

Public-Private Partnership Creates Web-based System to Improve Rural Children's Access to Health Care Through a Medical Home



Many residents of California's rural El Dorado County struggle to gain access to appropriate health care, facing barriers such as lack of insurance and a shortage of medical providers who accept public insurance. El Dorado County is a rural jurisdiction on the Nevada border, with an economy comprised mostly of its many small businesses. Its two main population centers, Placerville and South Lake Tahoe, are split by the Sierra Nevada Mountains, with Placerville located on the western foothills, and South Lake Tahoe on the eastern slope. To help these residents of the topographically divided area get the care they need, a group of public and private agencies came together to form Access El Dorado (ACCEL), a partnership dedicated to improving access to and quality of health care in the community. ACCEL consists of 12 partner organizations, including government agencies, community and rural health centers, a federally qualified health center, a tribal clinic, private physician practices, and two hospitals.

ACCEL developed a set of ongoing initiatives based on the Care Pathways model, which uses community health workers (CHWs) to help guide individuals through an often complex health care bureaucracy and connect them to the care they need. Each "pathway" consists of steps to overcome a particular access-related problem. For example, the "Obtaining a Medical Home" (OMH) pathway helps link children who visit emergency departments to a medical home by finding a primary care provider (PCP) who accepts their insurance. Other ACCEL Care Pathways initiatives include efforts to:

- Help parents obtain insurance for their uninsured children.
- Review clients' eligibility to help them keep the coverage they already have.

- Enroll eligible newborns in California's Medicaid program (Medi-Cal).
- Connect mental health providers with PCPs to ensure that patients' mental health needs are met.

Funding from a pair of AHRQ THQIT grants allowed ACCEL to develop and implement a Web-based application (iREACH) to manage the system that has permitted Care Pathways to more efficiently and effectively serve a larger number of individuals.

Secondary benefits of that expansion include a nearly 25-percent reduction in the use of emergency departments among children enrolled in the OMH pathway. With the trust developed between ACCEL partners through the collaborative planning process, all partners have adopted iREACH and major health care providers have agreed to fund ongoing operating costs such as maintenance, licensing, and Internet connectivity. This shared vision is critical in motivating care providers to find ways to maintain and improve the program, even in a challenging economic environment.

"I feel that iREACH has been extremely efficient. I just know from before, it's a much less tedious process, more streamlined...the paper process was bogging us down."

IREACH user

Grant Title: EL Dorado County Safety Net Technology Project/Access EL Dorado County (ACCEL)

Principal Investigator: Gregory W. Bergner, South Lake Tahoe, California

Grant Number: This project was supported by grant number P20 HS 014908 (Planning) / UC1 HS 016129 (Implementation) from 9/30/2004 to 9/29/2005 and 9/30/2005 to 9/29/2009, respectively.

AHRQ Final Reports:

<http://healthit.ahrq.gov/P20HS014908Bergnerfinalreport2005> and

<http://healthit.ahrq.gov/UC1HS016129Bergnerfinalreport2009>

