

Trusted Women's Healthcare

Hearing, supporting, and
empowering patients in their care

Women across Berkshire County are gaining expanded access to essential reproductive and preventive care thanks to women's health nurse practitioner Keegan Strzempko. Coming to CHP from Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Keegan brings extensive experience and specialized training in women's health.

Travelling between CHP sites throughout the county, Keegan provides care for a wide range of needs, including cervical cancer screenings, birth control, STI screening and treatment, pelvic pain, and breast health. Her work is supported by medical assistant Jada Pridgen, a graduate of CHP's in-house medical assistant training program.

For Keegan, **building trust with patients is at the center of her approach.** "I strive to create a space where patients feel comfortable expressing any and all of their needs, concerns, and questions," she says. "That really starts with building strong rapport and trust. I approach care as a partnership. We're working as a team to understand what's going on and decide on the best next steps together." She emphasizes meeting patients where they are, especially younger patients who may be discussing sensitive topics for the first time. **Listening without judgment, she says, helps patients feel heard and respected so they can take an active role in decisions about their care.**

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Our Mission

To nurture and inspire healthy lives for people throughout the Berkshires by delivering exceptional and compassionate health care and family services.



Because of You, Care Continues

Your support helps CHP respond to growing needs across the Berkshires

Dear Friends,

At Community Health Programs (CHP), we see every day how much our community relies on accessible, compassionate care and support. At a time when many of our neighbors are facing rising costs, uncertainty about health coverage, and increasing stress, **the need for community health centers has never been greater**. CHP feels these pressures as well—but thanks to supporters like you, we continue to move forward with purpose.

In this newsletter, you'll read about some of the **special ways CHP is meeting this moment**, including how we're making high-quality women's health services more accessible throughout the county, how we're empowering our team of insurance navigators to help patients understand their options and enroll in coverage, and how we're expanding our Adams food pantry to help our North County community members access nutritious food to support their health and well-being. Each of these programs help us live our mission to nurture and inspire healthy lives for people throughout the Berkshires.

Many of us are worried about the future of health insurance coverage and how increased costs and reduced access to coverage will affect our neighbors. CHP has been a critical community resource for more than 50 years and we are fully committed to **continuing to provide high-quality care to all Berkshire residents who need us**, regardless of their ability to pay. Our doors and hearts are open.

Your support makes our work possible. Thank you for standing with CHP and the community we serve.

With heartfelt gratitude,

Bethany Kieley, CEO

Meet Board Member Dena Fisher



A patient first and now a board member, Dena Fisher brings a unique perspective to CHP's mission, one shaped by experience, advocacy, and a deep belief in care for all.

How long have you been a CHP board member? What first drew you to CHP?

I joined the Board in 2022, but I was first connected to CHP in 2020 after moving from New York and needing a doctor. I had previously worked with a health center in Westchester County, and I was struck by CHP's ability to serve people from a wide range of economic and cultural backgrounds.

Why do you feel it is important to support CHP?

CHP's model of providing comprehensive, community-based care that's accessible to everyone is unique in Berkshire County. At a time when access to care is under attack, CHP stands out as an example of what healthcare can and should be.

Why is CHP a worthwhile investment for donors and community members?

CHP uses its resources efficiently, directing a strong share of funding toward patient care, and is one of the most comprehensive providers of health care in the County. Just as important, it offers continuity. If your circumstances change—financially, medically, or personally—you can remain a CHP patient with coordinated, high-quality care. I've seen friends lose access to their primary care providers and struggle to figure out their next step. Those who turned to CHP found not only care, but peace of mind.

What makes you most proud to support CHP?

Now more than ever, I'm proud to support an organization that provides high-quality, multi-disciplinary care to everyone regardless of income or immigration status. Knowing that people are being cared for without interruption is critically important. It's something I value deeply as both a donor, board member, and patient.

Trusted Women's Healthcare Continued

Across Berkshire County, Keegan is seeing many women seeking help with preventive care, hormonal health, and reproductive wellness. "When women come in for regular visits and feel comfortable talking about changes in their bodies," she explains, "we're able to catch potential issues earlier, offer more treatment options, and support their overall health through every stage of life."

Providing these services within a community health setting can make a meaningful difference. Many patients, particularly in North County, face barriers such as long travel distances, limited transportation, or difficulty getting appointments with specialists.

By offering women's health services across CHP locations, patients are much more likely to seek preventive care, stay up to date on screenings, and address concerns earlier.

"What has stood out to me most is how much geography and access to services can shape someone's healthcare experience," Keegan says. "But I've also seen how engaged and resilient patients here are. **When care is accessible and patients feel supported, they absolutely take advantage of it.**"



Navigators are Critical as Insurance Eligibility Changes in 2026

CHP's Patient Navigators help patients facing insurance uncertainty



From left to right, the staff of CHP's Patient Navigator Team, William Cruz, Alba Miranda, and Octavio Hernandez.

Core to CHP's mission is the principle that all patients should receive care, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay. Your support helps us fulfill this mission. Finding insurance coverage can be daunting and confusing, and our role is not just to provide quality healthcare, but to provide resources and services that allow our community members to be able to access this care.

CHP employs a team of Certified Patient Navigators who connect community members with insurance options. **This is a free service that is not limited to only CHP patients** – anyone in Massachusetts can reach out for assistance. Based on eligibility factors such as income, age, household size, and federal income guidelines, our Navigators enroll individuals and families in MassHealth (Massachusetts' Medicaid program) and subsidized plans offered through the Massachusetts Health Connector. The Navigator team undergoes training each year to stay up to date on current policies and procedures.

Beginning this year, however, changes in federal law are impacting who is eligible for insurance through the Health Connector. **As the complexities of insurance changes increase, our Navigators are tasked with the challenge of working to find continued coverage options for those in need.** We spoke with Octavio Hernandez, one of CHP's Patient Navigators, for his insight on how CHP will continue

supporting community members through these challenges.

What kind of training do Navigators receive to stay up to date on insurance policy changes?

Every year, Navigators must be re-certified as health insurance Navigators by MA Health Connector. The re-certification is either a refresher or full initial training for new Navigators working for non-profit organizations. In addition, mandatory training webinars are presented throughout the year.

How do you anticipate the federal changes will impact our community in 2026 and beyond?

Under the new changes, some patients that are currently eligible will lose subsidies that affect the affordability of their coverage, while others will lose their MassHealth coverage or will need to go through additional administrative steps to remain eligible. This particularly impacts those who are extremely low-income and fall under 100% of the Federal Poverty Level or those at higher income levels over 400% of the poverty level.

Have you experienced any changes or concerns, are you hearing from patients yet about worries about their insurance status?

People who are no longer eligible for certain subsidies such as tax credits are confused and worried about the lack of help to pay for their

insurance coverage in the year 2026 and beyond, unless they are willing to purchase a health insurance plan at full price.

Do the CHP Navigators have any plans or options in place for patients who might lose coverage?

The Navigators are equipped with the knowledge of all available MassHealth plans and can advise affected individuals and families on how to enroll in specific programs that provides medical and dental care available through community health centers at no cost, as well as emergency room visits. Other options include purchasing a private plan at full cost from the Health Connector. For those families with higher incomes, the Navigators encourage them to enroll in their employer-based health plan, if that is an option.

What are the biggest challenges you anticipate in 2026 and beyond?

Overcoming barriers to health insurance enrollment among the immigrant population in Berkshire County is a biggie. This is especially true due to fears of showing up to enroll and revealing their immigration status, which is not required by CHP but is required for enrollment in some coverage,

or fears of being considered a public charge and thereby affecting their immigration status.

What is your favorite part of your role at CHP?

Traveling throughout Berkshire County and meeting with our diverse community. On Mondays and Fridays, I do outreach and enrollment at Neighborhood Health Center, Pittsfield; Tuesdays and Thursdays at Adams Family Services; and Wednesdays at CHC Great Barrington.

CHP's Navigator team has played a critical role in our organization's ability to perform outreach and education to the Berkshire community, particularly to our most vulnerable populations which include people who are uninsured, low-income, or immigrants who are undocumented or documented. The Navigators thorough knowledge helps identify and reduce inequities across the county and will ensure that patients continue to have insurance options, even as changes at the federal level may have concerning impacts on coverage status. We take great pride in the work of the Navigator team, as they serve as faces of CHP and carry out our mission daily to bridge the gaps in insurance coverage, particularly during a time when those gaps may be widening.

“I am grateful for the respect my provider shows. She listens and understands and considers my thoughts and she truly wants to help me find solutions to my difficulties with sincerity and empathy. At a time when our medical professionals are overworked and overstressed, she always makes me feel important. She worked with me and offered ideas and empathy.”

- CHP Patient



Adams Food Pantry Opening Soon

Providing North County families
with food and nutrition support

For over 40 years, CHP has helped families access healthy food through a variety of programs, most of which have been based out of the Great Barrington Family Services location. Now, with the support of state funding, **CHP is preparing to expand that work to Northern Berkshire County with the establishment of a fully operational food pantry at our Adams health center.**

Each week more than 500 patients visit the Adams location for medical, dental, and family services. Until now, CHP has not been able to consistently offer food assistance programs, instead deploying short-term programs and a limited number of twice-monthly deliveries of food bags.

That will change in spring 2026 thanks to a \$20,000 award from the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' Local Food Policy Council Grant, which will help launch the Adams food pantry. The funding will support essential startup needs, including refrigeration, equipment and supplies needed to safely store and distribute food.

When it opens, the Adams food pantry will work with Berkshire farmers to source locally grown produce, meat, eggs, and dairy products, as well as partner with the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts to help stock the shelves. **In addition to providing food, CHP's on-staff nutritionist and dietitian help ensure families receive guidance and education to support healthy eating.**

The pantry project is also connected to a broader investment in the Adams health center. In 2025, CHP received \$150,000 from the Commonwealth's Underutilized Properties Program, administered by MassDevelopment to support building renovations that include a dedicated space for the future pantry.

While state funding is essential to launching the Adams pantry, **the continued support of donors makes it possible for CHP to sustain our food pantries and respond to emerging community needs.** With partners across the state and within the local community, CHP is building a stronger, healthier future for families in Northern Berkshire County.

"Expanding access to high-quality food and nutrition support will make a meaningful difference for local families, and we look forward to opening our doors soon."

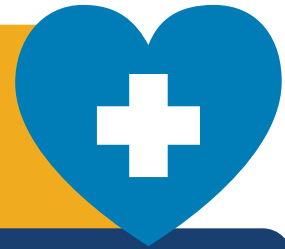
- Mary Feuer

Director of Family Services



In Their Care

Meet the doctors, nurses, and care providers making a difference every day, one patient at a time



Featuring: Dr. Carsell



Dr. Pat Carsell is one of the newest faces at CHP, joining our growing dental team in February as Dental Director. Dr. Carsell had a successful career in private dental practice in Dalton for over thirty years, and upon retirement in 2022, he discovered that it was harder than he had realized to leave dentistry behind. **“After leaving my office it was difficult placing dentistry on the sidelines,” he says.** Dr. Carsell was excited to find an opportunity to extend his career further in a new role in which he **provides clinical and administrative oversight to CHP’s dental practices in Pittsfield, Adams, and Great Barrington.**

Raised in Illinois, Dr. Carsell’s path to dentistry began close to home as he received a Bachelor of Science Degree as a Pre-Dental major at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. When a recruiter from Loyola University of Chicago College of Dental Surgery came to meet his cohort of classmates, he was encouraged to apply and says, **“from here on I exited the gates with focused excitement and intent.”** He eventually followed a classmate to the northeast and completed his residency in Burlington, Vermont and later purchased his General Dentistry practice in Dalton in 1988.

When considering the biggest challenges of his new role at CHP, Dr. Carsell anticipates that one will be quickly learning about the AI platforms that have become available for use in Dentistry. He sees this as a challenge to continue **“learning and implementing what we can to improve the execution and delivery of excellent care in a timely fashion to our patients.”**

On a broader community scale, a challenge for the Berkshire patient population is the growing wait time to be seen for both new and established patients, who are waiting weeks for appointments. Dr. Carsell would **“like to see that we have added enough staff to provide more timely care for our patients.** If there are incomplete treatment plans, it would be our goal to try and complete them, whenever possible, in a timelier fashion.”

What’s your favorite, local Berkshire attraction?

Tanglewood Performing Arts Center is my favorite venue. My wife Laurel and I have attended numerous BSO performances, however, the popular artist series has been our favorite time of the summer season in the Berkshires.

What do you enjoy doing in your free time?

In my free time I enjoy (most of all) foreign and domestic travel with family and friends, as well as motorcycling, sports cars, snowmobiling, and skiing. When the weather breaks, I’ll get back to gardening, which I really enjoy in the summer.

What are you currently enjoying watching or reading?

Recently, I visited my 92-year-old Dad in Moline, Illinois, and borrowed his copy of John Deere’s Company, A History of Deere and Company and Its Times. It’s very detailed and just shy of 900 pages. I’m presently a quarter of the way through it. I also love all James Patterson’s collaborations. My favorite miniseries are Yellowstone, Landman, and The Lincoln Lawyer.

WAYS TO GIVE

Want to think outside the checkbox for your giving to CHP in 2026? Here are a few creative ways you can make a difference and donate without pulling out your checkbook!

Consider a donation of a non-cash gift to CHP this year.

Donor-Advised Fund (DAF) - Set up a fund managed by a sponsoring organization from which you can make tax-deductible contributions of cash or assets, invest them for tax-free growth, and recommend grants be made to CHP

Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) - Make a gift directly from a traditional IRA to CHP if you are 70½ or older. This type of gift satisfies Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) without increasing your taxable income.

Stocks - Donate appreciated stock held for over a year to CHP and avoid capital gains tax. You can deduct the full fair market value, typically up to 30% of your adjusted gross income. Contact your broker for instructions on making a transfer to CHP.

Monthly Recurring Gifts - Looking to support CHP throughout the entire year? You can use our online donation form to set up a monthly gift, automatic donation via credit card of any amount. A monthly gift adds up to a meaningful contribution over twelve months!

