

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Op-Ed | Let's Build A Healthcare System, Not Just Buildings

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Whenever our recovery discussion turns to health, the focus is almost always on hospitals. While ensuring that we have well built, sustainable, resilient facilities is important, our healthcare recovery requires much more than just rebuilding facilities.

Understanding this, a broad cross-section of local healthcare stakeholders, led and facilitated by Natalie Grant and her team from the US Department of Health and Human Services and joined by partners with expertise and experience in building healthcare systems, have been meeting for over 2 months. Work groups met for over two months on workforce capacity development, meeting financial challenges, closing the gaps in mental health care, creating a data-informed health community, understanding pharmacy

needs and creating a patient, centered care environment, as well as one addressing the built environment that went far beyond just building facilities.

On April 5th all of the groups met to report on the products of these meetings and the plans on how the work and the collaborations will continue. The goal is an updated territorial health plan that will include input from the wider community.

There are certain decisions that have already been made. A few of them are:

- The Department of Labor has expanded and layered their portfolio of healthcare jobs that they will work with the relevant agencies to help address the gamut of health workforce needs.
- The patient care group has focused on a system of services that is based on a coordinated care model that includes community health workers and case managers.
- The built environment group is developing a cross-sectoral collaboration to address not just buildings but creating a physical environment that supports healthily lifestyles.
- The data connected group (and others) has identified the need for a health Information exchange that would connect providers, integrate care, collect needed data, give patients control of their health records, and enable tracking of patients with special needs and those who may need to be transferred out of the VI.

This only gives a superficial overview of the work that has gone into planning to use this recovery to create a health care system, that is comprehensive, integrated, patient centered and provides quality health care to every resident, and visitor who needs it. I hope that many of the participants will be able to attend and expand on this at the Resiliency Task Force's Community meetings.

We are grateful for the dedication of the federal partners which were led by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response, and included CDC, HRSA, CMS, SAMHSA, and others.

But every Virgin Islander can be proud of how the health care and Human Services providers, related community services and advocacy groups have come together, and will continue to work together to ensure that the people of the Virgin Islands have the health care system that they need and deserve.

Submitted on Thursday, April 19 by: *Former Delegate to Congress Donna Christensen.*