

Welcome Wellness: A Community-Anchored Model for Advancing Health Equity

Executive Summary

Founded in 2011, with direct community services launching in 2012, Welcome Wellness has served as a trusted bridge between health systems and the Cass County community for more than a decade, reaching over 10,000 residents. Through evidence-based wellness programs, chronic disease self-management, digital literacy initiatives, vision care, and community health access services, Welcome Wellness has improved health outcomes, fostered digital inclusion, and strengthened community trust.

Key outcomes include statistically meaningful reductions in A1C among participants in Spanish-language diabetes programming, more than 1,000 free vision exams and glasses provided to children, and 288 older adults achieving measurable gains in digital literacy through the Tech Tutors program. In addition, 219 AccessKC vouchers have been distributed by Welcome Wellness as an approved agency, to address urgent medical, dental, and prescription needs.

This white paper documents the evolution of Welcome Wellness, its core program model, evaluation methods, outcomes, and lessons learned. It is intended for funders, health systems, policymakers, and community leaders seeking scalable, equity-driven approaches to improving population health through community-based partnerships.

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1. Background and Need: Why Community-Based Wellness Matters

America's healthcare crisis is driven by a convergence of factors, including social determinants of health, persistent health disparities, rising rates of diabetes and obesity, the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating prescription drug prices, and poor care coordination. The United States spends more on healthcare than any other nation, with expenditures reaching

\$4.1 trillion in 2020, approximately \$12,530 per person, and costs are projected to continue rising.

Nearly 75% of healthcare spending is devoted to treating chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer. Despite this level of investment, access to care remains a significant barrier. More than half of adults with chronic illness report delaying or forgoing recommended care, prescriptions, or medical visits due to cost.

Evidence consistently demonstrates that many chronic conditions are preventable or can be better managed through early intervention, healthier lifestyle choices, and improved access to preventive services. Addressing these challenges requires a paradigm shift toward upstream, community-anchored models that identify risk early, reduce structural barriers, and support long-term wellness.

In communities such as Cass County, these national trends manifest as limited access to preventive care, high chronic disease burden, transportation and cost barriers, and growing digital inequities. These realities underscore the need for locally rooted, prevention-focused approaches that complement traditional healthcare delivery while advancing health equity.

2. Founder's Legacy and Program Origins

The vision for Welcome Wellness began in 2011 with Jeanne Patterson, founder of the First Hand Foundation and Cerner Corporation's charitable foundation. Drawing on her experience in philanthropy and health innovation, Patterson recognized that meaningful and sustainable health improvement occurs not only in clinical settings, but in trusted community spaces where individuals feel welcomed, respected, and supported.

St. Sabina Parish in Belton, Missouri, was intentionally selected as the program's first site, reflecting a strategic decision to embed health promotion services in an accessible, familiar, and trusted community environment. Through the First Hand Foundation, Patterson made a catalytic investment of more than \$1 million during the program's initial five-year pilot, fully supporting staffing, equipment, and infrastructure.

In addition, Cerner provided in-kind contributions of software and hosting services valued at more than \$1.7 million. This early institutional investment created a scalable operational backbone and allowed the program to test, refine, and sustain a community-centered model grounded in dignity, access, and trust—principles that continue to guide Welcome Wellness today.

3. Program Evolution and Organizational Growth

2011 - 2016: Foundational Development During its early years, the program established a foundation for accessible wellness education through partnerships with local clinics, schools, and community organizations. While alignment with the Blue Zones Project was explored, the estimated \$25 million, five-year investment required exceeded local sustainability capacity. Leadership instead chose to develop a locally tailored “micro well-being environment” focused on practical, measurable impact grounded in community priorities.

2017- 2019: Program Expansion and Cultural Responsiveness The program rebranded as *Healthe Communities*, transitioning from the St. Sabina Wellness Center identity. Chronic disease programming expanded, and bilingual health education was introduced, including *Head to Toe*, a 17-week Spanish-language healthy living program designed to support behavior change through education, physical activity, and practical wellness strategies.

2020 - 2021: Coaching Model and Pandemic Adaptation A health coaching model was implemented, emphasizing participant-defined goals and progress tracking. Risk stratification approaches were introduced to guide referrals and program intensity. During the COVID-19 pandemic, services pivoted to virtual delivery to maintain engagement. In response to urgent technology access needs, the *Cyber Seniors* program was launched to support participants in navigating digital tools essential for healthcare, communication, and daily living.

2022: Organizational Transition and Evidence Generation Following the planned sunset of the Oracle Health Foundation’s *Healthe Communities* initiative, *Welcome Wellness* was established as an independent 501(c)(3) to preserve program continuity, partnerships, and community trust. During this period, *Disfrutando la Vida con Diabetes*, a culturally tailored Spanish-language diabetes self-management program, demonstrated statistically meaningful improvements in glycemic control, with 66% of participants achieving sustained reductions in A1C.

Technology programming expanded with the launch of *Tech Tutors* and *Tech Café*, incorporating intergenerational mentoring from teen volunteers. Evaluation findings strengthened the organization’s evidence base and informed ongoing program refinement.

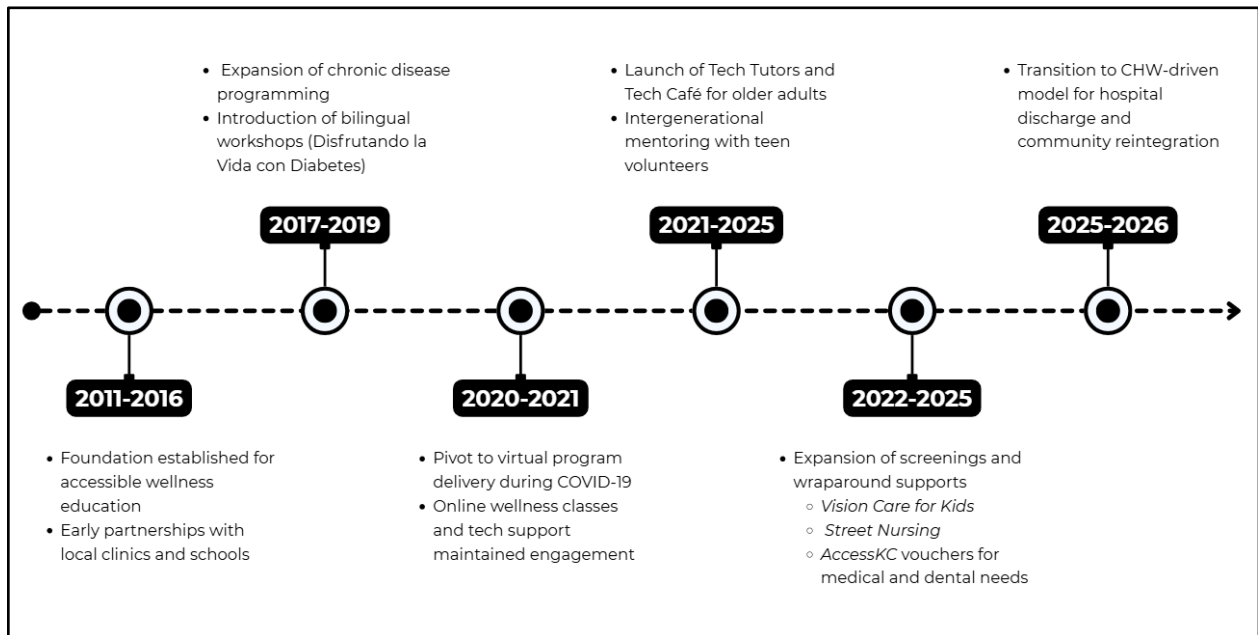
2023 - 2024: Integrated Services and Scaling Impact *Welcome Wellness* expanded health screenings and wraparound supports, including Vision Care for Kids, Street Nursing, and AccessKC medical and dental vouchers. Findings from *Disfrutando la Vida con Diabetes* were published in the *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, contributing to national evidence on

community-based chronic disease interventions. Based on evaluation results, Cyber Seniors was refined and formalized into the Tech Tutors model, now a core component of the Tech Café approach.

2025: Program Evolution and Planned Organizational Sunset Welcome Wellness continued advancing its work alongside ongoing community-based research, including activity supported by a Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) grant award.

During this period, a previously awarded \$498,000 federally funded Missouri Opportunity Grant was rescinded, leaving insufficient time to reorganize or restructure operations. In response, leadership made the decision to sunset the organization with intention, transparency, and fiscal responsibility.

Through Q3 and Q4, Welcome Wellness focused on maximizing impact during its final operational months, expanding reach where possible and ensuring continuity of services for participants already engaged. This approach allowed the organization to conclude operations with integrity while delivering on its commitments and preserving program models and partnerships for future adaptation.



4. The Welcome Wellness Model

Welcome Wellness operated an integrated, community-based model that aligned clinical support with interventions addressing social determinants of health (SDoH) to improve access, engagement, and outcomes.

Core Program Components

Health Education and Coaching: Evidence-based self-management programs in diabetes, chronic pain, and general wellness that build participant knowledge, skills, and confidence.

Community Health Access: Preventive screenings, A1C testing, eye exams, and follow-up care coordination delivered through Community Health Workers (CHWs) and partner organizations.

Digital Inclusion: Tech Tutors and Tech Café programs that provide older adults with digital literacy skills through individualized support and intergenerational mentoring.

Youth Engagement: Teen Tech Tutors programming fosters leadership, empathy, and service learning while strengthening intergenerational connections.

Cross-Cutting Features

- Community Health Workers embedded in community settings
- Culturally and linguistically responsive programming
- Strong alignment with clinical and community partners

5. Partnerships and Collaborations

Welcome Wellness collaborated with a broad network of clinical, academic, nonprofit, and community-based organizations to expand access, enhance service delivery, and ensure continuity of care. Key partners include:

- Research College of Nursing, Kansas City, MO
- University Health, Kansas City, MO
- University of Missouri Extension, Kansas City, MO
- University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing, Columbia, MO
- Bridge Hill Eye, Kansas City, MO
- Missouri Regional Arthritis Center, Kansas City, MO
- Guadalupe Centers, Kansas City, MO
- Mattie Rhodes Center, Kansas City, MO
- KC Digital Drive, Kansas City, MO
- Migrant Farm Workers Project, Lexington, MO
- Casa de Salud, Sedalia, MO
- West Central Missouri Community Action Agency, Raymore, MO
- Harvesters, The Community Food Network, Kansas City, MO
- High Blue Parks and Recreation Center, Belton, MO
- Belton Senior Center, Belton, MO

- Google Fiber
- Health Forward Foundation

6. Methods and Program Evaluation

Program evaluation relied on participant attendance records, pre- and post-program assessments, service logs, and volunteer tracking. Chronic disease outcomes, including changes in A1C, were measured using standardized clinical protocols. Digital literacy improvements were assessed through pre- and post-program self-reports of confidence, device usage, and connectivity.

All evaluation activities adhered to ethical standards for community-based research. While not a randomized controlled trial, the evaluation reflects real-world implementation in community settings and provides meaningful insight into program effectiveness.

Program Component	Evaluation Method	Key Metrics / Indicators	Data Source / Notes
Health Education & Coaching	Pre/post assessments, participant surveys	A1C reduction, symptom management, wellness knowledge gains	Clinical records, participant self-reports
Community Health Access	Service logs, CHW follow-up records	Number of screenings, referrals completed, follow-up adherence	CHW documentation, partner clinic data
Digital Inclusion	Pre/post skill assessments, tutor observations	Device use confidence, internet navigation, online engagement	Participant surveys, Tech Tutor reports
Youth Engagement	Reflection journals, volunteer logs	Leadership development, empathy, intergenerational interaction	Teen journals, mentor notes
Partnership Network	Partner interviews, collaboration tracking	Number of active partners, program reach, resource contributions	Partner reports, MOUs

7. Outcomes and Impact

Community Reach: More than 10,000 residents served over a decade.

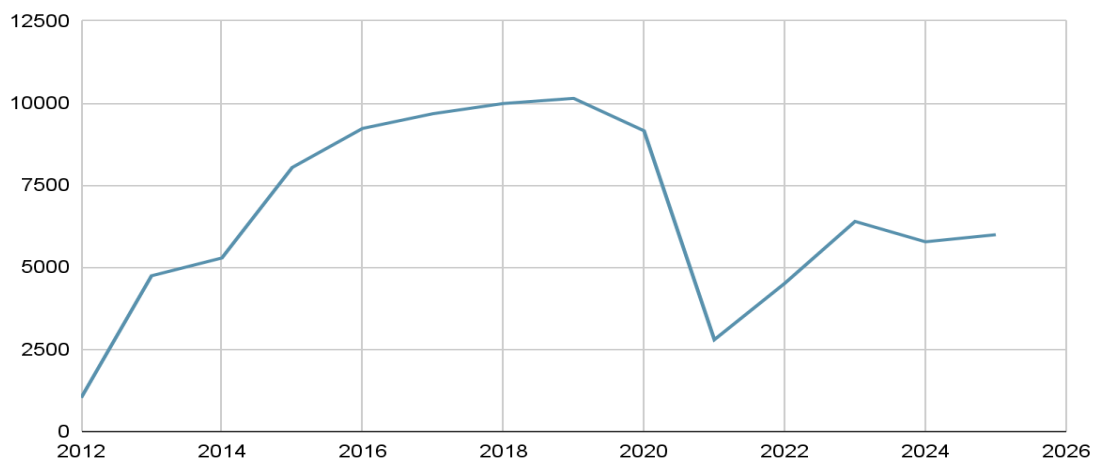
Health Outcomes: Sixty-six percent of participants in the Spanish-language diabetes program achieved sustained reductions in A1C.

Access to Care: Over 1,000 free vision exams and glasses provided to children; hundreds of AccessKC vouchers distributed for medical, dental, and prescription needs.

Digital Equity: Two hundred eighty-eight older adults completed Tech Tutors with measurable improvements in digital literacy.

Research Impact: Peer-reviewed publication documenting chronic disease outcomes in a community-based setting.

Annual Participation Summary



8. Community Impact Stories



Digital Inclusion: During COVID, an 84-year-old man shared that his world was getting smaller and he felt increasingly isolated. Through the Tech Tutors program, he learned how to video-call family members, access telehealth services, manage online bills, and even create a personal music playlist, skills that restored his independence and daily routine. He formed new friendships with people of all ages and now says, *“I have purpose again. People want to know my story.”*

Chronic Disease Management: Coming to Welcome Wellness for a routine health screening, a 78-year-old woman did not pass her vision exam. She received a referral for a comprehensive eye exam and glasses, where an ophthalmologist identified that her vision changes were linked to uncontrolled diabetes, symptoms she had previously attributed to aging. During her screening, she learned about Welcome Wellness’s Spanish-language diabetes self-management program and enrolled within days. Through the program, she learned practical strategies for nutrition, physical activity, and daily habits, reduced her A1C by 1.2 points, and gained confidence in managing her health. Today, she wears her new glasses, successfully manages her diabetes, and serves as a role model for her family, demonstrating that meaningful change is possible at any age.

Behavior Change: At age 67-year-old grandmother joined a weight loss challenge at Welcome Wellness with a simple goal: to walk alongside her granddaughter. Through consistent participation, she lost 43 pounds, lowered her cholesterol, and improved her diabetes management through better nutrition and regular physical activity. Today, she and her granddaughter are members of a walking club, continuing to exercise together and turning a personal health goal into a shared, cross-generational commitment to wellness. They hold one another accountable, supporting each other’s commitment to health.

9. Lessons Learned and Challenges

Lessons Learned

- Trust and cultural alignment are essential for sustained engagement.
- Partnerships extend reach, credibility, and continuity.
- Digital literacy functions as a critical social determinant of health.
- Adaptability in service delivery supports organizational resilience.

Challenges

The transition from support provided through Cerner/Oracle Health to an independent nonprofit marked a significant organizational shift and resulted in the loss of enterprise-level

analytics and reporting tools, limiting rapid data analysis and performance monitoring. The absence of centralized system support, such as human resources, compliance, and legal counsel, required the organization to build internal capacity while maintaining service delivery.

Evaluation also highlighted the complexity of traditional outcome expectations for older adults with multiple chronic conditions. Approximately 70% of participants presented with two or more chronic illnesses, making normalization of clinical indicators unrealistic. This insight informed a shift toward more appropriate success measures, including stabilization, functional improvement, self-efficacy, and quality of life.

10. Legacy, Sustainability, and Investment Opportunity

Welcome Wellness's legacy demonstrates that sustained community trust, paired with evidence-based interventions, can produce measurable improvements in health outcomes and access to care. Building on more than a decade of service, the organization is entering its next phase with a focus on sustainability, scalability, and deeper integration with health systems.

Welcome Wellness is transitioning toward a Community Health Worker, driven model designed to strengthen hospital discharge processes, reduce avoidable emergency department utilization, and improve continuity of care for individuals with chronic conditions. This approach aligns community-based services with clinical partners to address upstream drivers of health and reduce long-term costs.

While Welcome Wellness has concluded operations, the model, findings, and partnerships documented here are intentionally designed to inform future replication, adaptation, and investment in similar communities. Key considerations for replication include building trust-based infrastructure, integrating community and clinical care, supporting community health worker workforce development, embedding evaluation across programs, advancing digital equity, and planning for long-term financial sustainability.

11. Conclusion

Welcome Wellness stands as an evidence-informed model for advancing health equity through community-based partnerships, prevention-focused programming, and measurable outcomes. Its experience demonstrates the power of trust, collaboration, and adaptability in addressing complex health challenges, particularly those shaped by social determinants of health.

Rooted in community and guided by data, Welcome Wellness showed that meaningful improvement in population health is possible when services are integrated, culturally responsive, and designed around real-world barriers to access. The programs, partnerships, and practices developed through this work offer a transferable framework that can inform and strengthen future efforts to improve health, dignity, and opportunity for individuals and families.

12. Acknowledgments

The Wellness Center was Jeanne's heart. It was never meant to be just one thing. It was a place of movement and healing, learning and connection, where prevention mattered, access was protected, and people were met with dignity at every step of their journey.

This work was made possible through the extraordinary generosity and partnership of the Patterson Family Foundation, Health Forward Foundation, Google Fiber, KC Digital Drive, United Way of Greater Kansas City, Research College of Nursing, Oracle Health Foundation, and the Welch Family Foundation. We are also deeply grateful to the Parish of St. Sabina for hosting the Wellness Center and providing a welcoming home for this work within the community.

This work was further sustained through the personal financial contributions and steadfast support of dedicated individual donors, whose belief in this mission made care possible that is often hard to find and even harder to sustain.

We remember Orvie Prewitt with deep appreciation for her steady commitment to rigor and integrity. Orvie believed deeply in health literacy and advocacy. Her influence helped ensure this work was not only done well, but understood, by communities, partners, and those who will carry it forward.

Above all, we honor the Board, staff, and instructors whose compassion and leadership transformed a vision into a living, breathing community resource. The legacy of Welcome Wellness is not measured by programs delivered, but by the lives touched and the foundation laid for what comes next.

13. References

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