

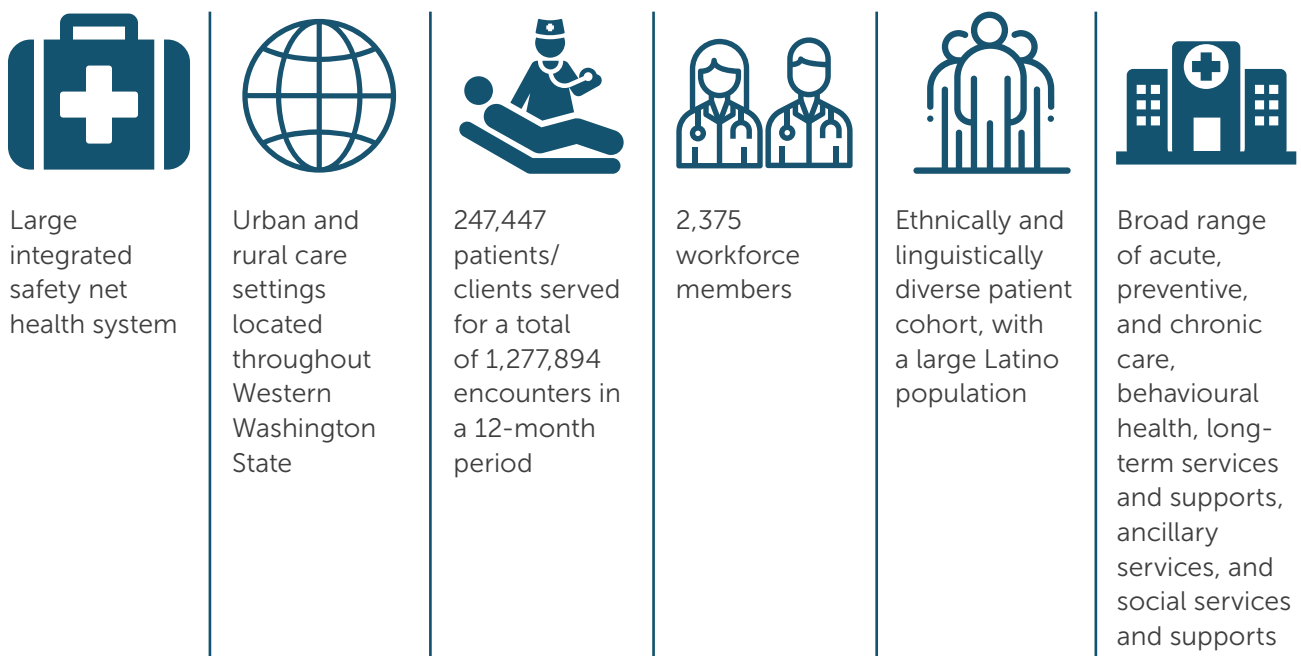
# Sea Mar Community Health Centers, Washington State, United States

## Overview of the organisation

Sea Mar Community Health Center (Sea Mar) is a large integrated community-based health system in Washington State (US). Sea Mar includes more than 90 medical, dental, behavioural health clinics, inpatient substance abuse treatment centres, skilled nursing and long-term care facilities. Sea Mar also provides a range of social and educational services, and affordable housing to the communities it serves.

Sea Mar is a Federally Qualified Health Center, which is a community-based health care organisation charged with providing health care and social services to underserved populations, including those who are homeless.<sup>46</sup> Sea Mar is accredited by the Joint Commission and has received the Gold Seal of Approval, demonstrating its delivery of safe and high-quality care.

Figure 1: About Sea Mar Community Health Center



## Person-centred care at Sea Mar

Sea Mar was founded on the principles of social justice and a mission to meet the unmet needs within the community. Sea Mar strives to always put the patient first and to understand the communities where they provide services.

Most of Sea Mar's medical clinics are Patient-Centred Medical Homes (PCMHs) recognised by the National Committee for Quality Assurance. PCMHs are a model of care that puts the patient first and uses team-based care, data and information to deliver evidence-based care to patients, and care management and coordination to ensure that patients receive the right care at the right time. The model is supported through continuous quality improvement, including focusing on creating a positive patient experience.

While Sea Mar is a national leader in providing high-quality, integrated, person-centred care, they do face certain barriers. These include:

- Continuing to provide quality, person-centred care when the organisation is rapidly expanding to meet significantly increased patient demand from the expansion of health insurance coverage under federal law
- Providing truly integrated, person-centred care when funding is fragmented and comes with limitations and restrictions
- Availability of appropriately trained professionals, in particular nurses and bi-lingual/bi-cultural professionals
- Educating and informing a highly diverse patient population so that they can be active participants in care, rather than passive recipients
- Responding to external mandates that do not necessarily align with patients' needs and expectations.

Sea Mar is a solution-driven organisation. They do not see barriers as reasons not to do something; instead barriers are seen as an opportunity to think creatively. In the coming years, Sea Mar will focus on behavioural health integration into primary care, further integrate continuous quality improvement into the operations of the company, and continue to strengthen and refine its services and programs.

## Key features of person-centred care

Sea Mar has many attributes that support the delivery of high-quality, person-centred care. This case study is not intended to be a comprehensive account of all of these attributes. Rather, it seeks to highlight some key examples from which other health services may learn.

### Sea Mar strives to assure a positive patient experience

A core value of Sea Mar is that everyone deserves to be respectfully treated in a way that preserves dignity and enhances self-worth. One way in which Sea Mar strives to fulfil this value is through assuring a positive patient experience for every person, every time.

In 2015, Sea Mar embarked on a campaign, Improving the Patient and Employee Experience, to provide employees with the tools they need to provide exceptional service and to improve the patient experience. Sea Mar's goal is to have 100 per cent of patients rate their experience as Excellent. This is a multi-year process that includes many components (see **Table 1**).



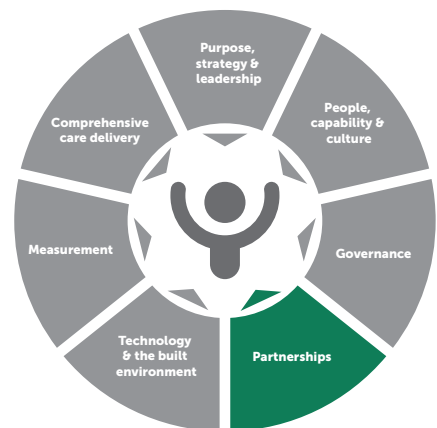
**Table 1: Components of the Improving the Patient and Employee Experience campaign**

<p><b>Leadership</b></p>	<p>Established the Improving Patient and Employee Experience Committee, which consists of patient experience professionals and serves as a patient experience advisory resource for Sea Mar initiatives.</p>
<p><b>Employee Engagement</b></p>	<p>Conducted a survey to learn from employees what tools they need to provide exceptional service. The survey led to implementation of key initiatives including: AIDET Customer Service training, changes to the new employee orientation, new employee recognition programs for exceptional customer service, and continued focus groups to learn from employees how to improve the patient and employee experience.</p>
<p><b>Patient Engagement</b></p>	<p>Using a standardised, validated patient satisfaction and experience survey,<sup>47</sup> Sea Mar measures the patient satisfaction and experience of care directly with patient feedback. Sea Mar also conducts patient focus groups to learn how to continuously improve the patient experience. Additionally, Sea Mar has introduced new technology and processes to ease access to care, increase patient participation, and improve patient/provider communication.</p>
<p><b>Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)</b></p>	<p>Using the data obtained from the patient satisfaction and experience survey, Sea Mar uses CQI processes to identify areas in need of improvement and initiatives that could lead to improvement.</p>

**Sea Mar is deeply integrated with the community**

Sea Mar was founded in 1978 by a group of Latino community leaders. This connection to the community has not been lost over time, but, instead has strengthened and incorporated more communities and cultures. Sea Mar works in partnership with communities to identify needs and find creative ways to address those needs. Sea Mar takes several approaches to remain connected with the communities:

- Employing professionals and staff directly from the communities where clinics and other care settings are located**  
 Sea Mar employs bi-lingual/bi-cultural staff whenever feasible. Staff and providers who look like, speak the same language, and understand and respect the culture of the populations, are better able to engage patients in care, especially those who are not typically accepting of modern medicine.



- **Conducting community focus groups to hear directly from the communities about what needs the community has and how they think Sea Mar can help meet those needs**  
For example, a recent focus group found that the community would benefit from an adolescent health clinic.
- **Use of data to identify needs within the community**  
For example, Sea Mar providers found that when they referred patients to specialists, the patients were often not able to get appointments. When patients were able to see the specialist, the specialist did not often share the information with the provider at Sea Mar. These incomplete referrals and lack of information sharing led Sea Mar to develop its own multi-speciality clinic so that specialists work within the Sea Mar system.

This close connection to the community allows Sea Mar to provide innovative, community-focused programs and initiatives (see Table 2).

**“We’re about empowering underserved communities”**  
Senior Vice President

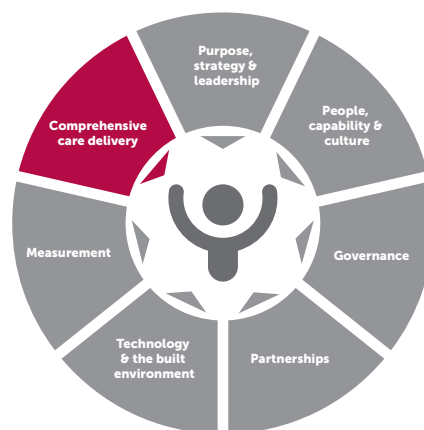
**Table 2: Sea Mar’s Innovative Community Programs and Services**

<b>Affordable Housing</b>	Understanding the ‘housing first’ principle <sup>48</sup> , Sea Mar has responded to the affordable housing crisis by developing affordable housing in three of the communities it serves.
<b>Sea Mar Radio</b>	A live radio program that is intended to help listeners achieve a better quality of life. The program includes topics on health education and prevention, community affairs and challenges, and other useful information intended to inform the listener.
<b>Sea Mar Community Center and Latino Cultural Museum</b>	A multi-purpose complex that includes an Education and Community Centre and Latino Cultural Museum. The centre provides meeting and office space, classrooms, art room, and athletic centre, which is home to Sea Mar’s youth boxing program. The Museum tells the story of Latinos in the Pacific Northwest and their unique story of migrating to the region.
<b>Child Development Center</b>	A child care and preschool program, providing a bilingual Spanish/English curriculum for children in the community. Includes an intergenerational program in partnership with Sea Mar’s Community Care Center, where residents of the Community Care Center interact regularly with the children at the Child Development Center, providing social skills and shared experiences for both children and seniors.
<b>Community Care Center</b>	A licensed skilled-nursing facility providing 24-hour supervised nursing care, personal care, therapy, nutrition management, organised activities, social services, room, board, and laundry. Includes a specialised Alzheimer’s Living Center.

## Using team-based care and standardised, synchronised patient flows, Sea Mar provides efficient, person-centred care

A core element of the Patient-Centred Medical Home is a team-based care approach. Through this approach, members of the care team are able to work to the top of their licence, care is more efficient and effective, and the patients' full scope of needs can be addressed. Sea Mar has spent a great deal of time and resources investing in a care team approach.

Of note, Sea Mar has spent the last three years developing a synchronised patient flow that is standardised across Sea Mar's multiple care sites. This allows for patients to be seen quickly (which is a priority of patients), but also to receive comprehensive care. Sea Mar also has introduced many ancillary services into their clinics (labs, X-rays, pharmacy) so that the clinic becomes a one-stop shop for patients. Key features of the synchronised patient flow are outlined in **Table 3**.



**“We try to understand the patient and be a partner with them”**

Physician

Table 3: Key features of team-based care at Sea Mar

<b>The care team</b>	At Sea Mar Seattle Medical Clinic, one of Sea Mar's largest clinics, the care team consists of the Primary Care Provider, two Medical Assistants, Nurse, Care Coordinator or Care Manager, and, if appropriate, a Behavioural Health Integration Specialist. At the centre of the team is the patient.
<b>Gap analysis and care plan</b>	The Medical Assistant runs what is referred to as a gap analysis report for each of the patients that the Primary Care Provider (PCP) is scheduled to see the next day. Through this process, the Medical Assistant identifies all of the patient's outstanding care needs, not just the specific reason the patient is coming in the next day. This could include vaccinations or cancer screening. Using this information, the Medical Assistant develops a care plan for the patient. When the patient arrives the next day, the patient is greeted at the reception desk, undergoes the check-in process, and is given the proposed care plan. The information is provided to the patient in his or her primary language.
<b>Clinic set up and patient flow</b>	The clinic is set up in a way that allows the patient to flow from one area to the next, according to the care plan. For example, if the patient needs lab work, the patient will go first to the lab and then to the exam room. The lab results are shared with the Primary Care Provider in real time using Sea Mar's electronic medical record. When the Primary Care Provider arrives in the room, all of the information the provider needs is in the medical record. The Medical Assistant attends the appointment, so that the PCP can focus on the patient, while the Medical Assistant documents in the medical record.
<b>Care coordinators</b>	Patients also have access to care coordinators, who educate patients about their conditions (for example, diabetes), and help coordinate access to services. Highly complex patients have a care manager who provides assistance with not only medical needs, but also helps to address social determinants of health. Finally, patients with behavioural health needs have access to a Behavioural Health Integration Specialist who works with the patient to address behavioural health needs in the primary care setting.