

PRACTICE PAPER

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# Eisner Health's Journey Through Implementing Trauma-Informed Care

How one organization reduced escalations, supported staff wellness, and improved the patient experience by integrating trauma-informed care

**BY LORI CHELIUS, MBA/MPH**

Co-Founder of Origins Training & Consulting

with contributions by

**ANDI FETZNER, PSYD**

Trauma-Informed Care Coordinator at Eisner Health and Co-Founder of Origins Training & Consulting

**DEBORAH LERNER, MD**

Chief Medical Officer at Eisner Health



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*“When we take care of ourselves, that’s when we can provide the best care for others.”*

- Eisner Health team member

When Eisner Health, a Federally Qualified Health Center (FQHC) in Southern California, began to integrate trauma-informed care (TIC) into its practices, the organization’s primary goal was to reduce the number of escalations among staff and with patients. Members of the team didn’t realize the profound impact a trauma-informed approach would have on their culture, the patient experience, and their personal lives as well.

**Trauma-informed care** includes awareness of the prevalence of trauma and adversity (including early adversity) and understanding of the impacts of trauma on physical, emotional, and mental health. Its principles help support a strengths-based and nonjudgmental approach to toxic stress risk assessment and intervention, and to prevent inadvertent retraumatization of patients and vicarious traumatization of service providers.<sup>1</sup>

Intrigued by TIC’s principles and promising benefits, Eisner Health secured funding to implement this approach within the organization and **began the planning process**. Through a series of surveys, training sessions, planning initiatives, clinic-

by-clinic rollouts, **long-term supports, and organizational changes**, Eisner Health’s team has begun transforming not only its patient care, but also its culture.

Along the way, Eisner Health leveraged several **facilitators** that propelled its success, experienced complex **challenges**, and learned invaluable **lessons and best practices** that it uses to guide ongoing implementation and share knowledge with others. Some of the top lessons learned include:

### **RECOGNIZE TIC AS A CRITICAL FOUNDATION FOR IMPLEMENTING ACE SCREENING**

If your organization is implementing ACE screening, pair it with TIC to support long-term sustainability and work toward achieving an even greater impact.

### **KNOW YOUR “WHY” BEFORE BEGINNING**

Defining the high-level vision or purpose Eisner Health was trying to achieve kept everyone focused on a shared goal and laid a strong foundation for long-term sustainability.

<sup>1</sup> Bhusan D, Kotz K, McCall J, Wirtz S, Gilgoff R, Dube SR, Powers C, Olson-Morgan J, Galeste M, Patterson K, Harris L, Mills A, Bethell C, Burke Harris N, Office of the California Surgeon General. *Roadmap for Resilience: The California Surgeon General’s Report on Adverse Childhood Experiences, Toxic Stress, and Health*. Office of the California Surgeon General, 2020. DOI: [10.48019/PEAM8812](https://doi.org/10.48019/PEAM8812).

### **ROOT TIC IN ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

Eisner Health navigated its TIC implementation as a long-term, cultural initiative, not a one-time or standalone project. This helped facilitate buy-in, make the integration smoother, and achieve long-lasting results.

### **FOCUS INWARD FIRST**

As Eisner Health implemented TIC, it prioritized looking inward first, with a specific focus on supporting staff resilience as the foundation for improving the patient experience. This approach helped the team make a greater impact both internally and externally.

### **CREATE A COMMON LANGUAGE**

Across departments, Eisner Health established a consistent definition and language for TIC, stress management, and resilience. This shared understanding was a critical step in building empathy, shifting the organization's culture to acknowledge that team members bring their whole selves to work, and laying a foundation to focus on staff wellness.

### **INCORPORATE THE VOICE OF PATIENTS AND STAFF WHEN DESIGNING SOLUTIONS**

Including patients on implementation teams and getting input from staff about their needs helped all parties feel heard and ensured that the solutions designed would be truly effective.

**These best practices** and others led to powerful results at Eisner Health. In addition to reducing the number of complaints and incidents (such as escalations to a supervisor and calls to security), employees say they feel safer, more supported, and more empowered to manage stressful situations within themselves, with other team members, and with patients. With more knowledge and tools at its disposal, Eisner Health has created a better experience for staff and patients alike.

While Eisner Health customized its approach, many of its strategies and lessons learned are universal and can be applied by any organization in any sector.

Here is Eisner Health's story, along with its team's practical recommendations for others navigating their own TIC journey.