

A Blueprint for Change

Since 1998, Community Voices: HealthCare for the Underserved Initiative has been laying a foundation for change by example. Building from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's decades of work at the community level, the Initiative gives the underserved a voice to help make health care access and quality part of the national debate.

The need to tell this story of change has never been greater. Two recent reports by the Institute of Medicine paint a vivid picture of the urgent need to create new and better ways of providing health. The health gap between people of color and whites has persisted, and, in some cases, increased. Now, the Institute of Medicine reports that more than 18,000 adults in our country die each year because they are uninsured and can't access proper coverage. Community Voices points the way for improvement.

Working in communities with some of the highest poverty rates and some of the most limited access to health care, Community Voices is constructing a structure for change. Here are some areas of focus:

- **Mental Health:** For most Americans, mental health services fall outside of the health care system. Community Voices has been building bridges to not only include mental health services in its 13 communities but to show policy makers that it can be done. In May 2001, Senator Pete V. Domenici (R-N.M.) saw first hand the work of the Kellogg Foundation at the University of New Mexico in how mental health services are being integrated into a cost-effective system of primary care. Less than one year later, Sen. Domenici returned to that same location with President George W. Bush to urge national action.
- **Oral Health:** From the start of the initiative, the 13 Community Voices sites have worked to fill the gap that too often separates people from needed dental care. Community Voices sites have worked on many fronts to eliminate oral health disparities. Efforts include recruiting dentists to work in the rural areas and low-income neighborhoods; opening full service clinics with primary care providers specially trained to recognize oral health concerns of their patients and refer those in need to qualified dentists; and advocating for the re-establishment of an Oral Health Bureau.
- **Men's Health:** Men of color suffer preventable diseases and die in numbers disproportionate to the rest

of the population. For too long this issue has been ignored. As a result of listening to the voices of the community, action has been taken. The nation's first men's health center was opened in Baltimore in 2000 and has served more than 6,000 men since it opened its doors and this number grows by the day. The site is actively involved in informing the policy process so that understanding this need is not isolated to one clinic. Beyond urban centers like Washington, DC, Detroit and Miami, awareness of men's health is also beginning to take hold in some unlikely settings. Indian health clinics in rural California are starting to examine the cultural notions of care that are attached to men in the community.

- **Substance Abuse:** Substance abuse treatment remains a patchwork of local policies. The 13 communities are working to build comprehensive programs to weave this fragmented approach into a larger quilt that covers more people. Through collaboration with the American Legacy Foundation, smoking cessation programs are helping people in places and populations previously targeted only by tobacco companies and their marketing techniques.

Building a healthy community also requires looking beyond just the health care system. Community Voices have addressed environmental health issues, like an intensive outreach campaign to reduce asthma. Some sites have improved transportation to health services and increased home ownership opportunities through a special cooperative mortgage program have made the dream of owning a home a reality.

Community Voices outreach workers work tirelessly to reach those who are hardest to reach. Sites organized teams of community members to better inform target populations about services available through the local health department. Other Community Voices sites collaborate with appropriate organizations to train men and women working among the immigrant communities to connect entire families to needed services.

This work and the knowledge gained are focusing on building lasting change. Community Voices is increasing the number of people who have a connection and relationship to the health system. Innovative programs are filling a void left by the private insurance market place. Here are some of the milestones that demonstrate how Community Voices' work has

increased access and strengthened the services-delivery system:

- Over 93 percent of all eligible children in West Virginia—20,088—are enrolled in the Children's Health Insurance Program. This highest in the nation number resulted from strong Community Voices outreach and work to streamline the application and enrollment process.
- More than 7,000 people are enrolled in the El Paso Community Voices Primary Health Plan.
- Almost seven out of ten Indian children in California who are part of the state's Healthy Families Program are enrolled through the Turtle/California Rural Indian Health Board program of Community Voices.
- More than 11,000 people in Northern Manhattan, New York have been enrolled in care programs. This includes more than 3,600 families who received disaster relief after September 11, 2001.
- In Alameda County, California, more than 7,100 residents now have health coverage through the Alameda Alliance for Health's Family Care, a subsidized managed care health coverage product for families, including undocumented immigrants. By including the safety net providers in the Alliance's network, the product is more effective for the most vulnerable populations.
- In Ingham County, Michigan, over 16,000 people are enrolled in Ingham Health Plan, gaining access to primary care and specialist physician services, laboratory, x-ray and pharmacy services.
- The Voices of Detroit Initiative's (VODI) service delivery system has directed more than 16,000 patients to primary care services, including oral health, mental health, and substance abuse services. The VODI network brings patients to the health care system through its' 18 enrollment sites.
- In Denver, from 1999 to 2001, the number of health plan beneficiaries has increased almost 60 percent to more than 87,000 people.
- A case management program in North Carolina has saved over \$3.4 million in just two years by focusing on patient needs and through new technologies that streamline management.

- The number of dentists serving underserved communities in New Mexico rose from one in 1999 to nine in 2001.

- In rural North Carolina, three new dental care centers have helped more than 8,100 children receive cost-effective care.

- In Miami, the Miami Action Plan for Access to Health Care was developed to provide the framework for an integrated health care delivery system that will address health care barriers.

There are challenges remaining with 41 million people left without any health coverage and millions more with inadequate care. This is especially confounding when a Community Voices survey showed 79 percent of Americans see health care as a right. Substantial increases in health insurance premiums have more people examining what's wrong with the system and searching for a new vision of how to increase

access, tame rising costs, and protect what is working.

Community Voices has a different story to tell. It is a story based on the reality that too many people are left out of the health care system; but it is also a story of progress and solutions. By showcasing the innovative methods 13 communities have constructed to improve access and increase the quality of care and prevention, this initiative will have distinction in the marketplace of ideas on how to improve health care. It is the plan of progress people want to see.

These 13 sites encompass dozens of organizations and health systems, hundreds of community participants, and thousands of people who have been brought into the health care system. Working both individually and as a network, each Community Voices site continues to build on and extend our understanding about community investments that produce measurable results. Community Voices has established models of best practices and is presenting the country with a blueprint for change.

COMMUNITY VOICES SITES:

Alameda County/Oakland, CA
Albuquerque, NM
Baltimore, MD
Denver, CO
Detroit, MI
El Paso, TX
Lansing/Ingham County, MI
Miami, FL
North Carolina
(select rural counties)
Northern Manhattan, NY
Sacramento, CA
(California Rural Indian Health Board)
Washington, DC
West Virginia



www.wkcf.org

One Michigan Ave. East
Battle Creek, MI
49017-4058
USA
269-968-1611
TDD on site
Telex: 4953028
Facsimile: 269-968-0413

For more information, visit our web site at:

www.communityvoices.org