

Indiana

Help Comes Closer To Home in Rural Indiana

Public Health Problem

Medically underserved rural populations have disproportionately higher death rates and disabling conditions and are at higher risk of suffering the consequences of untreated infectious diseases and unmanaged chronic ailments. They have little access to preventive health care such as screenings for breast, cervical, prostate, colon and skin cancers. Rural populations also have the added occupational risks of exposures to pesticides, herbicides, sun and farm accidents. Based on epidemiological data, the following were target areas of concern:

- Overuse of emergency rooms for routine care by rural residents, a costly practice.
- Prevalence of heart disease and stroke, the number one killer in Indiana. It is estimated that about half of all heart attacks and two-thirds of all stroke victims have high blood pressure.
- The ability of older adults to identify and control health conditions to ensure their independence.
- Adolescents engaging in risky behaviors and making choices that may lead to poor health.

Of Indiana's six million residents, over 862,000 lack health insurance. Many of the uninsured live in one of Indiana's 46 rural counties, which have limited access to primary health care. The residents delay seeking help for health problems because of the distance to care and the cost.

Taking Action

Effective use of nurse practitioners increases access to health care and cost savings. Studies have concluded that 80% of adult primary care services and up to 90% of pediatric primary care services could be performed by nurse practitioners. The cost of seeking care from a nurse practitioner is 40% less than that of a physician.

In 1995, Indiana decided to use the PHHS Block Grant to start solving the problem of access to healthcare in rural Indiana by supporting Nurse Managed Clinics throughout the state. The state eventually sponsored 27 clinics, with 25 still operational. The most recently funded clinics are located in Martin, Daviess, and Orange counties; which are rural counties in medically underserved areas.

The following objectives were required by the state health department for new nurse managed clinics:

- Increase the proportion of regular clinic patients with high blood pressure whose blood pressure levels are controlled to 50%.
- Increase the proportion of adolescents aged 13 through 18 who receive all screening and immunization services and at least one of the counseling services recommended by the U.S. Prevention Task Force to 50%.
- Increase the proportion of adults aged 65 and older who receive all screenings and immunization services and at least one counseling service appropriate for their age and gender as recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force to a least 40%.
- Give 100% of the patients instructions on the proper use of hospital emergency rooms.

Implications and Impact

Martin County Healthcare Clinic has a patient count of 3,189, Daviess Clinic serves 2,999, and Orange Clinic has a patient count of 3,835. Some patients discovered they were diabetic, hypertensive, had cardiac problems or had cancer. These patients, who had never been screened and were unaware that their conditions were possibly life threatening, received general services and appropriate referrals for follow-up care. Better serving Indiana's rural population through Nurse Managed Clinics and Block Grant funds has proven to be a lifesaver in the state.