

ORANGE COUNTY BUSINESS JOURNAL



OC politicians and executives at the groundbreaking of the Irvine Health and Wellness Campus

Be Well OC Breaks Ground On Campus in Great Park

Names Health Veteran Franks as New CEO

The past month has been a busy one for Be Well OC, the public-private partnership between the County of Orange, hospitals and nonprofits that is tackling mental health issues.

It broke ground on its Irvine Health and Wellness Campus on Oct. 16 in Irvine's Great Park, which will ultimately hold 150 beds, including a unit for adolescents.

"The goal of Be Well OC is to vastly improve the mental health of every resident of Orange County, regardless of ability to pay," Dr. Richard Afable, Be Well OC board chair, told the Business Journal.

"The groundbreaking was another momentous occasion."

A week later, Be Well OC announced Huntington Beach resident Phillip Franks as chief executive.

Franks most recently served as the CEO of OC Specialty Health & Hospitals, where he led two new hospital projects: both Anaheim Community Hospital, a 98-bed General Acute Care Hospital and Outpatient Surgery Center, and Aliso Ridge Behavioral Health, a 119-bed Acute Psychiatric Hospital in Aliso Viejo, opened their doors in 2022.

Prior to his work in Orange County, Franks served as chief operating officer of the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services, the second-largest municipal health system in the nation. He also spent 18 years in the U.S. Army, rising to become chief administrative officer of the 40th Infantry Division.

"He's going to do a great job," Afable said. "He knows Orange County. He's very well suited for the next phase."

Phased Build-Out

The Irvine campus is on 22 acres that were decided to the County of Orange as part of the closure in the 1990s of Marine Corps Air Station El Toro.

The campus will be developed in three phases, beginning with Area 1 that includes approximately 75,000 square feet of building space to house adult services such as crisis stabilization mental health urgent care, a sobering center and residential and outpatient programs. The first phase is estimated to cost \$86 million.

Area 2 is planned for child, youth and perinatal specialty programming, expanding both

residential and outpatient services capacity while supporting an entire family.

Area 3 will expand opportunities for community connections by providing space for educational programs, community meetings and youth and senior centers.

Beginnings

Be Well OC's beginnings date to 2015 when Board of Supervisors Vice Chairman Andrew Do and then Supervisor Lisa Bartlett formed the county's first-ever Mental Health Ad Hoc Committee. That group led to the creation of the first Be Well OC campus in Orange, which opened in 2021 with 92 beds.

"We are caring for 300 people a month who would otherwise be receiving care and service in hospital emergency rooms or jails," Afable said.

Be Well OC also provides services in eight cities, arriving when a 911 call for help that isn't criminal, medical or fire. Its blue vans provide about 3,000 responses a month.

Clear Need

Be Well has won a variety of funding, including \$40 million for the construction of the campus from the Orange County Board of Supervisors. In addition, it received \$15 million from CalOptima Health and \$37.6 million from the state of California. It's also received investments from MemorialCare, Hoag and Kaiser Permanente.

The need to treat mental health is clear, Afable said, saying about 1 in 5 people are affected with symptoms that range from anxiety to substance abuse to schizophrenia.

Afable noted Be Well OC brings together public, private, academic and faith-based organizations to create a coordinated system to treat mental health.

"We are an example for the state on how a community can come together and address this issue," Afable said. ■

Be Well OC



- BUSINESS: treats mental health issues
- HEADQUARTERS: Orange
- CHAIR: Dr. Richard Afable
- CEO: Phillip Franks
- EMPLOYEES: 89
- NOTABLE: breaks ground on new facility in Irvine, names new CEO