

2008 Rural Health Quality Award

Virginia Community Healthcare Association's Health Disparities Collaborative Initiative

The Virginia Community Healthcare Association's ongoing commitment has helped eliminate disparities and improve delivery systems in its community.

The Virginia Community Healthcare Association's hard work on gaining equivalency for the Health Disparities Collaborative Initiative is a model for how Primary Care Associations can be a key partner with their Departments of Health to improve clinical quality for the patients of community health centers in rural areas. The program is part of an integrated and collaborative national effort through the Health Resources and Services Administration.

Participation in a HRSA Health Disparities Collaborative (HDC) introduces Health Centers to three models: The Care Model, the Model for Improvement and The Learning Model. They agree to adopt shared national measures, as well as local measures based on proven guidelines. Measures are aligned with expert guidelines, external reporting requirements or other community standards of care. One important shared national measure of every HRSA collaborative is "patient self-management," since supporting self-care is an integral part of the Care Model, crossing all conditions as well as prevention and cancer screening. In 1999, when Virginia's first community health center began participating in the HDC process, there was only one community health center and one community health center provider involved. Less than a decade later, there are 46 sites participating, 33 of which are located in rural areas. The Virginia Community Healthcare Association provides training and technical assistance to the collaborate teams, including an annual state meeting of all Virginia HDC teams for the sharing of best practices, mini-grants to assist and support their efforts, assistance in the formation of state and local partnerships, web-based trainings to enhance the learning process, and conferences calls to assess teams' needs.

Through a contract between the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Community Healthcare Association, the Association has been able to promote and support participation in the Health Disparities Collaborative by Virginia Community Health Centers. This has resulted in significant increases in participation and has culminated in the development of a state-based process for participation. By working together, the Virginia Department of Health and the Virginia Community Healthcare Association have been able to improve the quality of care provided to patients at Virginia Community Health Centers.