

the public in how they operate and what is defined as healthcare.

Seeking a New Paradigm for Healthcare Districts

Mindful of the increasing political scrutiny and controversy regarding some of its member districts, the Association of California Healthcare Districts in 2016 engaged a

24-member expert task force to review how districts are perceived, where they are headed and how they might reposition themselves more effectively within a rapidly-changing healthcare environment that emphasizes preventive care. The task force approved four strategic recommendations on October 5, 2016, which ACHD shared with the Commission and others at the November 2016 advisory committee meeting. Those included:

- Updating the 1945 healthcare district enabling act and adding intent language to define today's

Beach Cities: Is This a Future of Healthcare Districts?

The Beach Cities Health District, which serves residents of Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach and Redondo Beach, offers one hint of how districts might retool themselves. The district, established in 1955, has no hospital and calls itself “one of the largest preventive health agencies in the nation.” The district encourages and helps children walk to school, eat right and lose weight, provides relatively-low cost memberships at a district fitness center and helps older people remain living at home through personal visits and in-home care. The district’s innovative Blue Zones Project branding effort also encourages healthy habits at home and work and promotes local restaurants that offer nutritious menus. The district, which receives 73 percent of its revenue from fees and other sources beyond its \$3.1 million annual property tax base (2016), also makes grants to community partners.

Asked if critics who support closing districts without hospitals may be thinking narrowly and not understand shifts in healthcare, Dr. Michelle Bholat answered, “Yes.” In written comments provided to the Commission in November 2016, Dr. Bholat explained, “Beach Cities Health District successfully transitioned in 1998 from disease-focused care to preventive care health services – largely because research from the Centers for Disease Control shows 70 percent of chronic illnesses are preventable, and healthcare cost savings associated with keeping people healthy and out of hospitals are substantial. Currently, the U.S. spends roughly \$3 trillion annually on healthcare costs.”

The district counts a major success in reducing childhood obesity in Redondo Beach K-5 students from 20 percent of children in 2004 to 7 percent in 2016 by working closely with the district’s 21 public schools and parents. Parents attend district training and teach nutrition in schools, said Dr. Bholat. The district identifies gaps in Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Department services, uses science and data to target specific community needs and measures program impacts with data collection and analysis, she said.

Beach Cities, often considered a model for transitioning California healthcare districts to preventive care, operates a Community Services Department which connects children and underinsured adults to medical, dental and mental health services; a LiveWell Kids program that provides elementary school students with daily physical education, nutritional and gardening information and fresh fruits and vegetables; and a Center for Health and Fitness with 3,000 members and free visits for police officers, firefighters and lifeguards. Their Community Services Department also works with nearly 20 percent of residents 85 and older to stay healthy at home.

In June 2016, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy visited the district, and told representatives, “We tend to believe that America’s health problems are too big and intractable. You have proven that communities can take charge and reverse the trend.”

Sources: Beach Cities Healthcare District. “BCHD Overview.” <http://bchd.org/bchd-centers-programs/center-health-and-fitness>. Accessed July 22, 2016. Dr. Michelle Bholat. Board Member. Beach Cities Health District. November 8, 2016. Written comments to the Commission. On file. Personal conversation with Beach Cities Health District officials on December 7, 2016 and July 21, 2017.

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