

HEALTHYLIVING[®]



SHINING BRIGHT

Feli Ramirez lights up the room
with her story of overcoming
multiple myeloma

Eisenhower Mobile Care

Working toward health equity with access to care,
educating physicians

BY STEFANIE GREENBERG · PHOTOS BY ETHAN KAMINSKY



IN A DIMLY LIT PARKING LOT NEAR THE FREEWAY, there is a buzz that isn't quite distinguishable from across the street. There are tables with chairs and there are small groups of men and women — some at the tables and some standing scattered about — bundled in jackets as the temperatures drop in the late days of fall.

On this Tuesday evening in November, Eisenhower Mobile Care was parked in the lot, quietly glowing in the light and welcoming those who arrived along with that night's medical care team.

Launched in February 2024 with the generous support of the Houston Family Foundation and guided by Eisenhower Health's Latinos in Philanthropy Advisory Board, the mobile care unit is dedicated to providing health care to the underserved in the entire Coachella Valley. Its current focus is on addressing the significant needs of the east valley's agricultural community, the unhoused population, and individuals without access to transportation or insurance.



From left: Victor Cisneros, MD, MPH; Rosa Lucas, FNP-C, Coachella Valley Volunteers in Medicine; Brian Wexler, PhD; and Susan Veldey, MSN, RN, CEN

In collaboration with Coachella Valley Volunteers in Medicine (CVVIM) and Eisenhower School of Graduate Medical Education (GME), the mobile care unit represents a key initiative in Eisenhower's commitment to delivering equitable and accessible care to everyone in the Coachella Valley.

Health equity is the principle that everyone deserves a fair and just opportunity to achieve their highest level of health, regardless of their background. Beyond the challenges faced by the area's large geriatric population, farmworkers, LGBTQ+ individuals, and the unhoused community also encounter significant barriers. These not only include limited access to health care, but also critical deficits in key social determinants of health, such as food security, housing stability, transportation, utilities and personal safety.

"At Eisenhower, we've implemented initiatives to address social determinants of health, starting with screening and identifying the prevalence of food insecurity among patients in the emergency department and inpatient settings. We are now expanding these efforts with our mobile care unit to help bridge the transportation gap and bring care directly to communities in need," explains

Victor Cisneros, MD, MPH, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Community Health Outreach for the GME program.

Dr. Cisneros also serves as faculty for the Department of Emergency Medicine at Eisenhower Health and the Medical Education Departments at both the University of California, Riverside School of Medicine, and the California University of Science and Medicine.

In collaboration with partners such as CVVIM, F10 Love, Bridges of Hope, Overflow 9:12, and FIND Food Bank, the mobile unit provides health care screenings and hosts educational events within the community. Each Tuesday night, the unit travels directly to areas where people in need eagerly await its arrival.

As part of Eisenhower Health's GME program, resident physicians in family medicine, internal medicine, and emergency medicine participate in a dedicated street medicine rotation. They are joined by a multidisciplinary team that includes undergraduate and medical students, nursing students, nurses, attending physicians, and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), working together to deliver care and support to underserved populations.



Street medicine health care professionals, including physicians, residents and interdisciplinary team members, stand outside the Eisenhower Mobile Care unit during a community outreach event on a fall evening, highlighting their commitment to providing care to vulnerable communities.

The street medicine program initially began with a small group of dedicated individuals, including Brian Wexler, PhD, a licensed clinical psychologist at Eisenhower Health, and Rosa Lucas, FNP-C, both team leaders with the CVVIM Outreach Team. In 2015, Dr. Wexler was invited to join the Eisenhower Health Family Medicine Residency Program as faculty, where he worked to integrate street medicine outreach as part of the curriculum.

Dr. Wexler remains an active supporter of the program, which, on that particular night, marked its 434th Tuesday providing care and support to the community.

“We realized that in creating the street medicine outreach team, we needed a multi-disciplinary approach,” Wexler says.

Eisenhower faculty and residents, staff and volunteers at CVVIM — including the support of Executive Director Doug Morin, and volunteers from numerous disciplines are able to gain a unique experience in providing care to the unhoused, he explains.

“It’s such a unique part of their education,” Wexler says. “Many have never worked outside a clinic environment. It’s important to realize that when you’re out in the street, it is critical to be respectful and compassionate. The unhoused are one of the most

marginalized groups of people in our society and they deserve as much respect and care as anyone else.”

When Dr. Cisneros joined Eisenhower, he was tasked with improving the street medicine curriculum and broached the idea of improving the experience for both medical residents and patients through a mobile care unit that would provide privacy and technology similar to what those would experience in a clinic or hospital. Thus, the work began of the mobile unit and the eventual tie-in of additional hands-on experience in the GME program or for those interested in pursuing a career in medicine.

“We bring care directly to vulnerable populations, addressing not only their health care needs but also providing educational resources and tackling substance use disorders, including the opioid epidemic,” explains Dr. Cisneros.

For many individuals in the unhoused population, pets are a vital part of their lives. The distribution of Narcan through the program has saved the lives of both humans and their pets over the past year.

“We’ve encountered patients with complex needs, such as a pregnant woman who lacked access to essential resources,” explains

Dr. Cisneros. "She had no access to OB-GYN care, so we started her on prenatal vitamins, performed a bedside ultrasound to ensure her baby was healthy, and connected her with community partners offering OB-GYN continuity of care. This simple intervention profoundly impacted her health and well-being."

Dr. Cisneros emphasizes the unique advantage of the mobile unit, which is equipped with ultrasound technology — a rare offering in Riverside County.

Teaching Health Equity to the Next Generation

BY STEFANIE GREENBERG

EISENHOWER HEALTH IS LEADING THE CHARGE in preparing the next generation of physicians to deliver equitable health care to the diverse populations of the Coachella Valley. From farmworkers and the elderly to LGBTQ+ individuals and those experiencing homelessness, Eisenhower's emphasis on street medicine provides trainees with hands-on experience addressing the unique challenges faced by these communities.

Eisenhower Health's Graduate Medical Education (GME) residency programs in Internal Medicine, Family Medicine and Emergency Medicine integrate a required street medicine rotation as part of their Community Medicine and Health Equity training. The goal is to deepen residents' understanding of how social determinants of health intersect with and impact patient care. Through this hands-on experience, residents are exposed to critical health-related challenges, including homelessness, substance use disorders, behavioral health issues, food insecurity and addiction medicine.

The curriculum includes Tenuity Emergency Department shifts, collaborative work with social workers and trips out into the community via street medicine — conducted on foot with supplies in backpacks or with Eisenhower Mobile Care.

"This is critical training for the next generation of physicians," explains Victor Cisneros, MD, MPH, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Community Health Outreach for the GME program at Eisenhower Health. "We're preparing them to manage complex patient populations, whether they encounter these patients in the emergency department, outpatient clinics or hospital wards."

Dr. Cisneros also serves as faculty for Eisenhower's Emergency Medicine Department and holds academic appointments at both the University of California, Riverside School of Medicine and the California University of Science and Medicine. Dr. Cisneros emphasizes the relevance of this training, particularly for Internal Medicine, Family Medicine and Emergency Medicine residents.

"These specialties consistently see patients from vulnerable

"Having this capability allows our team to tailor treatment plans in real-time. For example, we can determine whether a patient with a red, swollen extremity needs emergency department care for blood thinners or more aggressive treatment, or if it's a simple skin infection that can be treated on-site. This approach has prevented unnecessary emergency department visits and hospital admissions," he says.

He continues, "Not only does this benefit the patients by addressing their needs promptly, but it also helps the health care

and underserved populations. This experience not only equips them to deliver better care but also teaches them to recognize and address the needs of these communities," he adds.

Beyond residency programs, Dr. Cisneros developed a Community Medicine and Health Equity (CMHE) elective for third- and fourth-year medical students from across the United States. This two- or four-week elective, available year-round, combines asynchronous learning modules based on national health equity guidelines with direct community engagement. Every Tuesday night, students collaborate with street medicine teams — a partnership with Coachella Valley Volunteers in Medicine — alongside residents and attending physicians.

Claudia Tang, 28, met Dr. Cisneros through the Latino Medical Student Association. A student at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine in Harlem, New York, Tang took a gap year between her third and fourth year of medical school to pursue a Master's in Public Health (MPH). She chose the four-week CMHE elective to complement her MPH project and gain hands-on experience. Tang's next step in her career is matching with a residency program, one of which could be the Eisenhower Health Emergency Medicine Residency Program.

Tang enjoyed the elective's opportunity to work in and out of the hospital. Despite working in July's scorching temperatures, she spoke of its value.

"What's great about it, is that since we're always visiting the same sites and we have built a rapport with this community over time, it's almost as if we are providing continuity of care," she says.

Her project focused on a needs assessment on how best to deploy the mobile unit. She worked with Dr. Cisneros on writing it and is hoping for publication.

"We need more preceptors on the ground to be able to break up into more teams to help people," she says. "I really enjoyed doing the project and I want to continue working in that space."

Dr. Cisneros underscores the importance of these opportunities for medical students and Eisenhower Health's dedication to health equity in shaping a generation of compassionate, competent physicians, ready to advocate and care for vulnerable populations.

"They are the future of health care in America," he says. "Exposing them to these tools and experiences ensures they're ready to meet the challenges ahead."



Leland Black, MD, a third-year resident in Emergency Medicine, works inside the Eisenhower Mobile Care unit.

system by reducing emergency department wait times and preventing overcrowding with non-emergent cases.”

Dr. Wexler adds that the care and treatment provided on the street is not only reducing the impact on the emergency department, but with fewer hospital admissions, ultimately reducing the financial impact to the hospital itself.

Looking ahead, Dr. Cisneros is focused on expanding the resources and services offered by the mobile clinic. His vision includes

managing chronic diseases more effectively and developing a comprehensive continuity-of-care model to better serve everyone in the community.

“The addition of the mobile care unit really adds another layer of access and service,” says Dr. Wexler.

“It’s hard not to be impressed that so many are taking the time to be available week after week. So many of the volunteers really put their heart into this work,” he adds.

Educationally speaking, the learning spans all directions, as a community pathway for students seeking a career in medicine, to senior medical staff teaching residents, to EMTs teaching from their expertise in on-the-spot treatment.

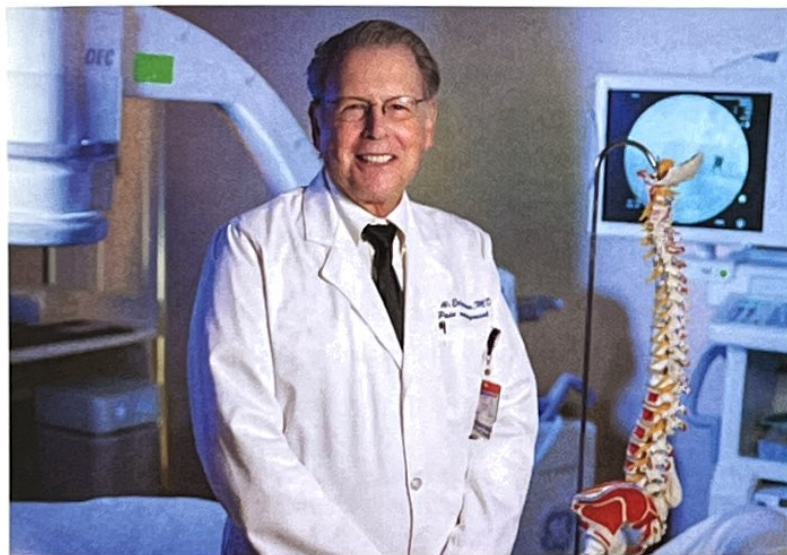
For Dr. Wexler, he encourages the team to meet the unhoused where they are, practicing and teaching respect and offering care.

“A lot of the work is making the connection with others and offering our services,” he adds. “It’s truly helping people to change their lives.”

The street medicine team will accept donations — knitted items, blankets, hygiene kits — throughout the year, especially through the winter season. For more information, contact Ali Calderon at CVVIM at 760.342.4414.

To learn more about Eisenhower School of Graduate Medical Education, visit EisenhowerHealth.org/GME.

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LEE ERLENDSON, M.D., DABIPP, FIPP

In 2006 Dr. Lee Erlendson fulfilled a need for a center in the Coachella Valley area that addressed acute and chronic pain. Today he and his wife Dale, a registered nurse manager, run a pain clinic with best practices and evidence-based guidelines for pain management.

Comprised of a team of talented PAs, nurses, and specialty staff, the clinic keeps pace with the rapidly changing landscape of healthcare. Dr. Erlendson draws from decades of experience to identify the uniqueness of each patient and help them improve their function, pain level, and quality of life.



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