

# Community Voices

Healthcare for the Underserved

# Who We Are



# Community Voices

*Community Voices: Health Care for the Underserved* is a group of community-based demonstration projects dedicated to finding real-life ways to provide greater access to quality health care to the underserved and uninsured people in America.

We believe practical examples that reach real people where they live, work, and seek health care services are better guides for policy-makers than untested solutions. With eight “learning laboratories” (Albuquerque, NM; Baltimore, MD; Denver, CO; Lansing, MI; Miami, FL; New York, NY; Oakland, CA; Pinehurst, NC), we are an innovative agent of change based on real-life demonstrations of what does and doesn’t work.

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## The Challenge

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According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 43 million people living in America were uninsured in 2002, up from 41 million people in 2001. Nearly a third of the 34 million people living in poverty that year had no health insurance. That same year was the second consecutive increase in the number of uninsured and underinsured.

Simply put, our current system of care does not adequately serve the poor, even when they are employed, and quality care is being seen as a privilege rather than as a right.

This must change. The underserved in our communities must have access to care, and we have initiated special programs in outreach, care management and collaborative development to help all of us think about ending the inequity in the system.

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## The Program

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In 1998, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation helped launch *Community Voices* as a pilot program to create greater health care access at the local level and give the underserved a louder “voice” in the national debate on health care access. In 2003, the National Center for Primary Care at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta became the group’s program office.

Our *Community Voices* sites are based in areas that are home to some of our nation’s most underserved populations, such as immigrants and the homeless. Each area faces its own unique issues and considerations, as well as insurance and health care issues that impact other cities throughout the country. The settings are different, but the goals are the same – to increase enrollment of eligible people into public programs and to improve health care access and quality for the underserved by providing models for change and improvement.

Program outcomes must include a greater focus on primary care and prevention, preservation and strengthening of the community health care safety net, implementation of a stronger health care delivery system, and development of best practices for communities to adapt to unique circumstances.

It is not enough to implement programs without establishing a framework for how they operate, an evaluation process, and methods to document those findings so that adjustments can be made. We continue to develop new ways to measure, define and replicate success at all our sites.

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## Accomplishments

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The innovative concepts designed by *Community Voices* are making in-roads to creating a policy blueprint for the nation to customize quality healthcare services for all, despite the challenges facing healthcare safety net providers, such as shrinking budgets, rising costs and bureaucratic red tape. Community Voices programs are impacting the policy debate within their states:

### **Northern Manhattan Community Voices – New York, New York**

Serving Harlem and the Washington Heights-Inwood communities, Northern Manhattan Communities Voices is virtually next door to some of the best medical facilities in the nation, yet such facilities are often out of reach to the residents of these communities. By building bridges between the healthcare providers and the medically underserved population, we link them to available resources and establish and strengthen programs that address the needs of the whole community.

### **New Mexico Community Voices – Albuquerque, New Mexico**

Too often, oral health is overlooked as a major factor in the overall health of an individual. In New Mexico, we have gone from virtually no public health dentists to a system of care across the state with an institution devoted to oral health study and services at a major state university. New Mexico now has a sustainable system of oral health care that is a model for systems reform.

### **Ingham Community Voices – Lansing, Michigan**

One of the most innovative programs to bring care to low-income uninsured is the Ingham Health Plan, which has enrolled more than 30,000 people and successfully halved the number of uninsured in the area, providing them with primary and special care services. The IHP demonstrates that county government can be a catalyst for expanding community access.

### **FirstHealth Community Voices – Pinehurst, North Carolina**

FirstHealth developed FirstPlan, an innovative health coverage product line aimed at helping businesses with 50 or fewer employees provide affordable health coverage. The plan offers a premium subsidy for low wage employees to increase employee participation and incentive discounts for the employer. FirstPlan received an enthusiastic response from small businesses and is a sustainable strategy for reducing the number of working uninsured.

### **Community Voices Miami – Miami, Florida**

Community Voices Miami, based in the Collins Center for Public Policy, complements its focus on policy reform with applied grassroots programming. The Overtown Grassroots Men's Health Team brings together residents from the distressed neighborhood north of downtown Miami and researchers from the Collins Center. Together they designed "Healthy Men Healing Overtown," a program that responds to the local men's health crisis by providing basic health care, healthy lifestyle coaching, advocacy training, and family education about the importance of men's health.

Learning from locally-developed models is the key to developing state and national policies for health care reform. To publicize these local developments, we have created more than two dozen policy briefs, available at our website. They include the following:

- *Community Health Workers and Community Voices: Promoting Good Health*
- *The Big Cavity: Decreasing Enrollment of Minorities in Dental Schools*
- *Too Few Options: The Insurance Status of Widowed or Divorced Older Women*
- *A Poor Man's Plight: Uncovering the Disparity in Men's Health*
- *Forgotten Policy: An Examination of Mental Health in the U.S.*

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## New Areas of Focus

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**Community Outreach Using Frontline Workers** – Building off the success of community health workers connecting with people in Denver’s Latino, African-American, and Native-American communities, Denver Health Community Voices is joining with the Community College of Denver and the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development to develop training and certification programs for community health workers.

**Improving Access to Care for Men, Especially Poor Men, Men of Color, and Men Returning from Incarceration** – Community Voices Baltimore’s Men’s Health Center is the nation’s first full-time, full-service primary care facility for uninsured men, encouraging men to take charge of their health. Similarly, Community Voices Miami has expanded its basic health care services for men to include lifestyle coaching, advocacy training, and family health education.

**Case/Care Management to Link People with Providers and Services** – Northern Manhattan Community Voices builds bridges between health care providers and the medically underserved in the Harlem and Washington Heights-Inwood communities with links to available resources and establishing programs to address their health care needs.

**Improving Adult Access to Oral Health** – Too often, oral health is overlooked as a major factor in the overall health of an individual. New Mexico Community Voices took a statewide health care system that included no oral supported health care and implemented a sustainable system to provide oral care and other overlooked health services.

**Mental Health Treatment** – Advances in treatment and counseling for mental health, including substance abuse, have been outstanding. As part of a four-tiered approach to promoting access to high-quality, culturally and linguistically appropriate health care to immigrant communities, Community Voices Oakland is developing a holistic model of care that includes mental and oral health, as well as education, case management and interpreter services.

*Please contact us for more information and to request copies of our research reports:*

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