



Creating Safe Health Care Environments for Patients and Staff

People with histories of trauma may feel unsafe in unfamiliar environments, leading to anxiety and stress. Minor changes to a provider and/or health care organization's physical, social, and emotional environments can improve patients' feelings of safety, and create an atmosphere that reduces the likelihood of re-traumatization.

At the [Stephen & Sandra Sheller 11th Street Family Health Services](#) in Philadelphia, for example, bright colors and artwork — many created by members of the community — can be found throughout the facility. At the [University of California, San Francisco's Women's HIV Program](#), staff and patients are encouraged to mix and mingle at a breakfast buffet hosted periodically in an open conference room. [Montefiore Medical Group](#) in The Bronx encourages its outpatient practices to control noise levels in waiting rooms, consider playing soothing music for those waiting to see a provider, and to avoid playing news stations on waiting room televisions that might create stress for patients. These are all examples of how modest investments can create a more welcoming tone for both patients and staff.

Below are additional recommendations:

Physical Environment 	Social and Emotional Environment 
✓ Keep parking lots, common areas, bathrooms, and entrances/exits well lit	✓ Train all clinical and non-clinical staff to effectively communicate with patients
✓ Decorate with warm colors and artwork and create spaces for staff to relax	✓ Encourage frontline staff, including front desk staff and security guards to greet patients in a warm and welcoming manner
✓ Ensure security guards are readily available in settings where necessary, and consider stationing them at building entrances and exits to monitor the flow of traffic in and out of the building	✓ Understand how an individual's culture affects how they perceive trauma, safety, and privacy
✓ Keep noise levels in waiting rooms low	✓ Send medical forms that require patients to provide sensitive information ahead of time
✓ Use positive and welcoming language on waiting room signage	✓ Ask patients whether they are comfortable with having the door shut during exams or meetings
✓ Ensure people are not allowed to loiter or congregate outside entrances/exits	✓ Keep consistent schedules and offer sufficient notice and preparation when changes are necessary

Learn More

This fact sheet is a product of *Advancing Trauma-Informed Care*, a national initiative focused on better understanding how trauma-informed approaches can be practically implemented across the health care sector, made possible by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and led by the Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS). For more information, visit CHCS' *Trauma-Informed Care Implementation Resource Center* at TraumaInformedCare.chcs.org.