

## The Doorway at Cheshire Medical Center Leads to Healing



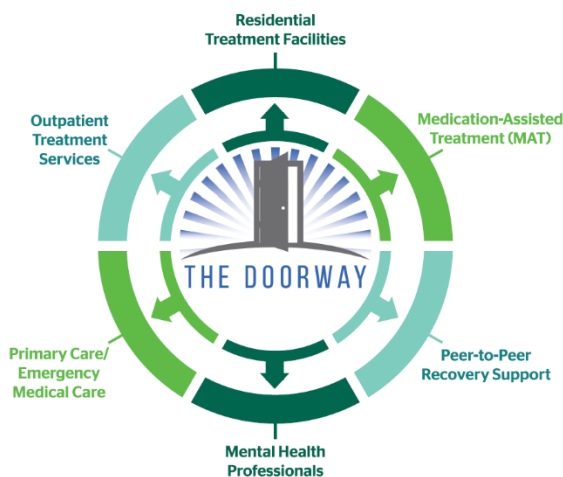
Cheshire Medical Center

New Hampshire posted the third-highest rate of opioid overdose deaths in the nation in 2018. The drug death rate in Cheshire County ranked second among the state's 10 counties, according to the New Hampshire Drug Monitoring Initiative. It was a crisis for families in many rural towns in the area and very difficult to find access to treatment even when a person was motivated to seek help.

Cheshire Medical Center, Keene, NH is a 94-bed rural hospital and a member of the Dartmouth Health System. As the county's only hospital, Cheshire Medical Center saw 214 patients in its emergency department (ED) with a primary diagnosis of substance-use disorder (SUD) that year. To improve those numbers and save lives, the hospital started The Doorway at Cheshire Medical Center in 2019.

Its goals are to:

- Be the place in southwestern New Hampshire that is always available to those seeking help or information involving SUD, for oneself or a loved one.
- Provide screening and evaluation, treatment and peer-recovery support services.
- Offer prevention resources and supportive services to assist in long-term recovery.
- Advocate for treatment and services for people with SUD, and be an instrument of change in the treatment of SUD and mental health services in general.



Before it was launched, The Doorway “convened treatment providers, public safety officials, human services agencies and other stakeholders to guide development of this new program” said Shawn LaFrance, Cheshire Medical Center’s vice president for population health. “We wanted people with knowledge and experience in the community to help design our new services to fill in gaps and link with current resources”.

The Doorway uses evidence-based assessment tools to refer clients to the appropriate service(s) in the community. As a central connection point between multiple SUD treatment resources, The

Doorway serves as a “hub” connecting to a series of “spokes.” The “spokes” represent a range of treatment and support entities.

The Doorway staff go to the ED or hospital inpatient units to meet with patients interested in SUD treatment. The Doorway can initiate patients' registrations and schedule their American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM) assessments before discharge, and staff will provide rides from the ED to The Doorway office.

The Doorway staff also will provide information and support to someone who isn't ready to seek admission into treatment, or someone discharged early from treatment for not upholding treatment program requirements. Staffers will meet with family or friends of a person with an SUD who seek information on how to help their loved one enter or re-enter a treatment program.

A new patient who is homeless will have a place to stay through a contract with a nearby shelter.

The Doorway provides a 24-hour hotline that allows callers to reach a clinician who can perform assessments over the phone.

The program serves anyone 16 years or older with an SUD, including those involving alcohol, regardless of a person's income, insurance status, place of residence or citizenship.

"Our patient volume has increased steadily throughout the pandemic as people find maladaptive ways to cope with stress," said Nelson Hayden, director of The Doorway. "People isolate, and it fuels their substance use because they are not having interaction with others."

A mix of contracts, grants and insurance reimbursement financially supports the program. There is funding from federal, state and county resources; private resources; and Medicaid and commercial insurance reimbursement. Attracting patients who have commercial insurance is an important part of the program's sustainability strategy.

The Doorway has made a significant impact. In 2018, the year before it opened, Cheshire County's drug death rate was 4.14 per 10,000 persons. Two years later, the rate had dropped to 1.80 drug deaths per 10,000 persons, the second-lowest rate of any New Hampshire county, according to the initiative's 2020 drug death data.

Partners in The Doorway program include Cheshire County government. "We couldn't be more excited about the partnerships we have with The Doorway," said Christopher Coates, the county administrator. "We have helped them with grants. They operate therapeutic counseling services for our drug court. People are being served at a time when they really need support and consistency."

The Doorway is a free service. It is supported by the Center for Population Health (CPH) at Cheshire Medical Center. CPH is focused on health and wellness education, outreach, and support to individuals, families, worksites, schools, and the community. CPH is a partner with the Healthy Monadnock Alliance and plays a leading role in the Greater Monadnock Public Health Network.

For more information contact:

Shawn V. LaFrance, MSUP, MPH  
Vice President, Population Health & Health System Integration  
Dartmouth Health Cheshire Medical Center  
Keene, NH  
603.848.7754  
[slafrance@cheshire-med.com](mailto:slafrance@cheshire-med.com)



**Rural Health Services**

Copyright © AHA 2023