

Reaching Immigrant Populations: Alivio Medical Center

Senior SNAP Enrollment Initiative Best Practices Report

April 2020

Introduction

Alivio Medical Center opened its doors to an eagerly awaiting community on January 4, 1989. On that day, the vision to create a community-based health center, responsive and culturally sensitive to many of Chicago's most underserved and vulnerable communities, was finally realized. The Chicago neighborhoods of Pilsen, Little Village, and Back of the Yards have been significant points of entry for immigrants and remain the home to a growing Mexican immigrant population in addition to an expanding community of Mexican Americans. Today, we serve families and individuals who historically have had limited access to healthcare for many reasons including: language and cultural barriers, intimidation of traditional healthcare institutions, limited awareness of available resources and/or fear of seeking help due to immigration status. Consequently, health promotion, education, and prevention are integral parts of our comprehensive programs. Alivio Medical Center's bilingual, bicultural providers serve all patients regardless of ability to pay.

Alivio Medical Center's target population is Hispanics, a group that is increasing and includes people of Mexican descent, which is currently the fastest growing minority group in America. This underlines the importance of breaking through linguistic and cultural barriers to provide adequate service and emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive health care and social services.

Alivio's Outreach Strategy

The Alivio Medical Center Benefits Enrollment Center (BEC) team has successfully served our community's older adults by maximizing the potential of partnerships developed over the years. We have institutionalized our specialized services in our partner organizations and are seen as a trusted, high-performing entity that is integral to their missions. We have focused on 'in-reach' and 'in-service' activities with our clinical, health education, and promotion staff as well as partner organizations; this has enabled Alivio to increase the reach of our BEC services.

The key to Alivio Medical Center's success in implementing the BEC are finding the right people to work on the program and the right partners to help bring the services to the community. Some of these locations feature weekend and evening hours:

- Alderman Cardenas' office, McKinley Park (Chicago)
- Alivio Medical Center Pilsen Satellite Senior Center (Chicago)

- Our Lady of Tepeyac Heart of Chicago/Little Village (Chicago)
- Alivio Medical Center Berwyn, Il Clinic (West Suburban)
- Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (Chicago)
- Epiphany Parish Little Village (Chicago)
- Holy Cross Hospital Marquette Park (Chicago)
- Latino Alzheimer’s and Memory Disorder Alliance Cicero
- Mexican Consulate near West Chicago and regional
- Solutions for Care North Riverside (West Suburban)
- Stickney Township, Burbank, Illinois
- Southwest Suburban Workers Education Society Bridgeport (Chicago)

These outreach efforts will continue to be developed and implemented with the people who work and live in the communities Alivio Medical Center is serving. This way we will continue to work collaboratively with the people and organizations/entities in their own neighborhoods. In addition, we tailor our efforts to meet the needs specific to the area. We have been fortunate to find and establish excellent relationships with community entities that recognize the importance of the work Alivio Medical Center does through the NCOA BEC program and have ongoing commitments to continue working together.



Outreach event at Pilsen Center

Challenges

One challenge is finding the right partners and the logistics involved in the partnerships. Our clients have encountered numerous problems based on language barriers. Many of our clients have low literacy and are unable to understand the notices that they receive. Far too often they are treated unkindly and are discouraged from returning to the local Public Aid office.

Our number one goal is to be able to assist our clients and help them navigate the process via ABE (Application for Benefits Eligibility, Illinois SNAP portal). We have been successfully assisting numerous seniors with their SNAP benefits. Having more outreach events and possible radio announcements to reach a larger number of clients would greatly increase the number of benefits received in the following year.

Best Practices

The Alivio Medical Center BEC team works with our partner organizations to continue to provide services to our seniors via the following means:

- Provide services in the community where people live
- Ensure proper training for staff and volunteers
- Refine and simplify screening process
- Provide services in the appropriate language and literacy level

SNAP Client Stories

- Mrs. Elisa Marques Flores is 65 years old and was screened and found eligible for SNAP as well as Medicaid based on her monthly income. With her monthly income of \$839.00 from Social Security she was struggling with her finances. As with the great majority of seniors the high cost of living expenses is too much for them. Considering the rising cost of an affordable apartment is increasingly hard on older adults living on a fixed income. Wondering if they will have enough for the basic necessities of life can definitely take a toll on our seniors mentally and physically. Now with Mrs. Marques's SNAP benefits she will longer worry about having enough for her monthly groceries. Mrs. Marques was very grateful that we were able to help her.
- Mr. Nicholas Garcia and Mrs. Rosa Garcia are a lovely couple who were in need of assistance, with an annual income of \$6,180.00 from Social Security for both of them. Life is hard to be able to meet their monthly expenses. Mr. Garcia's failing health requires full-time care from his wife. He has Parkinson's disease and vision in only one eye; it is very difficult for him to be without help. Mr. Garcia is the only person receiving income for the household. Mrs. Garcia has always been a homemaker. She cared for her children while her husband worked. Without the help of the assistance of SNAP their lives would be much more difficult. They also qualified for Medicare Savings Programs (MSP) as well as Medicaid and Extra Help with prescriptions. As we age our mental well-being is so greatly impacted with the all worries of medical and financial bills, not to



Traditional dancing was featured as part of an Alivio outreach event

mention the everyday necessities, but the Garcias' quality of life has been affected in a very positive way.

- Mrs. Martha Campos and Mr. Salvador Campos are a senior couple trying to manage the household expenses of being homeowners and sustaining themselves. With their combined monthly income of \$1,414.00 the daunting task of juggling their mortgage payment, utilities, and groceries is very stressful. In addition to their numerous medical bills and prescriptions that are needed on a monthly basis, they do not want to be a burden on their adult children. After coming to Alivio Medical Center, they are now receiving SNAP benefits that ensure that they are able to buy groceries without stress. Mr. Campos has advanced Alzheimer's as well as several other medical conditions. Mrs. Campos has several medical conditions of her own. She has diabetes and is in treatment for kidney failure. They are on a Medicaid Spend-down case, which Alivio assists with on monthly basis.
- Mrs. Margarita Gonzalez is a single 65-year-old client who is, as many single seniors, trying to make ends meet on a monthly basis. Her combined monthly income from Social Security and her part-time job is \$636.43. Mrs. Gonzalez is now receiving her SNAP benefits which were a major concern for her. She also qualified for Medicaid and MSP in addition to Extra Help. As the parent of an adult child she was increasingly concerned about burdening him with her financial afflictions. Mrs. Gonzalez's hopes of being independent were very bleak before receiving the assistance; she is at this time able to remain independent because of all the benefits.