

WPHCA

2024 Performance Excellence Award Nominee

## ACCESS COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS: ADVANCING POPULATION HEALTH

Access Community Health Centers' (Access) Population Health Team identified a goal in 2022 to increase colorectal cancer screening (CRC) rates by 10% over an 18-month period. COVID had significantly reduced screening rates from a pre-pandemic high of 68% down to 37%. Because Access had a previous foundation for improving CRC rates, the team knew that recommitting to and concentrating efforts to re-engage staff, providing training to new clinical staff, educating patients, conducting proactive outreach, and utilizing Cologuard® as a screening option could improve CRC rates. Access also worked with Exact Sciences to ensure that uninsured patients would be able to obtain Cologuard® at no cost.

The Population Health Team that started, oversaw, and managed the project was comprised of clinical leaders, data and informatics, patient services, and population health staff. The project included placing approximately 1,500 Cologuard® orders for patients over an 18-month period. With grant support from Exact Sciences, Access expanded their population health outreach staff to include 3.0 FTE population health specialists. Patient outreach was coordinated by Amanda Acosta, Senior Patient Services Manager and Elissa Sprecher, Community Relations Consultant and three population health staff: Tchia Thao, Sara Shawano, and Isabel Jimenez who worked to increase touchpoints with patients. Patient outreach included text messages, postcards, and phone calls in the patient's preferred language, with the goal of reducing fears and myths surrounding colorectal cancer screening. Like community health workers, the Population Health Team members share similar ethnicity, language, and life experiences as the patients served, which helps to build trust in the recommendations, informal counseling, and guidance shared by team members.

In March 2024, Colorectal Cancer Screening Month, Population Health Team members staffed education booths



at Access' Joyce & Marshall Erdman and William T. Evjue clinics. In April, they provided education and information about the importance of CRC screening at an East Madison Community Health Center health fair. In addition, the team placed posters in medical exam rooms to increase education. Access is also working with the UW Carbone Cancer Center to hold a series of focus groups for patients ages 40 to 75 to understand patients' knowledge, awareness, and perceptions of stool DNA screening tests as an option for CRC screening. Access' Latinx patients will be invited to attend the focus group this fall.

Access' investment in workforce capacity to restructure their Patient Services team to provide a population health focus helped them increase screening rates by 18% during the project period. 90% of patients who had a positive Cologuard® test and then received a colonoscopy had pre-cancerous polyps, demonstrating the importance of CRC screening. Currently, Access has the highest rate (57.3%) of colorectal cancer screening among Wisconsin Community Health Centers.

Access' "Butt Seriously" outreach campaign, which includes attending events in the community and offering content that resonates with patients in multiple languages, is motivating unreached patient populations to get screened. The boost in culturally appropriate navigational support and outreach to address CRC screening deficits will remain an organizational priority at Access with a goal of achieving a screening rate of 80% in the adult medical patient population—a goal shared by the American Cancer Society.

Access Population Health Team and staff:

- Dr. Kevin Fehr, Chief Medical Officer
- Dr. Beth Zeidler Schreiter, Chief Behavioral Health Officer
- Dan Martin, Chief Clinical Services Officer
- Julia Green, Director of Clinical Services-Medical
- Dr. Meghan Fondow, Director of Behavioral Health
- Chris Schacherer, Director of Data & Analytics
- Judy Keel, Director of Grants & Project Management
- Tracy Schwartz, Senior Clinical Information Services Consultant
- Amanda Acosta, Senior Patient Services Manager
- Elissa Sprecher, Community Relations Consultant
- Tchia Thao, Patient Services Specialist
- Sara Shawano, Patient Services
- Isabel Jimenez-Diaz, Patient Services