



Beacon Community Program

Awardee of The Office of the National Coordinator for
Health Information Technology

The Beacon Community Program goals include building and strengthening a health information technology infrastructure; improving health outcomes, care quality, and cost efficiencies; and spearheading innovations to achieve better health and health care.

Colorado Beacon Community

Overview of the Colorado Beacon Community

Colorado, already known for its innovative, community approach to health care, aims to improve its already advanced health system performance to become the healthiest state in the nation and to provide the highest quality community-based care. On the western slope of Colorado, the Mesa, Delta, Montrose, Garfield, Gunnison, Pitkin, and Rio Blanco Counties are partnering with the Colorado Beacon Consortium (CBC) to strengthen existing health information technology to better support primary care physicians in designing their practices and clinics to effectively control the chronic disease burden of asthma, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and depression. The CBC will engage and organize local medical provider leaders around performance measurement and improvement goals using a successful health information exchange to reduce variations in care delivery, learn new approaches to team-based care coordination, and improve the consistency of quality care available to the population in this region.

Goal of the Program

As a Beacon Community, the CBC is partnering with local community leaders and organizations to demonstrate how costs can be reduced and patient care and general health of population improved through the collection, analysis, and sharing of clinical data, and the redesign of primary care practices and clinics focusing on patients and their needs. Specifically, the CBC is working to achieve four objectives:

- Reduce unnecessary emergency room visits and hospital admissions
- Improve quality of care for patients with asthma, diabetes, and heart disease
- Reduce health risks associated with obesity and depression
- Strengthen secure health information exchange at the community level to ensure the meaningful use of electronic health records by physicians, nurses, and other providers

Using Health Information Technology to Make a Difference

Effective care coordination of patients with chronic health problems requires that information about a specific patient be collected from every site where he or she receives care, including doctors' offices, hospitals, labs, pharmacies, and other providers. It also requires that this information be securely shared among all providers and across all settings in the "medical neighborhood," especially in areas that cover large geographic regions. Primary care doctors must have real-time access to information to make decisions about how to care for their patient.

The CBC is promoting use of health information technology to achieve primary care practice-led care coordination through such efforts as:

- Using physician learning collaboratives to engage and equip local providers to work together in new ways, to focus on the use of performance data, and to share information on steps to make their systems more efficient and patient-centered
- Using patient registries—databases with information about individual patients with particular characteristics (e.g., a diagnosis of diabetes)—to support effective and appropriate treatment planning and population health management
- Training providers on how to understand and use data available via health information exchange
- Creating a website and other electronic tools to support primary care practices and clinics that are working to build patient-centered medical homes
- Conducting meetings and delivering technical assistance with regional extension centers to help providers use electronic health records meaningfully
- Promoting interoperability and health information exchange to increase preventive screening, increase childhood immunizations, and help patients quit smoking to improve population health
- Helping providers submit patient information for feedback from supporting community organizations

The CBC is on track to achieve 60 percent of all primary care providers within the region meaningfully using electronic health records to improve the quality of care by 2013.

A Team Approach

The CBC is an independent, mission-driven, not-for-profit consortium—an association of local leaders and organizations—intent on improving the efficiency, quality, and performance of the health care system in western Colorado. The Consortium comprises the Quality Health Network; Mesa County Physicians IPA, Inc.; St. Mary's Hospital: The Regional Medical Center; and Rocky Mountain Health Plans. The CBC is coordinating its activities directly with the Regional Extension Center funded by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology—the Colorado Regional Health Information Organization.

Improvements for Patients and the Community

With better collection and use of patient data, doctors are better equipped to provide the right treatment at the right time, because they are better able to identify health factors that create the greatest risk for individual patients and deliver more personalized care to more patients efficiently and effectively. Working with 15-20 physician practices in several cohorts for a total of 75 physician practices, CBC has begun the process of building and strengthening the quality improvement, technology, and data infrastructure to:

- Improve consistencies and reduce variation in care quality for patients with diabetes, asthma, and heart disease using clinical data
- Increase follow-up for adults and children with high body mass index; identify and counsel patients who smoke on steps to quit; and identify those at risk for depression, which can ensure that patients who need assistance receive it
- Reduce unnecessary visits to emergency rooms and unnecessary hospital admissions by promoting care for patients in the primary care setting where possible and appropriate
- Using evidenced-based guidelines to ensure that people with asthma get the right medication and understand medication instructions, improve how people with heart disease manage their cholesterol, and improve how patients with diabetes maintain their blood pressures and blood sugar levels

Once in place, the technology-driven primary care practice redesign activities can be used to improve and maintain the general health of the population. With two primary care practice learning collaboratives initiated including 40 physician practices across the “western slope” region of Colorado, the CBC is on track to demonstrate how provider engagement and organization around performance improvement goals will reduce care variation and improve the overall health status of its residents.

