

CrescentCare Community Health Center

ABOUT US

In 1983, the HIV epidemic was causing devastating effects on the New Orleans community, and in response to this devastation, the NO/AIDS task force was founded. This task force was made up of community members who utilized a single phone line to provide services to those in need. In the following years, services continued to expand to respond to different impacts of the epidemic on diverse populations. Then, in 2005, Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans and caused widespread destruction in the community, leaving thousands of people homeless and exposed to health risks such as mosquito-borne diseases, mold, contaminated water, and mental health effects.



In response to community needs and the new opportunities offered under the Affordable Care Act, NO/AIDS task force services expanded as well as their mission to provide comprehensive health and wellness services and advocate empowerment for the whole community. In 2013, NO/AIDS changed its name to CrescentCare and became a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) to reflect its expanding services. As CrescentCare continues to evolve, they are committed to providing high-quality affordable health care and supportive services to people who have been systemically marginalized in their community.

UNDERSTANDING CRESCENTCARE'S PATIENT'S SOCIAL NEEDS

New Orleans has one of the highest poverty rates among other large metro areas and is particularly susceptible to climate-driven events due to its geographical location. In 2021, Hurricane Ida caused severe damage to New Orleans, knocking out power for more than a week in the middle of a heat wave. CrescentCare Community Health Center lost over \$250,000 in medicines and vaccines when the health center's gas-powered generators failed during Hurricane Ida. Patients were unable to access health services and life-saving medicines. 19 New Orleans residents died from excessive heat, lack of oxygen, or carbon monoxide poisoning, emphasizing the need for communities to have reliable access to power and health services.

Other climate threats that New Orleans faces, in addition to natural disasters, are rising temperatures, extreme precipitation, vectors, and poor air quality. These climate threats disproportionately affect some people more than others, such as those living in poverty and Black communities who have faced discriminatory redlining policies. To become more resilient to climate threats, CrescentCare Community Health Center has acknowledged these existential threats and has begun the process of transforming its health center into a resiliency hub for those most vulnerable to the devastating effects of climate change.

CRESCENTCARE RESPONDS TO THEIR PATIENT'S NEEDS

CrescentCare was awarded a \$650,000 grant from Direct Relief to fund solar microgrids and backup battery systems to remain resilient during power outages during natural disasters and other climate events. The grant is part of Direct Relief's Power of Health Initiative, which seeks to ensure nonprofit community health centers stay powered through natural disasters and power outages. This grant goes directly in hand with the [Community Lighthouse Project](#), which was created by the nonprofit coalition Together Louisiana. A lighthouse is going to serve as a place of refuge for nearby residents to access necessities during disasters. The project was created after many backup generators broke down or ran out of fuel after Hurricane Ida. CrescentCare is one of the locations that is going to serve as a lighthouse, and its participation is essential to ensure that during a hurricane or power outage, the clinics will be able to keep operations going. These lighthouses are being identified in communities that don't have the resources to evacuate during a storm so that community members have somewhere to turn to.



Reginald Vicks, the Chief Operations Officer of CrescentCare, said that “the number one reason for installing solar panels and backup batteries is to maintain service delivery and access for our vulnerable patients in the community.” If power is lost throughout the community, patients will be able to rely on CrescentCare for assistance and other everyday health services that the underserved need, especially in emergency situations.

CrescentCare is also aiming to become as green as possible and recognize its role in eliminating harmful environmental conditions. For example, reducing their health center's carbon footprint and greenhouse gas emissions can lead to improved air quality for all in the community. Enhancing the community's health through continuous primary care services, and resources in times of disaster, and playing a part to improve air quality is critical because most patients that CrescentCare serves are low-income and people of color who are already impacted by multiple social drivers of health burdens. CrescentCare's solar projects are in the process of being installed and the health center is expecting a large financial return in cost savings over the years in utilities. CrescentCare plans to track their savings with electrical bills each month to demonstrate why installing solar + storage is a viable option for health centers.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Lessons that CrescentCare learned during the solar installation process:

1. Having a program manager for oversight of the solar installation process is really important
 - a. The program manager can ensure all permits are in order
 - b. The program manager can also keep the project on track
2. Having an architect look at your health center's roof is worth the extra expense
 - a. Hiring an architect to ensure your roof is solar-ready
 - b. An architect can also assess the roof condition and identify optimal locations for solar
3. Be optimistic, every project has its ups and downs
 - a. CrescentCare faced some supply change issues, pushing back the solar installation completion date, but these issues have since been resolved

If you are considering solar microgrids and back-up battery systems for your health center, the [Community Health Access to Resilient Green Energy \(CHARGE\)](#) partnership provides energy options for health centers supporting communities most vulnerable to grid outages, disproportionately burdened by chronic disease, and most impacted by poverty and racial and ethnic health inequities. CHARGE is a collaboration between NACHC, Collective Energy, and Capital Link. CHARGE can provide services such as program management, take care of permitting processes, and assess your health center's roof to ensure it is solar-ready.

There are a variety of different [incentives and benefits](#) for solar + storage at health centers that should be taken advantage of. The Inflation Reduction Act updated and expanded the investment tax credit (ITC) for solar and battery storage resilient projects. The ITC was raised to 30% coverage of an eligible project through 2032, and this change significantly raises anticipated savings for solar projects. There are also many bonus credits to take advantage of, including four that are in alignment with the [Low-Income Communities Bonus Credit Program](#). When paired with tax incentives, there are large financial savings to be had when it comes to solar + storage. Other benefits of storage include contributing to the electricity supply when the sun isn't shining, and can be applied during grid disturbances.

Working as a team, CHARGE offers education, assessment, design, installation, and financing options to make clean and reliable energy easy and affordable for health centers.