

CLIENT SUCCESS STORY

Mendocino County Health Centers Transforms Care Delivery Through Emotional Intelligence

Mendocino County Health Centers (MCHC) is the largest healthcare provider in Mendocino County and serves neighboring Lake County as well. As a federally qualified health center, MCHC plays a vital role as a safety net for the community, providing care to patients regardless of their ability to pay. The majority of patients rely on Medicaid or Medicare, and many face complex medical, social, and economic challenges.

With more than 400 employees, MCHC delivers a wide range of services including family medicine, pediatrics, women's health, dental care, mental health services, urgent care, and specialty programs. These include HIV management, substance use disorder treatment, community care focused on social determinants of health, street medicine for unhoused populations, and healthcare services within correctional facilities.

Seventy-five percent of the physicians in Mendocino County work for MCHC, placing the organization at the center of healthcare delivery in the region.

THE CHALLENGE

Like many healthcare organizations, MCHC faced mounting stress and pressure during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Employees were exhausted, emotionally taxed, and continuously operating in a high-stakes environment with intense demands.

AT A GLANCE

Challenge

- High levels of stress and emotional fatigue following COVID
- Limited adaptability across teams
- First-year employee turnover at 33%
- Need to strengthen relationships among staff and with patients to deliver high-quality, compassionate care

Solution

- EQ training delivered to all employees across clinical, administrative, and support roles
- Two internal certified trainers leading the rollout
- Mastering EQ® Level 1, Level 2, and Teams
- Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® – Self Edition and Multi-Rater Edition
- EQ embedded into onboarding for all new hires and reinforced through daily huddles and EQ lunches

Results

- First-year turnover reduced from 33% to 11%
- 40% reduction in overall turnover, resulting in \$2.28M in savings
- Employees report being happier, more engaged, and less stressed
- 12% reduction in stress- and mental health-related leaves of absence
- Stronger collaboration and improved patient-provider relationships

“ We were seeing people who were tired, stressed, and emotionally drained. In healthcare, decisions are emotional by nature, and when under stress, people are quicker to get angry, feel offended, and not work well with others.

— Joaquin Blanco, Director of People and Culture

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Employee survey data confirmed these concerns. Scores were low across key indicators including stress levels, psychological safety, willingness to change, and the ability to disagree without fear of retaliation. Turnover was also a concern, with 33% of employees leaving within their first year, a rate consistent with industry norms but one that carried a heavy cost.

At the same time, leadership recognized a deeper truth about healthcare delivery.

“Medicine is not about medicine, it’s about relationships,” Joaquin shared, recalling a conversation with MCHC’s Chief Medical Officer. “If providers can truly connect with and listen to patients, 80% of the treatment is already done.”

MCHC aspired to shift from a model of “sick care” to true healthcare—addressing prevention, behavior change, and social determinants of health. Leadership knew this required a higher level of emotional intelligence across the organization.

WHY EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE—AND WHY TALENTSMARTEQ

Joaquin had long been passionate about emotional intelligence, drawing on more than 20 years of HR experience across industries including Cisco and Sutter Health. As he evaluated solutions, EQ emerged as critical for developing people, strengthening teams, and improving patient care.

“How do you move a team from point A to point B and help them perform at an optimal level?” Joaquin said. “The answer is emotional intelligence.”

After researching peer FQHCs and learning how high-performing healthcare organizations embedded EQ into their culture, MCHC selected TalentSmartEQ.

“Why wouldn’t we go with the leader in the industry? TalentSmartEQ’s approach, research, and team stood out, and we’ve had an outstanding experience working with them.”

— Joaquin Blanco, Director of People and Culture

THE SOLUTION

Beginning one year ago, Mendocino County Health Centers launched a comprehensive emotional intelligence initiative designed to reach every employee across the organization. Rather than positioning EQ as a one-time training, MCHC intentionally embedded it into daily operations, leadership practices, and team interactions.

Two internal leaders, including Joaquin, became certified EQ trainers and led a full organizational rollout delivered through a mix of in-person and virtual sessions. All existing employees completed the EQ training, and emotional intelligence is now a formal part of onboarding for every new hire.

- **Organization-Wide Rollout:** EQ training delivered to all employees, across clinical, administrative, and support roles.
- **Onboarding Integration:**
 - All new hires complete the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal® - Self Edition and Mastering EQ Level 1 within their first 90 days.
 - After 6 to 12 months, participants then complete the Multi-Rater Assessment to gain deeper insight into how their EQ shows up for others and complete Mastering EQ Level 2.
 - Mastering EQ for Teams is delivered another 6-12 months after that.
- **Reinforcement & Practice:**
 - The trainers host regular “EQ Lunches” to revisit strategies and tools.
 - Daily team huddles are structured to emphasize gratitude and discuss EQ skills and challenges.

EQ training spans entire care teams—including physicians, physician assistants, nurses, medical assistants, environmental services staff, and administrative employees—ensuring that everyone who touches the patient experience is aligned around the same emotionally intelligent behaviors.

“EQ is for everyone,” Joaquin shared. “It’s become part of our DNA.”

THE RESULTS

People & Culture Impact

Within the first year of implementation, MCHC saw dramatic and measurable results:

- **First-year turnover dropped from 33% to 11%**
- **Overall turnover decreased by 40%**
- **\$2.28 million in savings** tied directly to reduced first-year turnover
- **12% reduction in stress- and mental health-related leaves of absence**

Employees report feeling happier, more engaged, and less stressed. Leaders have observed a clear shift toward a growth mindset, greater agility, and a stronger willingness to change.

“ People now recognize when they’re having an ‘EQ moment.’
It’s changed the way we treat each other.”

— Joaquin Blanco, Director of People and Culture

Patient Care & Experience Improvements

As internal culture improved, so did the quality of patient care.

Staff demonstrate stronger listening skills, empathy, and respect both with patients and with one another. These behaviors have strengthened patient-provider relationships and supported MCHC’s broader goal of delivering care with compassion, dignity, and respect.

MCHC has also begun tracking patient experience and quality metrics, with early indicators suggesting a strong correlation between EQ, growth mindset, and improved patient outcomes.

A Long-Term Vision for Healthcare

For MCHC, emotional intelligence is not a trend. It’s a strategic capability that addresses systemic challenges and enables people to focus on what matters most: caring for patients.

“EQ helps us address systemic issues, so we can truly focus on taking care of people,” Joaquin said.

Reflecting on the journey, he summarized the partnership simply:

“ TalentSmartEQ is helping us transform healthcare. Period.”

— Joaquin Blanco, Director of People and Culture