



P.O. BOX 213, Vashon WA 98070

www.vashonhealthcare.org

NEWS FROM VASHON HEALTH CARE DISTRICT

Vashon Health Care District to Provide Urgent Medical Care at Home

Services For Uninsured Patients Begin Soon

Commission Offers Support to VIFR Mobile Integrated Health Program

Vashon Island residents will soon be able to get urgent medical care without leaving the island or even leaving home.

Vashon Health Care District commissioners on Aug. 21 authorized their Superintendent to sign a contract with DispatchHealth, a leading provider of in-home medical care across the U.S.

DispatchHealth will immediately begin introducing the service on the island, with house calls expected to begin by October 1st. Care will include diagnosis and treatment for a wide range of health concerns in the comfort of patients' homes.

A care team will deliver urgent medical care to Vashon residents 365 days a year, including weekends and holidays. In most cases, patients will be seen the same day they request care. DispatchHealth will use clearly marked vehicles with all the equipment needed to provide care.

"This is a huge step forward for health care on Vashon," said Tom Langland, Vashon Health Care District board president. "Our island neighbors have told us clearly and repeatedly that they consider the lack of on-island urgent care – especially after hours and on weekends – Vashon's most glaring unmet health care need. The decline in ferry service has only made the problem worse."

Most insurance plans will be accepted, including Medicare, and Medicaid. Uninsured islanders will soon be able to access DispatchHealth's services at no cost. The Commission resolution directed the Superintendent to prepare an additional agreement for DispatchHealth to provide care to the uninsured within 60 days.

The Commission further directed the Superintendent and Board Chair to develop a plan within 30 days for submission to the Vashon Island Fire & Rescue Board to engage in collaborative short, and long-term planning for augmentation of existing Mobile Integrated Health Services, up to and including urgent care services supported by Health Care District resources and funding.

The District began exploring ways to provide on-island urgent care more than a year ago. "We're delighted DispatchHealth has agreed to partner with us," Langland said. "After six months of discussions with them, we think they understand Vashon's unique circumstances."

A team of knowledgeable islanders will be appointed to support DispatchHealth's integration into the community.

DispatchHealth, founded in 2013, operates in more than 40 communities across over 20 states. In Washington, it has partnered with MultiCare since 2019 to provide in-home health care services in mainland King County, as well as south Snohomish, Pierce, Thurston and Spokane counties.

The Health Care District is subsidizing DispatchHealth’s service by covering the added costs of providing service to a sparsely populated and isolated community like Vashon. No tax increase is anticipated.

To start, service on the island will be provided for eight hours each day. While shift start and end times aren’t yet set, care will be available into the evening on weekdays.

DispatchHealth employs the same medical professionals you’d see in a hospital, including medical technicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and emergency medicine doctors who support all visit remotely. DispatchHealth will assign multiple rotating teams to Vashon service to ensure coverage seven days a week.

The mobile team will be able to treat a wide variety of urgent, but not life-threatening, illnesses and injuries, including – but not limited to – lacerations; minor bone breaks; strains or sprains; fevers; flu; migraines; urinary tract, eye, sinus and ear infections; objects in the eye; sore throats; nosebleeds; diarrhea; constipation; dizziness; hives; and rashes.

Team members can write prescriptions, administer medications, stitch up cuts, splint strains or minor fractures, insert urinary catheters and intravenous lines, and test for some infectious diseases.

When islanders phone or go online to request care, a DispatchHealth representative will review symptoms and determine if it’s clinically appropriate for the patient to be treated at home. If it is, a home visit – usually that same day – will be scheduled. If it’s not – if the injury or illness is life-threatening, for instance – patients will be directed to a more appropriate care setting.

The DispatchHealth Vashon contract is for two years and allows the Health Care District to decide at the 18-month mark whether to extend the partnership.

The goal is to complete the long-term planning described in the resolution by early 2026, before a decision must be made on renewing the DispatchHealth contract. “We’ll have 18 months of learning what Vashon needs with the benefit of real-world experience,” Langland said. “We hope VIFR will join with us, to learn and collaborate. And during those 18 months, the island will be getting high-quality urgent medical care.”

DispatchHealth is one of several recent additions to Vashon’s health care landscape. VIFR’s new “Mobile Integrated Health” program is providing in-home services to vulnerable adults two days a week. Vashon Pharmacy is expanding to provide some clinical services. And the Health Care District recently agreed to fund a significant expansion of behavioral health services for island children and youth.

#####

- Updates, and a forthcoming FAQ can be found at our website: www.vashonhealthcare.org
- Questions & comments are welcome via email at: info@vashonhealthcare.org