



For more details, please read the full [case study](#) of Northgate II conducted in September 2014.



The LeadingAge Center for Affordable Housing Plus Services serves as a national catalyst for the development, adoption and support of innovative affordable housing solutions that enable low- and modest-income seniors to age safely and successfully in their homes and communities.

To learn more about the center, see [www.LeadingAge.org/Center\\_for\\_Housing\\_Plus\\_Services](http://www.LeadingAge.org/Center_for_Housing_Plus_Services).

## Northgate II: Providing Services to Shrink a “Hotspot”

*Camden, NJ*

A 2009 study by Dr. Jeffrey Brenner and the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers<sup>1</sup> revealed “hot spots”— or geographic areas in the city with extensive use of these expensive medical services. Patients from just 6% of Camden’s city blocks accounted for 27% of all of the city’s emergency department (ED) visits and 37% of its ED costs.

Northgate II, an affordable housing property in North Camden, was one of the city’s two primary hot spots, according to Brenner’s research. Between 2002 and 2008, 615 residents of the housing property generated 3,901 ED and hospital visits at a cost of \$83 million.

Opened in 1981 by a community-based organization called Fair Share Housing Development, Northgate II consists of a 23-story high-rise building with 308 apartments for the older adults and persons with disabilities. Fourteen garden apartment buildings contain 94 units that house families. In 2004, Fair Share added 6,500 square feet of community space to the high-rise building during a \$12 million renovation.

Approximately two-thirds of the 340 high-rise residents are age 60 and older. Most of these older residents also have a disability. African-Americans and Hispanics make up 97% of the older resident population.

Approximately 60% of Hispanic residents are Spanish speakers.

### *The Camden Coalition Partnership*

Dr. Brenner approached Fair Share Housing Development in 2011 to see if the organization would be interested in working with the Camden Coalition to reduce the extensive and unnecessary ED and hospital visits among Northgate II residents. Fair Share eagerly agreed.

In addition to partnering with the Camden Coalition, Fair Share took a number of steps to enhance its own supports in the building. It began with creating a position for a director of social services who would develop strategies to support Northgate II residents and collaborate with the Camden Coalition.

<sup>1</sup> The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers is a consortium of health care professionals and entities in Camden, NJ. The coalition works to improve the care and coordination of health care for Camden residents while decreasing costs. For more information, see: [www.camdenhealth.org](http://www.camdenhealth.org).

Focus groups with residents revealed that a lack of reliable and flexible transportation was a primary barrier to residents visiting their primary care physicians. In response, the Camden Coalition recruited a primary care practice that was interested in opening a health clinic at the Northgate II property. It also helped bring other health promotion programming to the building. The clinic closed in December 2013 after not being able to build the patient volume needed for financial sustainability.

The coalition soon realized that its initiatives were not reducing ED and hospital use because they were not reaching the more complex patients living at Northgate II, who tended to be isolated and did not come down to programming on the first floor. This realization prompted the coalition to focus its energies on helping Northgate II build a more robust onsite social services division.

At the same time, Northgate II's new director of social services adopted a population health management approach that would encourage social services staff to engage more proactively with residents, bring multiple interventions to the property to address the full range of resident needs and interests, and increase staffing levels in the social services department, which now consists of the director and:

- Two full-time, bilingual service coordinators who provide ongoing monitoring and follow-up to about 120 "at risk" residents, in addition to general assistance to all Northgate II residents, as needed.
- A part-time community health worker who monitors, supports and encourages higher-risk residents to participate in services and programs and to make behavior changes that could improve their health and function.
- A full-time volunteer from the Jesuit Volunteer Corps who coordinates activities in the property's community center, supports the service coordinators' caseloads, and carries his own caseload of about 10 male residents.

### *Northgate II Service Package*

The newly configured package of onsite services at Northgate II includes:

- **Service Coordination/Care Management:** The social services team uses a proactive process to assess resident needs, stratify residents into

high-risk and moderate-risk categories, and then identify potential services and programming that could benefit residents in each category. A staff-developed assessment tool gathers information about resident health care utilization, health conditions, mental health, functional status and social support network. The Adverse Childhood Experiences survey helps staff identify past traumatic life events that may shape a resident's needs and behaviors. Northgate II uses the Camden Coalition's web-based data system to document its assessment data.

- **Transition Management:** Through the Camden Coalition, Northgate II social services staff has limited access to the Camden Health Information Exchange (HIE). Staff members check the HIE each morning to identify residents who went to the ED or were admitted to the hospital the previous day. This information, and incident reports from the building's security team, allows staff members to keep track of residents who will need support when they return home. When a resident returns home, the service coordinators check in to make sure everything they need is in place.
- **Wellness Programming:** The evidence-based Enhance Wellness program, the Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs (CDSMP) for English speakers and Tomando for Spanish speakers, two wellness support groups, and an exercise class help residents address specific health risks, manage the challenges of living with a chronic disease, and stay fit.
- **Assisted Living:** CARING Adult Healthcare Services, a licensed provider based in Pleasantville, NJ, delivers assisted living services at Northgate II through New Jersey's Assisted Living Program (ALP). ALP allows assisted living services to be provided in subsidized housing properties, and care staff are at Northgate II daily from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Currently, 18 residents participate in the program, which offers care management, personal care, health monitoring, help with medications, and personal care, nursing, pharmaceutical, social work, dietary, homemaker and transportation services.

- **Nutrition:** A congregate meal program, administered by the Senior Citizens United Community Services of Camden County, Inc., uses the property’s multi-purpose room to serve weekday lunches to 25 residents at a suggested donation of \$2 per meal. Residents also have access to a food pantry administered by TOUCH New Jersey, and to a resident-led class on healthy cooking.
- **Mental Health Programming:** Northgate II staff coordinates a support group and delivers the evidence-based PEARLS program to help residents learn strategies for combatting minor depression. Camden-based Healing SPIRIT provides onsite massage therapy program for residents who have experienced significant trauma during their lives.
- **Transportation:** Through a pilot program, the state’s Medicaid transportation coordinating entity has assigned four transportation providers to Northgate II to provide all Medicaid-funded transportation. Northgate receives a daily report of all residents scheduled for transportation the following day so that any potential problems can be preempted.
- **Social Activities:** Organized social activities are designed to motivate isolated residents to leave their apartments and interact with fellow residents. This includes activities such as an annual “Senior Prom,” holiday programs, parties and other social events, and support for resident-run clubs.

### *Partner Cooperation*

Communication among service providers and between the building’s social services and property management staff has contributed to the success of the Northgate II service program, according to staff.

The social services director holds quarterly “chat and chew” sessions so partners can learn about fellow service providers and their offerings, share information about program changes, identify trends in resident needs, and discuss gaps in services. Between meetings, service providers and social services staff members interact extensively. For example, CARING and Northgate II staff hold formal and informal discussions about assisted living program participants and sometimes develop joint plans to address residents’ identified needs.

The property manager views the proactive social services department as a valuable partner in helping older residents maintain their housing. The property manager believes that by helping residents maintain personal budgets, address health and functional care needs, and combat isolation, the social services staff is also helping to ensure that residents are able to pay their rent, maintain their apartments, interact appropriately with their neighbors, and participate in building a sense of community at the property.

### *Perceived Program Challenges*

The success of the Northgate II service program does not come without challenges, including:

- **Cultural barriers:** Many older members of ethnic minorities are reluctant to acknowledge that they need support or to use specific kinds of services, particularly mental health services. Residents of Puerto Rican descent, for example, are less likely to participate in the congregate meals program due to a cultural bias against eating in front of others, according to staff. Language can also be a barrier to program participation. When possible, Northgate II social services staff tries to partner with organizations that have a Spanish-speaking staff. However, finding language-appropriate resources is not always possible.
- **Resident mistrust:** Some residents have a general mistrust of providers due to previous unreliable and uncaring encounters. The social services staff has addressed this mistrust by working hard to build relationship with residents, improve the reliability of services, and maintain staff continuity in the building.
- **Unwillingness to switch providers:** Some residents are reluctant to use onsite services because they already receive services from another provider and are unwilling to switch. For example, some residents have been reluctant to enroll in the assisted living program because they already have a relationship with an aide from another provider. CARING has attempted to address this issue by offering to hire some of the aids who currently serve Northgate II residents. Northgate II social services and CARING staff also attempt to educate residents about the benefits of having their care staff onsite.

- **Lack of local resources:** The Camden area lacks adequate mental health and substance abuse resources, particularly for ethnic minority older adults. Northgate II attempted to fill this gap by initiating a counseling collaboration with Catholic Charities of the Camden Diocese. However, Catholic Charities ended the program due to staffing problems.
- **Funding:** Northgate II and its partners support many of their services through grants and other fundraising efforts. Northgate II would like to identify mechanisms to support these services through more reliable and sustainable funding streams.

## MacArthur Foundation

This snapshot was funded through a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. The views expressed are those of the authors and are not those of the foundation.