



Connecting Clinics, Campuses, and Communities to Advance Health Equity

Executive Summary

Community Connections Team began as a partnership between Marshfield Clinic, Family Health Center of Marshfield, Inc., and the University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire to help connect clinic patients to community services that can help them get and stay healthy, like food, energy assistance, housing, and transportation. We recruit, train, and supervise college student volunteers to listen to patients' needs in the clinic setting and find community resources that will meet those needs. Community Connections Team promotes health equity in the Chippewa Valley by addressing socio-ecological factors that limit the ability of patients to achieve healthy outcomes and by providing student volunteers with learning opportunities that create a pipeline of future professionals and citizens who understand the relationship between social needs and health and have the skills needed to effectively address that relationship.

Community Connections Team is proud of the program we have created to help serve patients, but we have bigger dreams! With the help with the Wisconsin Partnership Program, we will create similar programs in other rural and underserved Wisconsin communities to increase the number of patients we help and the number of college students who have the opportunity to learn the work of health equity through direct patient contact. We will also engage more individuals and groups in program decision making and build the evidence base to support the value of the program. To do so, we will include people directly affected by socio-ecological issues like discriminatory beliefs and social inequities into the core of our program leadership. We will also evaluate the impact our program has on health problems like hypertension, diabetes, cholesterol, obesity, depression, and anxiety.

To accomplish these goals, Community Connections Team will be creating systems to gather data to help our ensure program refinements and future directions are based on best evidence. We will organize focus groups of stakeholders to solicit a multitude of perspectives about how our partnerships can grow and better serve our communities. These data will inform the new directions our program will take and how we will work to promote health equity and health outcomes.

We envision pioneering a new way for clinics and campuses to work with our communities to promote health. In five years, we believe that rural communities throughout Wisconsin will have concrete networks—within but also beyond clinics—that bring the voices of individuals who suffer discrimination and social inequity into positions of leadership and empower them to influence how campuses, clinics, and communities collaborate to promote health equity. New cohorts of students will have the rich experience borne of working directly with needy individuals and will be bringing that experience to their workplaces and communities as professionals and citizens. Finally, we will have an ever-expanding database that allows us to continuously monitor the impact of these new networks and structures on health outcomes, giving us a stream of evidence that can sustainably inform future work in health equity.