

WPHCA

2026 Performance Excellence Award Nominee

NorthLakes Community Health Center

IMPROVING CERVICAL CANCER SCREENINGS

NorthLakes Community Clinic (NorthLakes) implemented a cervical cancer screening improvement initiative to expand access to preventive care for patients across northern rural Wisconsin. The program is supported by the American Cancer Society and the National Football League's (NFL) Crucial Catch program, an early cancer detection and risk reduction initiative. NorthLakes used targeted outreach, patient education, workflow redesign, and quality improvement methods to reduce barriers to screening and support timely follow-up when patients need specialty care.

NorthLakes prioritized this project after identifying a concerning decline in cervical cancer screening rates, which had fallen below 50%. Because cervical cancer is preventable through routine screening and early detection, the team focused on re-engaging eligible patients, reducing access barriers, and increasing participation in this essential preventive service.

The recent availability of Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved self-collection kit for human papillomavirus (HPV) created an opportunity to expand the clinic's screening strategy. By incorporating self-collection into clinical workflows, NorthLakes offered patients greater choice, convenience, and autonomy while reaching individuals who may have faced barriers to traditional screening methods.

The team used Root Cause Analysis and Plan-Do-Study-Act quality improvement methods to strengthen cervical cancer screening workflows and implement a new HPV self-collection process. During the project period, targeted reminders and outreach reached more than 900 eligible patients. Monthly internal performance review meetings helped the team assess progress, evaluate implementation strategies, and identify opportunities for improvement. Provider assessment and feedback supported adoption of new screening processes, while clinic-based Lunch and Learn sessions trained staff on project goals, patient education resources, outreach tools, and updated workflows. These combined efforts built staff capacity, strengthened care coordination, and promoted a standardized approach to supporting patients throughout the screening process.

During the project period, NorthLakes improved its cervical cancer screening rate by 5.3%. The initiative strengthened population health, enhanced patient experience, promoted access to care, and improved preventive screening options. The adoption of HPV self-collection was especially meaningful for patients who may experience barriers to traditional screening, including limited mobility, prior trauma, medical mistrust, or discomfort with speculum exams. Offering self-collection

gave patients greater choice and helped create a more community-centered care approach to early detection and cancer prevention.

NorthLakes actively participated in monthly American Cancer Society peer learning and technical assistance calls, sharing lessons learned with grantees from across the country. In recognition of their leadership and progress, the American Cancer society selected NorthLakes to present on a national webinar in fall 2026. The NorthLakes team also collaborates with WPHCA to support statewide improvement in health measures through participation in Wisconsin Health+, the Medicare Shared Savings Accountable Care Organization (ACO), and WPHCA's learning groups. These partnerships help spread practical strategies for improving cancer screening access and health outcomes across community settings.

NorthLakes Team & Staff

- Lori Cannon, Quality Improvement & Project Manager
- Shelby Barnes, Quality Improvement & Project Coordinator
- Sarah Tarkington, Grants Specialist
- Angela Lunn, APRN and Medical Services Manager
- Clinical teams in Ashland, Iron River, Hayward, Minong, Hurley, Lakewood, White Lake, Eau Claire and Augusta