



What services is SteppingStone providing during the Covid-19 pandemic?



Hello!

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Since the Covid-19 pandemic closed SteppingStone's Centers in March a complete transformation has taken place in how the agency provides care. This newsletter describes the services the agency is providing in August 2020 and how they benefit program participants.

The overall goal of our services remains the same despite the COVID-19 pandemic: to ensure our clients' needs are being met so they can maintain their health and remain in their homes. Because all our participants have serious medical conditions, our program provides constant, usually daily, health monitoring and

continuous provision of care services. SteppingStone staff provides fourteen different types of service, but the most fundamental is the Wellness Check phone call that all clients receive each service day.

The Wellness Check call is made in the primary language of the client by a clinician that knows the participant well. This is a formal process as participant's health is formally assessed twice each year and then monitored through the call and by other means. Staff members know what each client's baseline should be and where problems may develop. On any given day, most clients will not have had significant changes, but some will. About 30% of clients have substantial issues arise each month; about 5% have an urgent problem that needs to be addressed immediately.



Often the Wellness Call will flag issues that need to be attended to on the call or in a later call, perhaps with another staff person. Depression and mental health issues are present in over 40% of SteppingStone clients and in monitoring these conditions, staff may administer standardized tests such as the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS). Other issues such as blood pressure or glucose levels will be traced with additional actions taken if they are not stable. This might be as simple as instructing a participant how to correctly test themselves, but it could also result in a referral to other health providers to follow up.

COVID-19 screening and education is an ongoing concern. Mission Creek's RN Linda Lam explains their approach. *"Clients and their caregivers have been educated to practice frequent hand hygiene, wearing a mask, social distancing, limit outings, and to quarantine at home if ill. Weekly reminders and information are provided to all clients including flyers on COVID19 best practices when living with other people if space is limited."*

Clients regularly report that there has been an interruption in essential services such as in-home health workers not showing up, food not delivered or medicines not arriving in time. To address these concerns, each Center's team follows up immediately with the appropriate agency or health provider to resolve the issue. Staff, particularly the social workers and nurses, have ongoing relationships with the client's physician, pharmacist, building manager as well as caregivers and family members.

Focusing on client needs requires vigorous care coordination and advocacy on behalf of client on an ongoing basis. When participants cannot articulate their needs clearly or forcefully enough, SteppingStone can be their voice using the agency's deep experience and expertise to resolve the issue. Client advocacy is one of the key mechanisms every Center team uses to help clients maintain their health.



One of the problems of remote care is that clinicians are dependent on self-reporting by participants or caregivers. SteppingStone staff found when beginning doorstep visits and deliveries that some clients did not report or were unaware of worrisome developments such as weight loss, increased confusion and physical weakness. Each Center team now endeavors to visit every client regularly either with a delivery or just to check-in, using doorstep visits. This provides a second set of information on participant's health parallel to the telephonic care

programs.

Multiple times each month participants receive health supplies and recreational materials. This happens routinely, but if needed, emergency deliveries of food or medicines are undertaken. Mabini Center's Social Worker Silvia Sobral explains their approach. *"On a weekly basis Mabini participants most frequently request masks, followed by supplies for fun activities such as challenging coloring pages, Sudoku, crossword and word search. We send all participants our weekly newsletter that includes staff and client photos with interesting tidbits about them, photos of clients' art and timely topics such as COVID-19 precautions."*

In recent weeks, some Centers have begun enhanced care activities online including ZOOM physical therapy and social groups. In addition, some Centers have access to large courtyards that allow them to begin physical therapy classes with proper social distancing. Other innovations are being discussed as Center teams seek to enhance care for their clients.



"For the frail elders and adults with disabilities we serve, SteppingStone is able to provide robust health care, social supports and patient advocacy that is clearly making a difference for them and their families. We are working vigorously to help them maintain their health as we all navigate together this terrible pandemic." Daniel Gallagher, SteppingStone Executive Director

The fourteen service activities that SteppingStone provides participants are: care coordination and referrals, communication with primary care physician,



medication management and monitoring, screening for COVID-19 symptoms, health assessment/reassessment, wellness checks, behavioral health screenings, health training and education, verbal cueing, home-delivered care packages, psychosocial support, caregiver support, therapeutic activities, advocacy with other health care providers and service agencies.

Photos: **(Masthead)** Golden Gate Center Program Aids Mei Hua Xie and Feng Chan Jian prepare bags for delivery to clients. This delivery includes 5 reusable masks, a face shield, 10 surgical masks, 2 hand sanitizers, toilet paper, vegetable oil and recreational activity materials.

(Top) Mission Creek Center RN Linda Lam

(Middle 1) Mabini Center Social Worker *Silvia Sobral*

(Middle 2) Presentation Center Physical Therapist Karen Ande and Occupational Therapist Jamie Lew leading courtyard exercise class

(Bottom) SteppingStone Executive Director *Daniel Gallagher*.

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SteppingStone Health | 930 Fourth St | San Francisco, CA | 415-974-6784