



A CASE FOR SUPPORT: Circle the City’s East Valley Expansion

Purpose: This document serves to provide a case for support of Circle the City’s expansion into the East Valley to build a Medical Respite Center that will replicate its two successful programs in Phoenix.

Compassionate Care for All

As the issue of homelessness remains a constant social concern throughout the US and here in Arizona, efforts to provide support to those in need are more important than ever. Recent data from the Maricopa Association of Governments’ 2024 Point-in-Time Homelessness Countⁱ found that more than 9,400 individuals are without permanent homes - nearly a 60% increase since 2017 – while the US Office of Policy Development & Research estimates that in Arizona, 21% of unhoused individuals are over age 55ⁱⁱ.

For almost twenty years, Circle the City has worked to ensure that every individual facing homelessness in Maricopa County receives the healthcare and support they need. Circle the City was founded by Sister Adele O’Sullivan, CSJ, M.D., who earned her medical degree from the University of Arizona in 1984. She began offering medical care to people living on the streets of Phoenix in 1996. Her experience there impelled her to begin efforts to increase public awareness about the unmet healthcare needs of those experiencing homelessness in the greater Phoenix area. The greatest unmet need was the absence of a clean, safe place for the sickest to get off the streets and receive the care they needed to regain their health.

Circle the City’s Mission

To create and deliver innovative healthcare solutions that compassionately address the needs of all individuals facing homelessness in Maricopa County.

In 2012, Circle the City opened Arizona’s first Medical Respite Center for people facing homelessness. For the first time, there was a place where those without homes could recover from an illness or injury in a dignified environment that offered a clean bed, healthy nutrition, and comprehensive wraparound services, including the medical and nursing services they needed. For the first time, hospitals were afforded an alternative to discharging their homeless patients to the streets.

Since then, Circle the City has expanded its model to include two freestanding Medical Respite Centers, two outpatient clinics, five mobile medical units, and five street medicine teams throughout the Valley. Outpatient services now reach every geographic area of the Valley, bringing services to shelters, transitional living centers, and those living in the most vulnerable circumstances.

With Sister Adele O’Sullivan’s original vision of high quality, dignified care still at its core, Circle the City continues to grow and adapt, profoundly impacting the community by providing accessible, compassionate care for those who need it most.



What is Medical Respite Care and How Does it Help?

Individuals facing homelessness experience health challenges at higher rates and with worse outcomes than individuals who are housed. Medical respite centers play a crucial role in providing shelter, medical care, and wraparound support for individuals who are homeless and recovering from illness or injury. These centers offer a safe environment where patients can rest, heal, and access ongoing medical care, rather than being discharged back to the streets or shelters where their conditions may worsen. This brief but targeted intervention not only improves the individual’s health outcomes by addressing both medical and social needs but also has broader benefits for the community.

Since its inception in the mid-1980’s, medical respite care has proven successful in preventing hospital re-admissions and reducing emergency room usage, thus relieving unnecessary burdens on the emergency response systemⁱⁱⁱ. People experiencing homelessness average a 30-day emergency department readmission rate that is 5.7 times higher and a hospital inpatient rate 1.9 times higher than their housed counterparts. By alleviating pressure on hospital systems — particularly emergency departments and inpatient beds — medical respite care helps reduce healthcare costs and allows hospitals to focus on providing higher quality care for other patients.

In essence, medical respite care serves as a bridge between hospital discharge and stable health, helping to improve the overall wellbeing of both individuals and communities.

Growing East: Circle the City’s East Valley Medical Respite Center

Circle the City is launching a \$24 million capital campaign to build the East Valley Medical Respite Center (EVMRC), an 85-bed medical respite facility in Mesa, Arizona. This new Center will join the organization’s two other Phoenix centers - Downtown (210 S. 12th Avenue Avenue) and Midtown (333 W. Indian School Road) - to provide vital medical care and supportive services to individuals experiencing homelessness who are recovering from acute illnesses or injuries.

Because a medical respite center does not currently exist in the East Valley, EVMRC is being embraced as part of a larger solution to treating homelessness in the area. It is clear that providing patients with a safe place to rest, a clean place to recover, nutritious food, clean water, secure storage for medications, the overall ability to comply with hospital discharge instructions, and access to supportive services assists in completing recovery.

At EVMRC, patients who are medically stable but not yet ready to go home or to independent housing will be provided critical medical care and healing without discharge to the street. During their stay, patients will receive a bed, three freshly prepared meals per day, daily medical care, 24/7 nursing support, behavioral healthcare, transportation to appointments, substance use intervention, physical therapy, care coordination, and case management.

The East Valley Medical Respite Center is scheduled to be completed and operational by late 2026. This initiative represents a significant investment in community health and recovery for underserved populations in the area.

East Valley Expansion is Necessary

The dramatic increase in the East Valley's homeless numbers warrants the addition of a medical respite center in this part of our region. Maricopa Association of Governments' 2024 Point-in-Time Homeless Count shows that the City of Mesa alone increased its homeless population by 238% from 2017 to 2024 (going from 130 – 309 persons).

A recent publication of the Phoenix New Times reports that Maricopa County is “on pace to set a new eviction filing record in 2024.^{iv}” Of the 10 zip codes listed as those being hit the hardest, Mesa contains two of them – 85201 and 85202. The city has identified a need for over 23,000 affordable housing units for its lowest-income residents, thereby signaling the potential for a sharp increase in homelessness.

Further exacerbating the homelessness issue is the aging of the homeless population. By 2030, Arizona will have more adults over 65 than under 18, and some predict that the number of homeless people over 65 will triple by then. In Mesa alone, seniors account for 20 to 25% of the population, and many are aging without family support, living on fixed incomes, and struggling with rising housing costs.

Older homeless adults present complex and serious health conditions, and medical ages that far exceed their biological ages, caused by living on the streets. Research has shown that homeless individuals experience geriatric medical conditions such as cognitive decline and decreased mobility at rates that are on par with those among their housed counterparts who are 20 years older.

These individuals struggle with preventable and often treatable diseases, such as diabetes and cancer, and as a result, suffer mortality rates 3.5 times higher than the general population. The cycle of poverty, compounded by health challenges, addiction, and limited access to healthcare, contributes to this stark contrast in life expectancy.

The age of the average patient at Circle the City's Downtown Medical Respite Center is 55, with nearly 50% of patients over 50 and 9% over 65. At the Midtown Medical Respite Center, 40% of the patients were over the age of 60 .at the

Despite providing a total of 1,119 acute care beds^v, Mesa and the surrounding area have been designated as a Medically Underserved Area (MUA) by the Arizona Department of Health Services^{vi}. Currently, medical respite services are absent from



the acute care system in the East Valley. There are no step-down options for patients facing homelessness who are discharged from hospitals and emergency rooms, but who still need care. This underscores the need to expand Circle the City's services to the East Valley.

The East Valley Medical Respite Center project will provide a number of unique benefits not only to individuals facing homelessness, but also to the East Valley at large, including:

- Taking the onus for care away from emergency rooms and emergency departments, as well as emergency shelters that cannot provide the medical care necessary for patient recovery.
- Helping to prevent unnecessary and costly emergency room utilization and hospital readmissions, providing a significant benefit to taxpayers and local municipalities.
- Reducing emergency calls to East Valley hospitals, healthcare systems and community first responders from homeless citizens experiencing health care emergencies.
- Stimulating local economic development by delivering approximately 120 high-paying jobs, including physicians, nurses, physical therapists, case managers, and a host of support staff, and adding over \$13 million of annual local spending, including \$8.8 million in wages & employee benefits.

According to census tract data, the area surrounding the EVMRC location has a family income of less than 70% of area median income. Enhancing medical support and respite facilities here will meaningfully impact the well-being of unhoused individuals, while also addressing both immediate healthcare needs and longer-term support for health stability for all in Maricopa County.

Be a Part of Circle the City's Innovative Solutions

Arizona faces intersecting crises that demand innovative solutions. Since its founding, as the only Federally Qualified Health Center in Arizona exclusively serving individuals facing homelessness, Circle the City has identified unmet needs in our community and met them head-on. A June 2024 article in the New York Times cited Circle the City's respite care program as being "...one of the most sophisticated in the country." And, most impressively, 77% of medical respite patients who complete their plan of care leave with housing plans, including subsidized apartments or temporary stays with friends - somewhere other than the streets or a shelter.

We invite you to join Circle the City as we advance lifesaving programs that improve health while alleviating the burden on our healthcare systems, and build a larger, stronger, and more diverse network of healthcare and support in our communities. Your investment in the *Growing East* campaign is an investment in Circle the City, the larger community, and a commitment to sustainable change.

By joining *Growing East*, you're directly contributing to Circle the City's mission to expand vital healthcare and support services for those experiencing homelessness.



Every dollar invested helps fund innovative outreach programs; build safer, healthier neighborhoods; and create lasting opportunities for those most in need.

A number of attractive and prestigious naming opportunities are available to those who wish to make a significant investment in the Growing East campaign. This is a distinctive and cherished way to honor the individuals and families whose investment and dedication will make a transformative impact, create a more equitable healthcare system, and strengthen the social safety net for unhoused individuals.

Together, we're strengthening the community, one step at a time, and creating a future where everyone has access to the resources and support they need to thrive.

Are you ready to make an impact? Join us in growing hope and resilience in the East Valley!

To learn more about how you can make an impact as an investor Circle the City's *Growing East* campaign, please contact

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ⁱ [Point-In-Time Homelessness Count](#)

ⁱⁱ [2024 AHAR: Part 1 - PIT Estimates of Homelessness in the U.S. | HUD USER](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Homelessness And Health: Factors, Evidence, Innovations That Work, And Policy Recommendations | Health Affairs](#)

^{iv} [Phoenix metro evictions are highest in these Maricopa County ZIP codes | Phoenix New Times](#)

^v [A Guide to East Valley Hospitals - PHOENIX magazine](#)

^{vi} <https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/prevention/health-systems-development/data-reports-maps/reports/azmua-biennial-report.pdf>