



## Light Persists Accomplishments, 2019-2020

**Thirty-six years ago**, Dr. Jim Reuler founded a small volunteer organization to bring “street medicine” to uninsured homeless people and low-income residents of hotels in downtown Portland.

Named in memory of one of Dr. Reuler’s patients, today Wallace is a full-service health “home base” for low-income individuals and families, with multi-cultural staff who partner fully with them to improve their well-being.

*“In the midst of darkness, light persists.”*  
--Mahatma Gandhi

Our whole-person approach unites medical, dental and behavioral health services with a focus on addressing economic and social barriers that create health disparities.

### Challenges to Good Health

At Wallace we care for increasing numbers of people who are homeless, immigrants, refugees, and very low-income. Many have been economically forced out of neighborhoods where generations of their family lived. Many feel culturally and linguistically isolated from the help they need.

Health disparities in Wallace’s service area include high rates of food insecurity (over half of our patients), diabetes, high blood pressure, adult and child obesity, alcohol/substance use, and smoking—along with low rates of cancer screening, immunizations and other preventive care.

### Who Are Our Patients?

Wallace serves families in **East Multnomah County**, including the Rockwood and Gresham communities. We cared for 5,042 people with 19,500 visits last year.

- Ninety percent have **incomes at 200% or less of the Federal Poverty Level** (60% have incomes of 100% of FPL).
- **Sixty percent** of our patients are people of color.
- We speak in a **language other than English** in almost half of all visits.
- More than 20% of our patients are **age 19 or under**.
- Growing numbers are experiencing **housing instability or homelessness**.
- Nearly **60% identify as food insecure**.
- Many have **no health insurance** – on average, 25-30%.

The community we serve also fits the profile for those at high risk of COVID-19 transmission and severity—low-income, persons of color, underlying medical conditions, numerous health inequities. Many are “essential workers” in often unsafe work environments. Significant numbers live in crowded conditions or have no home at all. Too many have lost jobs and health insurance. Stress levels have skyrocketed.

## COVID-19: Adapting During an Unprecedented Year

Communities that already struggle with a wide range of disparities carry the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact. At Wallace we have been “ducking and rolling” to adapt to the realities of this unpredictable environment.

Along with other health centers, Wallace has **dramatically increased telehealth**—offering medical, behavioral health and even dental visits remotely with very positive feedback from our patients—and **drive-up services** (such as glucose checks and COVID-19 testing) to ease access to care and protect patient safety. Our **expanded behavioral health** team is providing increased coaching on stress reduction. Our insurance enrollers are helping recently unemployed patients sign up for Oregon Health Plan or other benefits. And our Patient Navigators have made thousands of phone calls to our most at-risk patients to check in and connect them to needed assistance.



*As a founding member of the Rockwood Food Systems Collaborative, we’re supporting the development of **Grandma’s Hands**—which engages elder African-American women to share healthy Black cultural food traditions with younger generations. Thirty families participate each month, picking up a free box of locally-grown ingredients to take home before logging in online for a live tutorial from a Grandma! Families watch each other prepare the meal, and then enjoy it together.*

**Food insecurity has spread acutely** here since March. We connect our patients to SNAP benefits, local pantries, and emergency food boxes, and partner with programs of the Rockwood Food Systems Collaborative.

Many **individual donors play a significant role** in this work, through their generous gifts to the Reuler Family Fund for Patient Support. These funds have been critical in addressing the many urgent health-related needs (food, transportation, utilities, rent) cascading through our patient population right now.

This excerpt from a recent interview with one of our patient navigators, Christine Sanders, illustrates the experiences of many of our patients:

*The pandemic has generated new concerns and intensified others. “People are dealing with a lot more stress,” Sanders said. “They’re worried about their family’s health and safety—a lot of them know people who have had COVID. They’ve lost jobs, or work fewer hours. If they still have a job, they might feel*

*unsafe there—like one person who works at a shipping warehouse. They're trying to help extended family members who've lost jobs, sharing their small incomes. Some face increased bias from landlords and authorities."*

*One of the biggest everyday worries is putting food on the table. "Patients are scrimping on food so they can pay utilities or rent. A lot of them, especially the most medically vulnerable, can't access available food resources if they're not in walking distance. And carrying a big food box home isn't easy, either!" Kids are home all the time now, which puts even more strain on food supplies.*

*Sanders and her colleagues have learned that families often hide their struggles with food and other basic needs. "Many, especially those who are immigrants, have a misconception that Wallace and other helping organizations are run by the government—and they don't want to put themselves or their families at risk by disclosing information about themselves. So sometimes that trust barrier is the first thing we have to address."*

## New Homes for Families, And Health

Last year we continued to shine a bright light on the importance of housing as a major factor in the health of many patients and their families. And we embarked on the planning for Wallace's future residence as well....

### A Roof Spreads Hope

Health is the foundation of all success—the breath that gives life to hope. Yet most of what affects health happens outside of the doctor's office. We care for increasing numbers of people who are homeless or threatened by homelessness. **With lives in constant crisis, homeless people can't focus attention on their health.** Existing health conditions get worse. New ones arise.

Housing for Health aims to address the impossible situation of individuals and families attempting to improve their health while homeless. Our model provides intensive support

"I'm so glad I'm not out there with the virus right now."

to prepare families for the transition from homelessness, secure affordable housing, and assure their stability. **Since the project launched in late 2018, twenty-three patient families have moved into their new homes—including six placed since the pandemic arrived in March.**

To date all twenty-three families remain in their housing. Children attend school, and parents are involved in education or employment. Family members access multiple health services, including needed surgeries and mental health. Acute health issues present when families entered the program have, and continue to be, addressed. Those with high-risk health issues, such as diabetes, cancer and severe back pain, are managing their diagnoses and diseases.

## One Big Roof for Wallace

Wallace is “health home base” for patients of all ages, offering easy access to the primary medical, dental, and behavioral/mental health care, and supportive services they need most. And in Spring 2021, that access will literally be “one door” when we move to a beautiful new location at 186<sup>th</sup> and Stark!

Our new full-service site in the “Downtown Rockwood” development will support robust team-based coordinated care that tailors plans for each individual’s medical, dental and behavioral/mental health needs. Navigation to connect patients to specialty care, warm hand-offs to community resources that address social determinants of health, and in-house supportive programs (pharmacy, physical activity, housing and food security programs, health education, peer support) will be woven seamlessly into the fabric of Wallace care. Everything on one floor, just steps away!



Plus...our new home will offer direct access to transit and other services and businesses at the very heart of the Rockwood community.

## Together in Health

Communities of color, immigrants and other underserved groups face unacceptable disadvantages in terms of health access and health outcomes, highlighted more than ever by the COVID-19 outbreak. **In 2021 we’ll be launching a new population health approach** that will help us do an even better job of identifying our most vulnerable patients and developing highly-focused, personalized care plans that integrate coordinated health services with social supports.

Back in 1984, Dr. Reuler founded Wallace in the belief that everyone deserves high-quality health care, regardless of circumstances. He was committed to meeting this need, one person at a time. That hasn’t changed.

Light persists.

*“I don’t feel as depressed as I was...I feel hopeful and like there’s light at the end of the tunnel.”*