



INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES  
FOR POPULATIONS  
EXPERIENCING INEQUITIES

INNOVATION AWARDS IN COMMUNITY HEALTH:

# ADDRESSING INFECTIOUS DISEASE IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

PREPARED BY

CHRT





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Health staff work with patients at Triangle Area Network, a federally qualified health center, that serves communities in Beaumont and Orange, Texas. The center was one of 71 awardees to receive grant funding from the Fund for Health Equity this year. (Photo by Donnie Hedden for Direct Relief)

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Looking Ahead



FROM 2020-2022

**T**he Pfizer Foundation provided \$3 million to advance innovation in infectious disease prevention and treatment for under-resourced communities and populations and people who experience health inequity across the United States. The funding, managed by Direct Relief, supported an award program for safety-net community health centers and free and charitable clinics to launch new and expand existing programs designed to improve care for infectious disease through better policy, programs, and practices.

ABOUT THE AWARDEES:

Across the U.S., 11 community health centers and free and charitable clinics received awards to vaccinate against preventable infectious diseases; prevent and treat sexually transmitted infections (STIs); respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent local outbreaks; and address a range of other infectious diseases, including hepatitis C virus (HCV), influenza, shingles, and pertussis, among others.

The programs spanned eleven states, serving both urban and rural areas, and provided tailored care to expecting mothers, newborns, children, teens, adults, and seniors.

ABOUT THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

Over the two years of funding, the 11 participating awardees:

- » trained 2,515 healthcare workers in infection control, the benefits of immunizations
- » provided infectious disease care and vaccines to 5,781 newborns
- » screened and cared for 14,154 children
- » vaccinated 53,949 children against diphtheria, hepatitis B, pertussis, rotavirus, and other diseases
- » screened 6,160 mothers for infectious disease, including syphilis
- » vaccinated 318,558 adults against COVID-19, influenza, shingles, and pneumonia
- » provided infectious disease healthcare services to 233,299 individuals

ABOUT THE PROGRAMS:

Vaccinating individuals against preventable infectious diseases

- » Creating a culture of prevention through innovation — Grace Medical Home, Orlando, FL
- » Community-based initiative to control infectious disease — Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas, Pittsburg, KS
- » Point of distribution exercises for flu vaccines in Philadelphia — Public Health Management Corporation, Philadelphia, PA

Preventing and treating individuals with sexually transmitted infections

- » STI outreach, testing, and treatment — DAP Health, Palm Springs, CA
- » Comprehensive HIV services — Esperanza Health Centers, Chicago, IL

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and preventing local outbreaks

- » Mobile COVID-19 testing expansion — Lawndale Christian Health Center, Chicago, IL
- » Borderlands infectious disease prevention — Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Douglas, AZ

Minimizing risk and harm of disease transmission among under-resourced populations

- » Pediatrics in the park, an immunization program for children — Zufall Health Center, Dover, NJ
- » Expanding access to care — Cherokee Health Systems, Knoxville, TN
- » Infectious disease control for elders — Harbor Health Services, Mattapan, MA
- » Chronic HCV screening and treatment — Westside Family Healthcare, Wilmington, DE

WHAT WE LEARNED:

At the end of the two-year funding period, Direct Relief and The Pfizer Foundation convened representatives from all 11 health centers and clinics to discuss their programs and accomplishments, as well as the challenges they faced and the lessons they learned along the way.

Some themes and lessons were shared across multiple sites. These provide valuable guidance for health centers, funders, and policymakers alike.

Reaching and serving populations who experience inequity:

- » meet people where they are — whether in their homes or out in the community;
- » use every visit as an opportunity to educate, vaccinate, and connect patients to needed care;
- » provide and normalize culturally competent care that affirms patient identities; and
- » use creativity, and a range of communications tools, to reach patients in the digital age.

Building sustainable partnerships and programs:

- » forge and maintain strong, sustainable partnerships — the payoff is worth it;
- » when establishing new processes and procedures, plan for sustainability;
- » get support and buy-in from providers and staff — it is crucial to your success; and
- » staff burnout and turnover are pervasive problems, but there are strategies you can employ to support and retain staff.

In this report, we highlight strategies that the 11 awardees used to reach and serve members of their communities, to support and retain staff, and to build sustainable partnerships and programs.

Our goal is to offer resources to safety-net health providers involved in infectious disease care for under-resourced populations experiencing inequities and to funders and policymakers eager to learn how to best support this important work.

One of the most persistent themes shared by awardees was the **importance of being flexible and adapting to serving clients in ways and places that meet their needs.**

**Work with other organizations to expand your reach and capabilities.**

Organizations collaborated closely with community partners to bring services to the people and places where they were most needed and had the greatest potential for impact.

Thanks to organizational partners, awardees were able to provide care to patients beyond their traditional brick-and-mortar clinics, including in homeless shelters, underserved areas of the community, and even patients' own homes.

**Mobile clinics can be a useful tool for reaching a variety of patient populations.**

Four organizations used mobile clinics to reach under-resourced populations in their communities, including those in rural areas, persons experiencing homelessness, and immigrant and migrant communities. Using mobile clinics enabled these organizations to provide care to communities in locations where they felt comfortable and

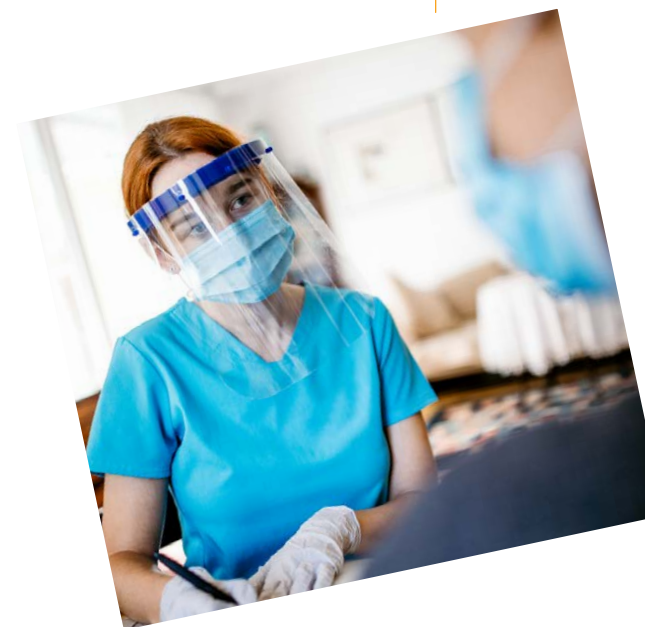
safe, while also eliminating barriers to care, such as the lack of reliable transportation and childcare.

**Awardees offered the following advice to those interested in establishing mobile clinics:**

- » **Invest in the exterior design of your mobile clinic.** Make sure it clearly communicates its purpose to patients and the public in a non-stigmatizing way. This can help increase the visibility of and lend credibility to the work that you are doing.
- » **Be consistent.** Establishing a consistent schedule of when and where your mobile clinic will be operating is crucial for building rapport.
- » **Be prepared for interruptions.** Sites ran into some challenges with their mobile clinics that interrupted service, including required maintenance and internet connectivity issues. Plan for these interruptions to minimize disruption for patients.



**1**  
**MEET PEOPLE  
WHERE THEY ARE –  
WHETHER WHERE THEY  
LIVE OR OUT IN THE  
COMMUNITY.**



**HARBOR HEALTH SERVICES**

Harbor Health Services developed a multimodal care delivery model to reduce exposure to hospital-based COVID-19 infections among medically complex older adults in Massachusetts. As part of the model, Harbor Health implemented PatientPing, a technology that allows providers to receive real-time messages about their patients. Harbor Health also partnered with a mobile integrated care company, InstED, to provide urgent medical care in the homes of enrolled older adults.

**Through this model, Harbor Health reduced unnecessary hospital admissions by 21 percent.**

### CHEROKEE HEALTH SYSTEMS

Cherokee Health Systems deployed virtual health technology and a mobile health clinic to provide infectious disease prevention, education, and care to medically under-resourced areas of Knoxville, TN. These innovations helped the organization to overcome structural barriers to care – such as inadequate transportation and time management challenges – for the health system’s unhoused patients.

**Thanks to their mobile clinic, they were able to provide 972 additional visits to uninsured and unhoused patients in Knoxville.**



### DAP HEALTH

DAP Health serves a geographical area of more than 11,000 square miles in California. Many of the health center’s patients reside in remote areas with limited access to STI services. DAP Health used a mobile clinic to provide STI education, prevention, and treatment to high-risk populations, including uninsured individuals, communities of color, immigrant and migrant communities, and members of the LGBTQ community.

**Thanks to their mobile clinic, DAP Health tested an additional 6,709 patients for STIs during the two-year award period.**

2

**USE EVERY VISIT AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO EDUCATE, VACCINATE, AND CONNECT PATIENTS TO NEEDED CARE.**

Under-resourced communities and populations who experience inequities — such as those who are unhoused, low-income, or have substance use disorders — often experience significant barriers to accessing care. Such barriers include limited access to affordable and reliable transportation and childcare, as well as paid time off, among others. **When patients take the time to engage with your clinic, try to connect them with additional resources and services they may need.**

**Integrating multiple services at a single location helps reduce barriers to care.**

Many awardees reported that their clinics, including mobile clinics, are equipped to connect patients to a range of services, including not only infectious disease care, but also primary care, behavioral healthcare, and social services.

**Have brochures, flyers, and other materials ready to share.**

This can help inform current and potential patients of the range of services that your organization offers. It can also help increase awareness of your program among community partners who may refer patients to you in the future.

**Creating multiple, low-barrier pathways to treatment makes it easier for patients to access the care they need when they are ready.**

For example, Esperanza Health Centers established a standing laboratory order policy enabling any provider or staff member to take patients to complete their pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) laboratory work when patients had time and were ready.

**Give providers and staff the information and tools they need.**

To increase vaccination rates, awardees ensured their providers and staff were aware of available vaccines. This was done through reports at staff meetings and e-mail communication. Additionally, they also created visual reminders for providers and staff to discuss vaccines with their patients.

**Identify opportunities to cross-train your staff.**

Awardees were creative in how they utilized staff to streamline the delivery of services, fill gaps in care, and limit patients' exposure to COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. For example, sites trained primary care providers to screen and treat patients for HIV and HCV. They also trained non-clinical staff on how to enroll patients in Medicaid and administer vaccines.



**ZUFALL HEALTH CENTER**

Zufall Health Center established a Pediatrics (Peds) in the Park program to increase access to pediatric immunizations among immigrant families and youth and other underserved children across seven counties in northern New Jersey. Through the use of a mobile clinic, the center minimizes barriers to care by holding events in locations that are convenient for children, youth, and their families — particularly for immigrant and migrant communities. Further, Zufall aims to provide patients who attend their Peds in the Park events with a full range of services, including vaccinations, nutrition counseling, dental exams, HIV testing, lead testing, COVID-19 testing, and more.

**Over the past two years, Zufall has hosted more than 250 events for children and families in their communities.**



“

There are already people going into homes and assessing conditions and . . . if you're delivering a prescription to your person, you might as well take a flu shot while you're at it. And so now we're . . . delivering two things at once.”

— KIMBERLY WHITAKER, VACCINE COMPLIANCE COORDINATOR, COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS



# 3

## NORMALIZE CULTURALLY COMPETENT CARE THAT AFFIRMS PATIENT IDENTITIES

Over the past two years, all awardees have implemented programs that serve vulnerable and marginalized populations – including those who are low-income, those experiencing homelessness, migrant and immigrant populations, and those who identify as LGBTQ – in their communities. Some of the programs aim to improve prevention and treatment for stigmatized conditions, such as HIV and HCV. Awardees have used the following strategies to provide culturally competent and affirming care to their patients:

**Providing culturally responsive and affirming care should be an important consideration when hiring staff.**

Awardees stressed the importance of hiring community health workers and staff with significant ties to the communities they are serving and capacity to communicate with patients in their own language.

**Culturally competent and affirming care involves understanding a patient’s priorities, needs, and concerns.**

Some strategies that organizations implemented to ensure that they understood the needs of their communities included:

- » **Getting feedback directly from current and potential patients.** Awardees surveyed and spoke with current and potential patients to understand what they saw as the biggest barriers to receiving care, to identify their concerns regarding vaccines and other forms of treatment, and to elicit suggestions for how to improve the program.
- » **Listening to those who are more familiar with the needs of the community,** such as community health workers or other community partners. Awardees empowered staff with significant community ties or relevant language capacities to inform leadership of community needs and concerns.
- » **Looking at the data.** Awardees analyzed and mapped data to identify disparities in infection rates, access to services, engagement, and service utilization. They used this information to identify locations of greatest need and areas where program adaptations may be needed to better engage and care for patients.



Our outreach community health worker supervisor was a farm worker when she first came to the states, so her ability to really see the needs of the farm worker populations that we serve is unparalleled. She’s able to have those pertinent conversations with the patients and relay that [information] back to leadership [to inform] additional services or programs that we need to take care of our community....”

—EMILY HARRIS, MANAGER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAMS,  
CHIRICAHUA COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

**Train all employees, from providers to those at the front desk.**

Awardees stressed that all providers and staff, especially those who interact with patients, should have the training and tools necessary to engage with patients in a culturally competent, affirming, and non-stigmatizing way.

**Infectious disease care is primary care.**

To provide comprehensive care to patients, prevention and treatment of infectious diseases such as HIV and HCV must be incorporated as a normal component of primary care.

**Some recommendations that awardees had to avoid making these specialized lines of service include:**

- » **Establish a presence at primary care clinics.** One site ensured the daily presence of an on-site PrEP care coordinator at their primary care clinic to connect patients to PrEP services whenever the patient was ready.
- » **Train primary care providers to offer necessary treatments and prescriptions.** Having to attend separate appointments with different providers to get care for STIs or other infectious diseases creates barriers and stigma for patients that may prevent them from seeking and adhering to treatment.

**ESPERANZA HEALTH CENTERS**

Esperanza Health Centers, located on the southwest side of Chicago, launched an initiative to provide comprehensive HIV services tailored to meet the needs of the under-resourced, majority Latinx communities in their service area. To provide culturally responsive care, they require that all staff are bilingual and make a point of hiring staff who are from or live in the communities they serve. They have also partnered with local community agencies to reduce stigma and increase awareness of HIV prevention and treatment in the community. Esperanza Health strongly believes that “PrEP care is primary care.” Over the past two years, they have trained 14 primary care providers to prescribe PrEP and integrated on-site PrEP care coordination at their primary care clinics.

**Thanks to these efforts, Esperanza Health Centers has had more than 20,000 patients consent to HIV testing, distributed more than 400 HIV self-test kits, prescribed PrEP to more than 130 patients, and provided primary HIV care to more than 60 patients.**



“

You have to listen to what your community is telling you and look at the data, marry that together and you continue to evolve with how you approach things.”

— JENN LYDIC, DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL SERVICES COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

4

**USE CREATIVITY, AND A RANGE OF COMMUNICATIONS TOOLS, TO REACH PATIENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE.**



Together...  
ENHANCING LIFE



Several Direct Relief awardees demonstrated how communication is a powerful tool to influence community members to make healthy choices and engage with programs or resources.

**Social media advertisements can spread information to a broader population.**

Three organizations created advertisements with target messaging. Advertisements shared information about programs, resources, or factual data in efforts to debunk misinformation, particularly related to vaccines. Awardees discussed placing advertisements on social media, public transportation, and other highly visible community locations. One awardee used known and trusted community members, referred to as social influencers or micro influencers, to share program details and push information out to the community via social media.

**Creatively communicating with patients creates more opportunities to connect.**

Two awardees adopted patient communication strategies that went beyond traditional patient portal systems. Creative communication strategies allow organizations to remind patients of upcoming vaccinations or encourage them to visit a clinic or provider. For example, one organization used a text messaging platform to communicate with patients who had not been in for a visit in a while. In addition, organizations emphasized the importance of having multiple ways for patients to access information, such as in person, online, and by telephone. One organization relayed the utility of maintaining a program website dedicated to describing their program, in addition to other communication channel.

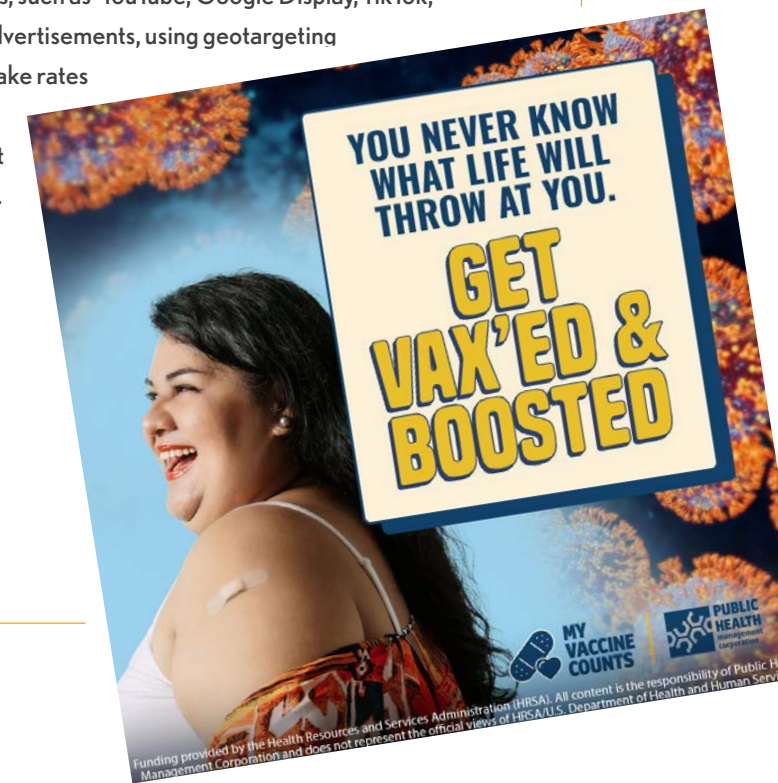
Awardees offered the following communications advice:

- » **Be specific about your target population.** Use the tools at your disposal to target populations most likely to benefit from, and engage with, your program. Google Ads provide useful data for targeting specific populations.
- » **Do not shy away from social media.** Social media continues to be an emerging way to influence change and reach patients. Work with staff or consultants who are competent and can help launch a successful campaign.
- » **Allow for change.** Be intentional about reviewing your campaign's data and willing to adapt strategies that are not working.

**PUBLIC HEALTH MANAGEMENT CORPORATION**

Public Health Management Corporation (PHMC), a group of six federally qualified health centers in Philadelphia, PA, used online advertisements to promote their **MyVaccineCounts** campaign — an educational flu vaccine campaign. The campaign launched in Pennsylvania and Delaware and was multipronged; it included flat ads advocating the importance of getting vaccinated, a toolkit for community health workers, and outreach materials, such as flyers, among other resources. PHMC consulted with an external partner to identify a strategy to advertise MyVaccineCounts online and via social media and other platforms, such as YouTube, Google Display, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and Hulu. PHMC was intentional with its advertisements, using geotargeting technology to tailor advertisements to areas with vaccination uptake rates below 50 percent. The organization described this as an iterative process — staff reviewed advertisement data, such as engagement rates, and modified their strategy based on what was working well.

**The campaign garnered over two million impressions, and their analysis showed that traffic from Google Search and Display, Snapchat, and Facebook advertisements led to the highest click rates and interactions on [myvaccinecounts.org](https://myvaccinecounts.org).**





# 5

## FORGE AND MAINTAIN STRONG, SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS. THE PAYOFF IS WORTH IT.

For many organizations, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed just how little key public health stakeholders communicated with one another, and the extent to which that lack of communication hindered their ability to meet patient and community needs. During the past two years, awardees worked to break down these siloes and establish strong, sustainable partnerships. **Some effective approaches they learned in the process include:**



**Make sure you have the right people at the table.**

**When building a committee, make sure to include:**

- » **Leadership.** A committee is most effective when key decision makers are at the table.
- » **People who engage in the day-to-day work of the initiative.** This ensures the committee is informed of the key needs and barriers facing clients, staff, and the initiative itself.

**Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Letters of Intent (LOIs) are great tools for formalizing partnerships.**

These agreements ensure a shared understanding among partners of the goals of the collaboration, as well as each partner's roles and responsibilities. By establishing an MOU or LOI, there is a clear record of this information. These documents are critical to ensuring this information is not lost due to staff turnover.

**Building a strong partnership can require considerable time investments, but the payoff is worth it.**

A lot of work goes into building and maintaining strong, sustainable partnerships. It can sometimes feel as if the time spent establishing committees, communication systems, and MOUs would be better spent on more pressing issues. In addition, some partners, particularly large organizations, and funders, seek partnerships with organizations that are highly communicative and responsive. Taking the time to build a solid foundation for partnership will enable greater efficiency and impact down the road.

**Establish sustainable systems of communication.**

**Communication is key for establishing strong partnerships. Some strategies that awardees used to build sustainable systems of communication include:**

- » **Establishing a committee with regular, standing meetings and a clear agenda.** Without a formal committee and standing meetings, sites found that communication was overly dependent on the personalities of those involved and their willingness to share information.
- » **Leverage technology to facilitate, and even automate, the exchange of information.** One awardee established a system in their electronic medical record system to automatically send updates and notifications to providers that share patients following patients consent.

**CHIRICAHUA COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS**

Chiricahua Community Health Centers is a federally qualified health center serving Cochise County, AZ. Chiricahua CHC's service area is deeply impacted by a 100-mile border with Sonora, Mexico. As early as 2016, Chiricahua CHC tried to increase communication with their counterparts in Mexico to better address the cross-border transmission of infectious diseases. However, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the need to build more formal systems of communication to strengthen their partnership and increase their impact. Using funds from this award, the organization hired an infectious disease program manager and program liaison. The center also established a binational infectious disease advisory committee that brought together hospital and health system leadership, epidemiologists, and other key stakeholders from both sides of the border to share best practices and develop coordinated strategies for addressing COVID-19, STIs, and other infectious diseases.



**The organization's approach to establishing a strong partnership and regular communication with their cross-border partners in Sonora Mexico has garnered national and international recognition.**

**LAWNDALE CHRISTIAN HEALTH CENTER**

Lawndale Christian Health Center (Lawndale) is a federally qualified health center situated in Chicago's west side. Through its partnerships with 12 homeless shelters, Lawndale's mobile health team provides shelter-based clinical care to those experiencing homelessness. This enables Lawndale to provide care in locations that are familiar and non-stigmatizing for clients, while also reducing barriers to care, such as limited access to transportation and technology, as well as low literacy. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, there was limited communication and coordination among healthcare and shelter service providers. Lawndale took a lead role in bringing together key partners from across Chicago – including the Chicago Department of Public Health, local research hospitals, and 38 shelters – to develop coordinated strategies for meeting the needs of those experiencing homelessness during the pandemic.

**Thanks to the strong relationships and lines of communication established during the pandemic, Lawndale Christian Health Center continues to collaborate with these partners to address barriers to care experienced by those experiencing homelessness in Chicago.**



6

**WHEN ESTABLISHING NEW PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES, PLAN FOR SUSTAINABILITY.**

Awardees focused considerable energy on creating sustainable foundations for their programs. They offered the following advice for others seeking to do the same:

**Before launching a program, take the time to ensure that you have the basic structures in place to ensure its success.**

There can be a lot of pressure to launch an initiative as soon as possible because you have patients that need these services. However, if you launch a program before you have the structures in place to ensure that patients have a positive experience and that the program will be sustainable, then you may be doing a disservice to your patients in the long run.

**When establishing a program, think about what you need to accomplish to lay the groundwork for future funding.**

During the two years, awardees worked to establish the systems and proof of concept needed to secure future funding. One organization used award funds

to establish standard procedures for collecting and tracking data in their electronic medical records; they have since been able to leverage this data to secure additional funders for their work. Other sites described designing their programs in ways that would allow them to engage in alternate payment models and value-based contracts.

**Integrate new responsibilities and procedures into existing workflows whenever possible.**

This will reduce the burden on providers and staff and make new procedures feel like just another part of normal care. Some strategies that awardees used to integrate new responsibilities and procedures into existing workflows include integrating screening tools into their electronic health records and incorporating training as part of new hire orientation.



With the [new] workflow, we really wanted to embed it in the things that we do on a daily basis. [The new responsibilities] are an extension [of our] routine health maintenance screenings... like offering mammograms or colonoscopies [when] patients are behind on those screenings, they can also offer HCV testing.”

— DR. KARLA TESTA, DIRECTOR OF PEDIATRICS AND SPECIAL POPULATIONS, WESTSIDE FAMILY HEALTHCARE



INNOVATIVE STRATEGIES FOR POPULATIONS EXPERIENCING INEQUITIES

**Standardization and documentation are key.**

Awardees strongly recommended implementing standardized training, workflows, and procedures to establish a standard of care. Documenting these protocols is key to reducing uncertainty about expectations and to ensuring information is not lost during staff transitions. This documentation can also serve as a useful roadmap for other sites or organizations seeking to adopt your model of care.

**Get feedback from patients and partners.**

Seeking feedback from patients and partners about your program will help identify adjustments to remove barriers that are a threat to sustainability. For example, one site reporting using feedback from patients and community partners to help streamline their patient registration process so that it imposed less of a burden on patients' time.

**WESTSIDE FAMILY HEALTHCARE**

Westside Family Healthcare, a federally qualified health center serving nearly 28,000 patients in Delaware, used award funding to expand their Chronic HCV Patient and Provider Education, Screening and Treatment in the Medical Home to all five of its health centers. In order to develop a sustainable program, they focused on establishing processes that could be integrated into existing workflows and electronic medical record infrastructure, as well as trainings and toolkits on how to provide care to HCV patients across the care continuum. As a result of these efforts, Westside Family Healthcare was able to cure 45 HCV patients.

**They also shared their trainings, didactic materials, and toolkits with other primary care practices to expand access to HCV care throughout the state.**



7

**GET SUPPORT AND BUY-IN FROM PROVIDERS AND STAFF – IT IS CRUCIAL TO YOUR SUCCESS.**

Providers and staff are the face of your initiative and securing their buy-in is crucial to its success. Here are some strategies that awardees implemented to gain the support of their providers and staff:

**Communicate the “why.”**

To gain the support of providers and staff, it is important that you take the time to clearly communicate why you are asking them to do something new or different. Sharing data and patient stories can be a useful strategy for communicating how the work they are doing is helping patients. For example, Grace Medical Home described one strategy for communicating to staff about new electronic health record (EHR) charting protocols:

**Find and support your champions.**

Finding a provider or staff member who is willing to champion the work among their colleagues is crucial. Give your champions the platform, tools, and time they need to field other providers’ questions and concerns. Make the work that they are doing visible; one strategy that sites used was to praise the work that their champions were doing during morning huddles.

**Give providers the space to be open about any questions or concerns that they have.**

Many providers have spent considerable time building rapport and trust with their patients and are hesitant to do anything that would jeopardize those relationships. It is important that you give providers the training and resources they need to feel equipped and comfortable implementing your initiative among their patients. By giving providers a platform to raise any concerns or questions, you will be able to identify and provide any needed education and resources.

**Make it as easy as possible.**

Due to increases in patient volumes, providers and staff are increasingly required to take on more responsibilities. They may be skeptical about adding something new to their plates or doing something differently. To overcome this skepticism, it is important that you make it as easy as possible for them to do what you want them to do.

**Some strategies for facilitation adoption of new protocols include:**

- » Embed new processes and procedures into existing workflows when possible.
- » Leverage technology. Multiple organizations described adding automated alerts and dropdowns to their EHR to help simplify data collection and entry. One site described working with their analytics team to integrate the data reporting requirements from different funders to create one universal reporting system in their EHR.
- » Think creatively about staffing. Consider adding new staff or rearranging staff responsibilities to help lighten providers’ loads. Some organizations described training non-clinical staff to administer screenings and vaccines.
- » Ask providers and staff for their feedback on how to simplify or streamline processes and procedures.

**Do not feel like you need to have 100 percent of your providers on board before you launch an initiative.**

If you wait for 100 percent buy-in, you may never get there — and in the meantime you are doing harm to patients who would benefit from treatment. Identify providers who are supportive of the initiative and find ways to support the patients of providers who are not yet on board.



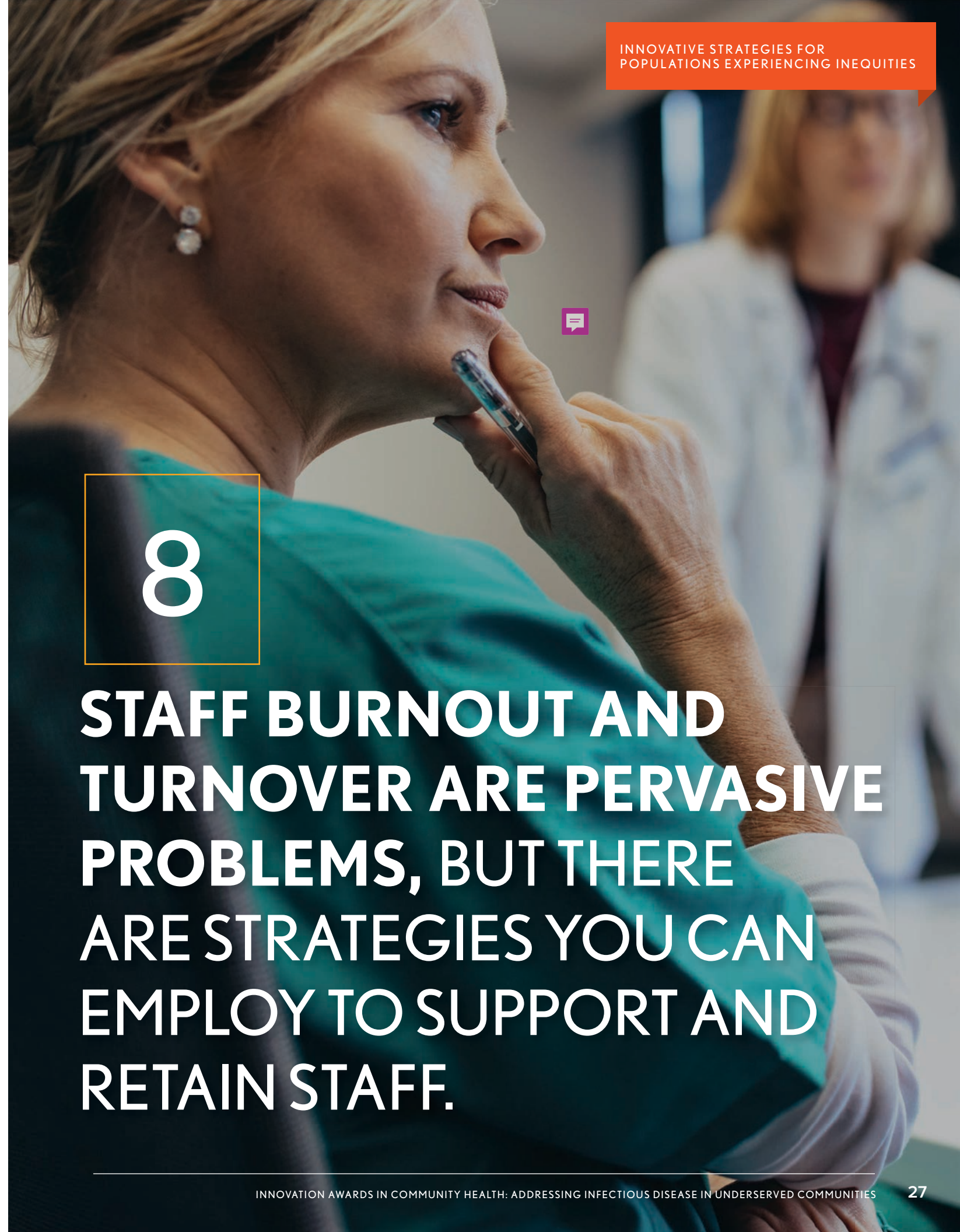
### GRACE MEDICAL HOME

Grace Medical Home is a free and charitable clinic that serves low-income and uninsured patients in Orange County, FL. Through their program, “Creating a Culture of Prevention through Immunization” the clinic seeks to increase adult vaccination rates. The clinic implemented several approaches to encourage buy-in among providers and staff, including: establishing standardized processes for EHR charting, conducting a patient survey to learn more about vaccine-related concerns and motivators, developing trainings and tools for providers to address vaccine hesitancy, and leveraging data to identify gaps in vaccine acceptance and guide decision-making. One strategy that Grace Medical Home has found particularly useful for encouraging adoption of their new protocols, particularly their new charting procedures, is to regularly share program outcomes with providers and update them on how they have been able to use the collected information.

**Thanks to these interventions, the clinic was able to increase adult vaccination rates among their patient population by twenty-six percentage points during the two-year award period.**

“One of the things we have done successfully is bringing our outcome results back to the staff at least once a year. We do a presentation where we say, ‘look, 78 percent of our patients have their diabetes controlled and we know that because of the work that [you] do.’ And then we even take [it] a step further and say, ‘and we were able to get a grant to do X, Y, Z because we could show [that success to the funders.]’”

— SARA SULLIVAN, METRICS AND EVALUATION LEAD, GRACE MEDICAL HOME



# 8

**STAFF BURNOUT AND TURNOVER ARE PERVASIVE PROBLEMS, BUT THERE ARE STRATEGIES YOU CAN EMPLOY TO SUPPORT AND RETAIN STAFF.**

Each awardee mentioned that a key strength of their organization is the passion and dedication of their providers and staff. They praised their providers and staff for their willingness to pivot, take on new responsibilities, and go beyond to meet their patients' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the pandemic has contributed to prominent levels of staff burnout and turnover, which has been a challenge for adequately staffing and sustaining programs. Admittedly, there is no magical solution to staff burnout and turnover, but some strategies were offered that have proved useful for supporting and retaining staff.

**Hire people who will be a good fit for the role.**

Hiring the right candidates is about more than just finding candidates with the right qualifications and certifications, especially for roles where you can train people on the job. When hiring staff, look for passion; people who are passionate about the community and the work that your organization is doing are more likely to stay in the role.

**Invest in good managers.**

Managers play a crucial role in supporting staff. Give managers the training, tools, and support they need to be engaged, competent, and supportive supervisors.

**Invest in your staff.**

To support and retain staff, you need to be willing to invest in them. Some strategies for investing in your staff include:

- » Carving out space in the budget to offer staff a reasonable wage.
- » Offering benefits. Awardees described a variety of benefits that their organizations offer employees, such as sabbaticals and wellness resources.
- » Supporting staff professional development. Provide staff financial support and time in their schedules to pursue additional certifications, degrees, and training. Giving employees the resources and space to grow professionally will help keep them engaged.



**Establish opportunities for staff to check in with one another about how they are feeling and what support they need.**

Some organizations established weekly check-ins, while others implemented a system for staff to signal that they were feeling overwhelmed and needed extra support.

**Be willing to say no.**

As a representative from Lawndale Christian Health Center said:

“We’re in a caring industry and we want to do all things. We want to pivot all the time. We want to serve every need... We have to prioritize. That can be challenging, but you can’t do everything. During COVID we all would’ve done a thousand more things. But there would be no health care workforce left at all if [we] said yes to everything.”

— ALYSSA SIANGHIO, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER, LAWDALE CHRISTIAN HEALTH CENTER



**COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTER OF SOUTHEAST KANSAS**

Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas developed a community-based initiative to increase awareness and affordability of, as well as access to, adult vaccines, including for influenza, pneumonia, and COVID-19. Using award funds, the center was able to create a vaccine outreach team, onboarding 7 new staff to conduct vaccine education and administer vaccines throughout their region.

**As a result of the nimbleness of their team and the partnerships that they developed, the center was able to administer more than 40,000 COVID-19 vaccines, with 6,853 COVID-19 vaccines administered prior to ever having to waste a dose.**

# LOOKING AHEAD

Through innovative approaches, tireless dedication, and compassion for their patients, the 11 awarded organizations of the *Innovation Awards in Community Health: Addressing Infectious Disease in Underserved Communities* showed the power of philanthropic investment for combatting structural barriers and increasing access to care.

Through its generous support, The Pfizer Foundation amplified the value of community-based healthcare, investing in innovative capacity building to improve policy, programs, and practices for infectious disease prevention and treatment. Through this investment, millions of people across the U.S. had better access to vaccinations, STI testing, HCV management and cure, PrEP medication, and education about immunization, among other services.

Everyday safety-net healthcare providers work tirelessly to deliver care, counseling, education, testing, and treatment and for infectious diseases to medically under-resourced communities – this work often requires them to overcome structural barriers, through combatting misinformation, navigating taboo and

stigmatized topics, and expanding care for unhoused, immigrant, migrant, and other populations. These challenges compound medically complex care for patients often diagnosed with multiple chronic conditions.

Recognizing these continued challenges, The Pfizer Foundation has renewed its philanthropic investment in this award program, committing an additional \$5 million to address vaccine preventable infectious disease for historically marginalized communities. This funding will support innovative infectious disease programs at safety-net healthcare providers in U.S. counties with the highest inequities in infectious disease care and treatment, with the second cohort of award recipients scheduled to be announced in June 2023.

Direct Relief would like to thank The Pfizer Foundation for their continued partnership and belief in and commitment to the community healthcare providers increasing quality and equitable care for patients across the country.





### CLOSING CREDITS?

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