
MODELS FOR PRACTICE FOCUS AREA: ACCESS (INSURANCE)

Program Name: CHOICE Regional Health Network Regional Access

Location: Olympia, Washington

Problem Addressed: Access to Insurance

Healthy People 2010 Objective: 1-4, 1-5

Web Address: <http://www.choicenet.org>

SNAPSHOT

The mission of the CHOICE Regional Health Network, a nonprofit consortium of rural and urban providers, is to “improve the health of our community.” That “community” represents five counties in central western Washington State, with four being rural counties.

RAP improves access to primary care and other medical services by connecting eligible residents to a medical home and providing guidance on available sources of health insurance.

The Regional Access Program (RAP) serves the uninsured and underinsured at or below the 250 percent federal poverty level in the five county service areas. RAP improves access to primary care and other medical services by connecting eligible residents to a medical home and providing guidance on available sources of health insurance.

THE MODEL

Blueprint: CHOICE Regional Health Network Regional Access Program was created in 1996 to provide intensive outreach to low-income individuals and families. Access coordinators partner with schools, providers, daycare providers, state agencies, hospitals, and other community-based organizations to reach children and adults who are without health insurance.

Access coordinators meet individually with clients to explain the various programs for which they are eligible, help them complete the necessary paperwork, and serve as advocates. In 2002, CHOICE helped enroll more than 3,000 people in public insurance. Since the program began, CHOICE has assisted more than 14,000 people in the region to access needed health care services.

The services provided by RAP include:

- outreach to community-based organizations;
- provide a toll-free phone number that connects to a person who prescreens and schedules appointments;

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- provide application assistance to complete necessary paperwork and provide follow-up; offer Spanish translation and interpretive services through a toll-free, dedicated Spanish phone line and through four bilingual staff;
 - perform enrollment case management when appropriate;
 - serve as a liaison between state agencies and clients to facilitate enrollment or to resolve problems;
 - educate consumers by explaining benefits and helping clients choose an affordable health plan and primary care physician;
 - connect residents to available social services and programs for which they may be eligible;
 - produce and distribute marketing materials to reach the target population; and
 - provide information to consumers about being informed and responsible health care users, with a focus on primary care.

Making a Difference: The program conducts annual surveys of providers and patients to assess the effectiveness of the program. The impacts of the program for 2001 include:

- reduced the number of uninsured in the region by 3,331;
- decreased the insurance disenrollment rate of CHOICE clients from 30 percent to 10 percent;
- saved the providers in the region \$4.5 million in uncompensated care; and
- reduced hospital bad debt and charity care by 14 percent.

Beginnings: The CHOICE Regional Health Network is a nonprofit consortium begun in 1996. Network membership includes public and non-profit hospitals, local health departments, family practice residency programs, practitioners, schools, and community members.

The CHOICE Regional Health Network takes on new and/or expands existing programs based on an assessment of factors that reflect their mission and vision. The questions asked as criteria for program selection for the Regional Access Program are:

- Does this initiative make sense regionally?
- Is the problem important and in the long-term interests of the community?
- Does it address a coordination, quality, access, or health status objective?

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- Is it a step toward better distribution of health resources?
 - Is it a prudent investment in a cost-conscious market?

Challenges and Solutions: To address social and cultural issues, case management services were created to connect people to other needed services (e.g., food). Bilingual staff were hired to address language and cultural issues. Special materials were developed to assist clients from other cultures to understand the concepts of insurance, medical home, and managed care. Recently, CHOICE partnered with the Crisis Clinic to manage an Internet-based Regional Resource Directory.

Ongoing funding for the network comes from membership dues that are paid by the six public and non-profit hospitals (member sponsors). This funding is supplemented with state contracts and grants. For example, the Statewide Health Insurance Benefit Advisor (SHIBA) Program was folded into the RAP program. Savings from reductions in uncompensated care are reinvested back into the program. In 2001, the program received a Community Access Program (CAP) grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. Expanded funding over the last five years allows the program to increase its service population, adding children, the underinsured, and additional counties (from one to five).

PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION

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