

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

The Washtenaw County Health Care Program (WCHC) and the Washtenaw Community Health Organization (WCHO), led by the Washtenaw County Public Health Department, are proposing a unique coordinated project that will improve access to and integration of primary, specialty, mental health, and substance abuse services for Washtenaw County, Michigan's low-income, uninsured population. Most recent available estimates show there are approximately 43,000 indigent persons residing in the county. Nearly one of every eleven residents lives in poverty, and an increasing number of people have moved from being on welfare to qualifying as "working poor." Historically, the low-wage jobs available to this population have not provided health benefits. A 1995 telephone survey indicated that 10 percent of Washtenaw County residents were uninsured (approximately 29,000 people, based on the 1995 population) and 24 percent of low-income persons were uninsured. In year one of the project, low-income, uninsured adults will be targeted for participation in the coordinated project, and a program will be developed that will provide an opportunity for low-income, uninsured *and* underinsured adults to participate in the project in year two and beyond.

Washtenaw's current delivery system for its uninsured population is extensive, with many health and mental health and substance abuse providers offering care. Three hospitals, the public health department, and numerous health clinics provide low- or no-cost health services to qualifying people, while many mental health and substance abuse providers deliver their services through Washtenaw's Community Health Organization (WCHO). Despite the many providers in the county, services are not well coordinated among health care providers (e.g. primary and specialty services), and among physical health and mental health and substance abuse providers (e.g., there is no tracking system to coordinate primary care, specialty care, emergency follow-up care, and mental health/substance abuse services).

The goal of the proposed project is to provide access to comprehensive *and coordinated* medical and mental health/substance abuse services to the county's low-income uninsured population. In year one of this project, low-income, uninsured adults will be targeted for (1) enrollment in the Washtenaw County Health Care Program, to provide access to comprehensive medical services; (2) coordination with the Washtenaw Community Health Organization, to provide mental health and substance abuse services that are coordinated with medical services; and (3) participation in a shared data warehouse, with a state-of-the-art quality patient tracking system designed to improve patient access, and ultimately to improve health. In year two of the project (after the grant year), low-income uninsured and *underinsured* people will be targeted for participation in these same activities through a third-share program, where a small employer, employees, and the county each contribute one-third of the cost for program participation.

The grant would support five programmatic objectives and their accompanying activities:

- Improve the quality of care provided to uninsured indigent residents by increasing the (a) integration of care across the major provider systems in the county through a shared data warehouse and (b) by monitoring results.
- Increase and improve access to specialty care by recruiting additional specialists to participate, including mental health and substance abuse providers, and by implementing a referral protocol.
- Develop a plan to create and implement a “third-share” program. A project coordinator will generate support in year one among small business owners, their employees, and their local association for third-share program participation in year two.
- Improve access to pharmaceuticals.
- Educate and enroll eligible individuals in the WCHC program to provide access to health services and improve health status.

A sixth objective, creating a Liaison Management Group (LMG), is included to formally establish a defined process and timeline for overseeing the grant activities of the collaborating partners. Those partners are the Washtenaw County Public Health Department, the WCHC, the WCHO, and Allegiance, L.L.C., a Physician-Hospital Organization that helps providers improve the quality and efficiency of health care delivery. The WCHC and WCHO each have representation on their boards and provider lists from nearly all of the health and mental health providers in the county. The partnership created through this collaborative project is a significant achievement because it will improve access to and coordination of a comprehensive range of health and mental health/substance abuse services.

Projected results from the project in year one will be:

- Improved quality of care, improved health, reduced emergency room visits and lost work days, as a result of (1) WCHC and WCHO database integration and coordination of services; and (2) quality and utilization tracking by the Allegiance Corporation. (Objective 1)
- An increased number of specialists participating in the WCHC and WCHO, resulting in greater access to health and mental health/substance services and a more evenly dispersed proportion of previously uninsured persons in each provider’s caseload. Enrollees will appropriately use specialty services. (Objective 2)
- A specific and viable Third-Share Program plan, ready to implement in the project’s second year (after the grant). Interest for the program among small business owners and their employees will be generated during the grant year. (Objective 3)

- Improved health and reductions in disease progression, as access to pharmaceuticals will be expanded. Long-term efficiencies in accessing free drugs will be initiated during the grant year. (Objective 4)
- Up to 1,700 new low-income, uninsured residents will be enrolled in the WCHC, with full access to and coordination with WCHO mental health/substance abuse services. A total of 3,000 individuals will be in enrolled in the WCHC by the end of the grant year and all will have coordinated care. (Objectives 1,5)