



Photos: Solar panels and batteries: PPCCC; all other photos: Adobe Stock

SOLAR FOR NONPROFITS

Planned Parenthood affiliate invests in the future with clean, resilient solar power

Thanks to solar power with battery backup, Planned Parenthood of California Central Coast can keep its doors open during increasingly frequent climate disasters.

By any measure, these are challenging times to manage a Planned Parenthood affiliate. New legal restrictions are emerging from statehouses and the courts. Protests outside clinics increasingly turn violent. And, for many affiliates, frequent climate disasters make it difficult to simply keep the doors open.

For Planned Parenthood of California Central Coast (PPCCC), those disasters include deadly wildfires and mudslides. “Climate-related catastrophes are impacting our ability to deliver health care,” says Jenna Tosh, President and CEO of PPCCC. “We’ve had to close our health centers for disasters and power outages or cancel appointments because our providers are stranded and can’t get to work.”

That’s a huge problem for thousands of patients who rely on PPCCC for reproductive health care. The affiliate’s six clinics log more than 58,000 patient visits each year, providing cancer screening, vaccination, birth control, treatment of sexually transmitted infections, abortion care, and more. Many of PPCCC’s patients lack other options for care: 80% are people with low incomes; many are agricultural workers from surrounding farmlands.

So, when drafting a strategic plan in 2021, PPCCC’s staff included climate resilience as a goal. “We see resilience as inextricably linked to the health and wellbeing of our communities and our ability to function as a healthcare provider,” Tosh says.

New financing opportunities for solar installations are available through the Biden Administration’s Inflation Reduction Act and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund.

Cost savings and continuity of care

Tosh realized that solar power with battery backup (solar+storage) could keep its clinics operating in a disaster, while reducing their climate impact. As a first step, PPCCC partnered with Solarize Nonprofit, an initiative of the Community Environmental Council and Asteri Solar, to install solar panels at its Ventura and San Luis Obispo clinics. Under a power purchase agreement, Solarize Nonprofit installed the panels at no upfront cost to PPCCC, which then pays a fixed monthly cost for electricity. At the end of the 7-year agreement, PPCCC will own the solar panels outright, generating most of the



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clinics’ energy on site. PPCCC expects to save \$350,000 over the 25-30-year lifespan of the solar panels.

But solar panels alone would not make the clinics resilient. Tied to the larger grid, the panels would not supply power in an outage. That meant that even a brief loss of power could make electronic records inaccessible and destroy the clinics’ vaccine supply. More ominously, the clinics’ security systems would not work without power – putting patients and staff at risk. So, in 2023, Andrew MacCalla, CEO of Collective Energy, recommended a battery energy storage system.

MacCalla started Collective Energy after years of working with Direct Relief, a humanitarian aid group. In that role, MacCalla saw what happens to health facilities – and their patients – when the grid goes down.

“One of the first solar+storage projects I worked on was for Profamilias, a women’s health and family planning provider in Puerto Rico that had lost power after Hurricane Maria,” MacCalla says. “It was one of few places to access affordable reproductive health care on the island. I realized then how critical it was for these facilities to remain consistently powered, not just in Puerto Rico but across the U.S.”

With funding from Direct Relief, Swell Energy helped PPCCC install a battery backup at its Ventura health center; another at San Luis Obispo will soon come online. While the Ventura center’s battery has not yet been tested in a disaster, other clinics have lost power and relied on Ventura for access to electronic records. And plans are underway for solar+storage at PPCCC’s Santa Barbara and Oxnard facilities.

Challenges and lessons learned

PPCCC’s plan to install solar+storage at all of its health centers has hit some snags. For example, its center in Thousand Oaks is too shaded for solar panels. There have also been significant delays due to supply-chain problems and permitting processes. “Patience is necessary,” says Yolanda Robles, PPCCC’s chief operating officer. “We look at this as a long-term game. We’ve been

working on these initiatives for four years, and we still have some time to go to get where we want to be with all of our facilities.”

Robles is grateful for the partnerships with Solarize Nonprofit, Collective Energy, and other vendors that helped PPCCC navigate a complex and challenging process. “For any nonprofit, partnerships are critical,” Robles says. “This process would be overwhelming otherwise.”

For Tosh, the challenges are worth it when she considers the future of PPCCC and the people it serves. “Most of our patients are between the ages of 18 and 30,” she says. “They are a generation that will be uniquely impacted by climate change. So, we feel it is important as an organization to keep their future and their health at the center of our planning.”

AT A GLANCE

Ventura facility

- 24.48 kW of solar
- Rooftop mounted
- Developer: Asteri Solar LLC
- Solar financing: Energy Services Agreement
- Price: .275 per kWh, escalating 3.5% annually
- 4 Tesla Powerwall batteries, funded by Direct Relief grant

San Luis Obispo facility

- 23.2 kW of solar
- Rooftop mounted
- Developer: Asteri Solar LLC
- Solar financing: Energy Services Agreement
- Price: .235 per kWh, escalating 3% annually
- 3 Tesla Powerwall batteries, funded by Direct Relief grant



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