint is making a concerted effort to let parents know about the recommendations of the American Academy of Pediatrics regarding immunizations and the importance of well-child visits. Dr. Feldman indicated that she felt it would be very helpful if the state would do more to keep reminding families of the importance of bringing children in for well-child care.



## Behavioral Health

Butler County has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. In 2019, 166 people died from a drug overdose, the sixth highest rate in the State. Historically, Butler County has the third highest rate of unintentional drug overdose deaths over the last five years. Often, when parents suffer from substance use disorders, grandparents and other family members will care for their kin. In Warren and Butler counties, over 5,500 grandparents are raising grandchildren.<sup>1</sup> Centerpoint provides behavioral health services, which helps parents struggling with substance use disorders. Currently, services are provided via telehealth. Dr. Feldman has noticed a drop in the number of patients and attributes that to difficulty some patients have with accessing a computer or internet. They offer both a video and phone option and have never stopped services.

Where a person lives determines access to healthcare, technology, internet access, and transportation. For the children and families Dr. Feldman and Centerpoint support in southwestern Ohio, as well as families across the state, the following are recommendations to ensure all families have access to healthcare during the pandemic and beyond.

## Recommendations

**Make the telemedicine expansion permanent.** Telemedicine helps address the issues of transportation and access to populations in underserved areas. Further, telemedicine should also be expanded to allow reimbursement for certain aspects of well-child visits, consistent with the recommendations and guidance of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

**Expand outreach programs by pediatricians and other health professionals.** We need to extend the types of settings where they can see parents and children to remove barriers to access. We should further support parents by letting them know it's safe for them to schedule well-child visits and the importance of keeping up with scheduled immunizations.

**Protect Ohio Medicaid.** As people are losing their employment and their private insurance, Medicaid will necessarily become their lifeline to healthcare. It's important that Ohioans have access to quality healthcare during the pandemic and as Ohio moves to economic recovery.

**Fund greater broadband connectivity in underserved areas.** Legislation such as [HB 13](#) and [HB 190](#) would create grant programs and opportunities to bring broadband into some underserved areas in Ohio. According to a study conducted by the Buckeye Hills Regional Council, it will cost nearly \$2 billion to provide last mile connectivity in rural areas of the state. In short, much more must be done so that the region can realize the full potential that telehealth offers in healthcare shortage areas.

## Additional Resources

[Ohio AAP COVID-19 Family Resource Guide](#)

[#SafePedsHealthyKids Toolkit](#) by the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics & GroundworkOhio

**For more information**, please contact Kelly Vyzral, Senior Health Policy Associate at [kvyzral@childrensdefense.org](mailto:kvyzral@childrensdefense.org) or visit [www.cdfohio.org](http://www.cdfohio.org)



<sup>1</sup> Public Children's Services Association of Ohio 2018 County Factbook: <https://www.pcsao.org/factbook>