

PROJECT ACCESS-NEW HAVEN

Project Access-New Haven (PA-NH) is a coordinated system of physicians, hospitals, and community organizations working together to provide donated specialty health care for low-income, uninsured individuals.

In the summer of 2008, a group of dedicated physicians aimed to identify the major health concerns within the New Haven community. Discussions with representatives from community health centers, non-profit agencies and community leaders highlighted three common areas of concern:

- (1) growing number of uninsured in the Black, Latino and immigrant communities
- (2) shortage of specialty physicians who will see uninsured patients
- (3) lack of care coordination disproportionately affecting individuals from cultural minority groups and those with low health literacy.

To address these health inequities, efforts were initiated to bring a grass-roots, non-profit organization called Project Access to New Haven. Project Access has proven to be successful in more than 50 American cities. The primary goals of PA-NH are to:

- (1) increase access to specialty care
- (2) reduce health inequities
- (3) provide coordination of services across the continuum of care
- (4) collect and report data on care utilization and associated costs
- (5) leverage the Project Access model for other health systems

At the core of the program are patient care coordinators helping patients navigate the healthcare system. Volunteer specialty physicians donate care while hospitals provide free ancillary and hospital-based services.

Through referrals from primary care physicians, community clinics, and hospital emergency rooms, qualifying patients without insurance will meet with a care coordinator to receive timely appointments with volunteer specialty physicians participating in PA-NH. Care coordinators will assess health literacy levels, and will provide linguistically appropriate and culturally sensitive care management. All patients will receive assistance to apply for health-related services.

Implementation of PA-NH will bring about a significant reduction in healthcare costs, ED visits, and hospital admissions for its target population. Physician participation in the care of the uninsured will increase significantly under the Project Access model. Data will be collected and reported on patient and physician characteristics, utilization of care, cost of donated care (through collection of dummy claims), and trends in ER usage and hospital admissions. These data can be leveraged for incorporation into existing and future state and national programs.

While state and national efforts to expand insurance coverage are being discussed, the need is immediate and critical. PA-NH will provide timely and effective specialty care now. PA-NH will continue to serve as a model to increase access and availability of services, and ensure comprehensive care delivery once further health reform is realized.