

Bronx Partners Use 'Intensive' Care Coordination to Cut Hospital Use

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New York, NY – By offering intensive care coordination, a group of Bronx health care providers and social-services nonprofits have drastically cut hospital use for people with serious mental illnesses who have unstable housing, initial data show.

Bronx Partners for Healthy Communities, a Performing Provider System participating in the state's DSRIP Medicaid reform program, said that its first cohort of 119 patients last year spent 62% fewer days in the hospital in their first six months participating compared to the six months before they entered the program. That includes days spent in an inpatient bed plus visits to the emergency room.

Bronx Partners leads the program, but other nonprofits—including Coordinated Behavioral Care, Mosaic Mental Health, SCO Family of Services and Visiting Nurse Service of New York—employ the case managers who provide services.

Hospital costs for Mosaic Mental Health's 23 patients were \$550,000 lower in the six months its three case managers helped coordinate their care, said Donna Friedman, Mosaic's executive director. She said that by assigning only eight to 10 clients to each case manager, they can more closely manage their care.

"The caseloads are much smaller than a traditional case manager would have," she said. "If staff don't feel supported, you'll have turnover. Turnover is really detrimental to a program like this because it's all about the relationships that you're building."

Bronx Partners gets referrals from hospitals, shelters and behavioral health providers, and then its partners deploy case managers to help coordinate medical care, housing, food programs and employment. The case managers work with clients for as long as nine months but typically begin transitioning them to permanent programs, such as Medicaid health homes, after six months, said Irene Kaufmann, executive director of Bronx Partners.

"It starts in an intensive way to address basic needs, including housing. They become more comfortable living in a community, and other service needs are also addressed," Kaufmann said. "By the time they're transitioned to the health home, the individual has a healthful environment and is not in danger of bouncing back to the ER or hospital again."

The group has received referrals from the PPS' hospital partners, Montefiore Medical Center and SBH Health System, but also from hospitals outside its network, such as Bronx-Lebanon Hospital Center and NYC Health + Hospitals/Jacobi.

The program uses the Critical Time Intervention model, a technique pioneered in the city in the 1980s to address the growing number of people with psychiatric disorders who were homeless, according to the Center for the Advancement of Critical Time Intervention at Hunter College's Silberman School of Social Work. It uses a short-term intervention—support from case managers—before connecting the person to long-term social programs available in the community.

The case managers are key in advocating for their clients to receive appropriate services, said Zoe Stopak-Behr, director of the Care Coordination Initiative at Bronx Partners. People with serious mental illnesses might end up in general shelters, not ones designed for the mentally ill.

The program is financed with DSRIP funds, and Bronx Partners is spending about \$500 per member per month. But with DSRIP set to end in April 2020, the network is looking for other funders.

"This is something we expect that health plans would be interested in supporting and continuing," Kaufmann said. —J.L