



Local and Public Health Nurses Leading Change to Advance Health in Maryland

Carolyn Nganga-Good, MS, RN; Betsy Bridgett, RN, MSN/Ed; Michael Bridgett, RN, CRNP;
Maureen Sharkey, RN; Evelyn Hasson, LCSW-C

Maryland public health nurses (PHNs) have been providing essential public health services to their communities for decades. Despite many changes in the healthcare landscape and the public sector, local PHNs have continued to advance the health of their communities through innovative initiatives. These initiatives have contributed to improved population health, improved health equity, and reduced health costs and illustrate efforts to promote a culture of health by Maryland's local health departments. As part of a study to enumerate and characterize Maryland's PHN workforce, PHN leaders were asked to provide examples of initiatives where PHNs are engaged in building a culture of health. Three PHN leaders agreed to share their work with the Maryland Action Coalition Summit. The culture of health initiatives include: 1) Healthy Beginnings - a collaborative effort initiated in 2012 to address the dramatic increase in narcotic addiction in Calvert County. Ninety percent of the Fetal Infant Mortality Review cases were babies born to substance abusing mothers and 89% were living below poverty level. The Calvert County Health Department provided case management, linkage to prenatal and obstetric services, WIC, social services, dental care, health insurance enrollment, and coordination of behavioral health and family planning services. This care coordination work resulted in reduced NICU admissions and positive toxicology results at delivery, increased use of prenatal services and long acting reversible contraceptives, and improved infant outcomes. 2) Community-Based Chronic Disease Care Coordination Program - an interdisciplinary team-based program through Worcester County Health Department provides home visiting care coordination services to high-risk residents with diabetes, congestive heart failure, and chronic obstruction pulmonary disease. This program has been successful in improving health outcomes and reducing health costs by reducing the number of readmissions and emergency department visits. 3) Children/Youth with Special Healthcare Needs Program - a Talbot County Health Department Program has been providing case management, resource/care coordination, support, and education services to parents and caregivers of children with special needs since 2001. The PHN who manages this program found that families routinely encountered barriers to care including lack of access to regional specialty care, difficulty securing reliable transportation out of the region to seek specialty services, poorly coordinated local services, and lack of provider knowledge about special needs care. To address these barriers, the PHN developed partnerships and coordinated Eastern Shore regional meetings to bring specialty care to the region. The Eastern Shore now has a Regional Consortium of public and private stakeholders that meets regularly. A freestanding pediatric specialty hub that serves the Eastern Shore region opened in July 2016, and the PHN serves as the regional consultant for health care providers. These efforts have reduced the number of missed appointments, improved health outcomes, and increased patient satisfaction and community engagement. This project has been developed in collaboration with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Maryland Action Coalition, the Maryland PHN Directors Council, the Maryland Department of School Education, and the Maryland School Health Nurses Association.