



Sheldon M Chumir Health Centre

OVERVIEW

Thirty-seven health programs, one primary care center, and one urgent care clinic are combined in 300,000 square feet and eight floors to create a state-of-the-art healthcare center focused on service integration and improving the patient experience for Calgary residents. The Sheldon M Chumir Health Centre is one of Canada's largest integrated community health facility.

The challenge: how to create an innovative, patient-focused facility that meets the needs of multiple programs and more than 1,200 staff members.

CONSOLIDATING MULTIPLE SITES

The Sheldon M Chumir Health Centre in Calgary is part of Alberta Health Services. A new downtown facility, it occupies the land where a veterans hospital formerly stood. The first phase, which opened in 2008, includes urgent care on the first floor and six other floors that consolidate various medical and mental health services. The eighth floor, completed in 2010, will offer primary care services.

“The 300,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility is comprised of modular furniture, allowing for maximum flexibility, as well as functional care environments,” says Leslie Herchak of Alberta Health Services.

The Sheldon M Chumir Health Centre serves as an innovative model, providing integrated health services for downtown residents, as well as a range of required programs to residents of the broader metro and surrounding areas. The motivating factor in developing the facility was to centralize the patient experience—reducing the need to obtain medical services from several clinic locations.

“Before our new Centre opened, a patient might have to visit several different clinics in various quadrants of the city to access all the services needed,” Herchak says. “That wasn’t easy from a time or travel standpoint. This is especially important for the downtown marginalized population, who rely on public transportation.”

A MODULAR PREFERENCE

From the start, administrators knew they wanted an innovative, patient-focused facility that would integrate technology, medical records, and other administrative functions, such as patient registration and reception.

In addition, “one of the most important considerations from the inception of this project was to enable flexibility for the future using modular furniture,” says Beverly Wilson, senior project manager for Alberta Health Services.

Planners knew they didn’t want the space to be locked in by millwork furniture. Instead, they preferred the freedom to



MAIN LOBBY ENTRANCE *staffed by knowledgeable personnel to direct patients and visitors to their appropriate floor.*

recreate space as needs change—freedom that only modular furniture could provide.

As part of the design process, Alberta Health Services engaged Steelcase Applied Research and Consulting to conduct observational research that eventually would be consolidated in the new facility. “These observations helped uncover unarticulated needs of user groups and patients,” says Robyn Baxter, Steelcase Applied Research and Consulting.

The research also suggested additional criteria for the development of the Sheldon Chumir Centre. Based on the findings, planners agreed the facility should:

1. offer people-friendly amenities;
2. support diverse needs;
3. maximize the use of space to facilitate service integration;
4. support care providers;
5. offer an open plan to foster teamwork and make efficient use of real estate; and
6. enable flexibility for the future.



AMBULATORY ENTRANCE to the 24/7 Urgent Care waiting area.

“As we talked about the facility’s desire for integration, it wasn’t just about the obvious efficiencies and financial benefits,” Baxter says. “The goal also was to create a positive patient experience that would reduce wait times and ease access to services.”

DESIGN DETAILS

A key component of the design is an open-plan layout in administrative areas. Most managers migrated from private offices to shared spaces, an environment that encourages learning and fosters stronger relationships among team members.

For patients, floor plans remain consistent on most floors (other than urgent and primary care) to provide continuity and reduce confusion. On each floor, for instance, the registration area is in the same location and a bank of windows overlooks the neighboring veterans park.

The entire building has been constructed with flexibility in mind—much of the furniture and many of the walls are modular. “Modularity has been key in supporting our realignment,” Herchak says. “Without modular flexibility, we’d be stuck trying to move services into different areas that wouldn’t enable them to function properly.”

The urgent care area on the main floor meets the needs of a mixed population in terms of age, culture, and socioeconomic status. The purpose of urgent care is to relieve the pressure on the emergency rooms by treating immediate medical needs that aren’t life threatening. Within the new facility, urgent care design is addressed as one clinic, taking into consideration the mixed population of users and the staff needs.

The final component in the facility’s design is primary care, a dedicated space on the eighth floor. The space will support a multidisciplinary team providing primary care services. Team care areas allow interns, physicians, and other providers to conference about a patient’s case.

To honor the heritage of the land it occupies, the Sheldon Chumir Centre incorporates sandstone, brick, and other architectural elements similar to those used in the veterans hospital that once occupied the site. Even the outdoor seating adjacent to the café mirrors the benches that had been used by the original veterans hospital. “It’s a way to preserve the past while celebrating the future,” Wilson says.



SHELDON CHUMIR CENTRE incorporates sandstone, brick and other architectural elements similar to those used in the veterans hospital that once occupied the site.



ADMITTING ROOM provides a consistent experience on most floors with the registration area in the same location and a bank of windows overlooking the neighboring veterans park.

FAVORABLE OUTCOMES

Today, the Sheldon Chumir Centre is an innovative facility centered on service integration and patient-focused care. The building is certified as BOMA Best Level 3, the leading Canadian environmental certification for building operations.

In short, the plan worked. But the transition didn't happen overnight. It took time for people to adapt to the new facility.

"After the centre opened, we noticed a drop in the number of people participating in our needle exchange program," Wilson says. "But after a few months, it picked right back up. We attribute the drop to a fear of the unknown among the population who participate in the program. All of a sudden, there was this new, shiny building, and they didn't know if they fit in here. But that's part of what makes us unique. The population we serve is very diversified, and there's a place for everyone."

General service numbers dropped off initially, too. "Again, we offered this beautiful new downtown facility, but we were somewhat unknown," Herchak says. "Those who used our services in the different outlying areas weren't sure how to approach us."

Within the past year, however, service numbers have risen, surpassing the pre-construction peak by up to 30 percent. "We attribute the increase to word-of-mouth from patients who have received care," Herchak says. "The transition from all the different sites into one went well," says Pierre Michiels, regional healthcare manager for Nurture by Steelcase. "The key was defining potential issues up front and addressing them through space design."

Anecdotal evidence also suggests the new building has improved employee morale. "Our healthcare system has been undergoing an enormous reorganization for the last several months," Herchak says. "Having a wonderful new work environment has helped. The centre has been a ray of hope for patients and staff."



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