

First-ever CMS Innovation Center pilot project to test improving patients' health by addressing their social needs

- \$157 million in funding will bridge clinical care with social services
- Tribal organizations are eligible to apply
- Applications due March 31, 2016

The Department of Health and Human Services announced a new funding opportunity of up to \$157 million to test whether screening beneficiaries for health-related social needs and associated referrals to and navigation of community-based services will improve quality and affordability in Medicare and Medicaid. Many of these social issues, such as housing instability, hunger, and interpersonal violence, affect individuals' health, yet they may not be detected or addressed during typical health care-related visits. Over time, these unmet needs may increase the risk of developing chronic conditions and reduce an individual's ability to manage these conditions, resulting in increased health care utilization and costs.

The five-year program, called the Accountable Health Communities Model, is the first Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Innovation Center model to focus on the health-related social needs of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries, including building alignment between clinical and community-based services at the local level. The goal of this model is that beneficiaries struggling with unmet health-related social needs are aware of the community-based services available to them and receive assistance accessing those services.

Award recipients under this model, referred to as "bridge organizations," will oversee the screening of Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries for social and behavioral issues, such as housing instability, food insecurity, utility needs, interpersonal violence, and transportation limitations, and help them connect with and/or navigate the appropriate community-based services. For example, a patient who isn't taking his medication because he or she lacks transportation to the pharmacy would be referred to federal, state or local assistance programs. Some bridge organizations will assist beneficiaries in applying for community-based services, such as the Low Income Home Energy Program, which can provide much-needed assistance with utility bills and allow beneficiaries to maintain their medication supply rather than having to choose between maintaining their health or paying their heating bill.

"For decades, we've known that social needs profoundly affect health, and this model will help us understand which strategies work to help improve health and spend dollars more wisely," said Dr. Patrick Conway, CMS Deputy Administrator and Chief Medical Officer. "We will learn how health and health care improvements can be achieved through strong partnerships and linkages at the community level."

Model Description

The model will test three scalable approaches to addressing health-related social needs and linking clinical and community services - community referral, community service navigation, and community service alignment. Bridge organizations will inventory local community agencies and provide referrals to those agencies as needed. They may also provide intensive community service navigation such as in-depth assessment, planning, and follow-up until needs are resolved or determined to be unresolvable for high-risk beneficiaries.

Eligible applicants for the Accountable Health Communities model are community-based organizations, hospitals and health systems, institutions of higher education, local government entities, **tribal organizations**, and for-profit and not-for-profit local and national entities with the capacity to develop and maintain a referral network with clinical delivery sites and community service providers. Applications are due March 31, 2016. Letters of Intent were due Feb. 8 but are not necessary to apply and will not affect the grant decision process.

To view a fact sheet on the Accountable Health Communities Model or for more information on the Accountable Health Communities Model, including the Funding Opportunity Announcement, please visit: <https://innovation.cms.gov/initiatives/ahcm>.

For past and future webinars relating to the Accountable Health Communities Initiative, including a February 25th webinar visit

<http://www.dialogue4health.org/web-forums/detail/accountable-health-communities>