



Primary Care Action Group

A Coalition of Partners Addressing Health Issues in Greater Bridgeport Since 2003

History

Improving the health of a community is critical to ensuring the quality of life of its residents and fostering sustainability and future prosperity. Health is intertwined with many different facets of our lives; where we work, live, learn, and play all have an impact on our health. Understanding the current health status of a community and all of the different factors that influence health, is important in order to identify priorities for program planning and coordination across partner organizations.

In 2003, the Primary Care Action Group (PCAG) was formed to help address the health needs of the Greater Bridgeport community, which includes the six towns of Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Monroe, Stratford, and Trumbull. PCAG is a coalition of two neighboring hospitals, Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center, along with the six departments of public health, federally qualified health centers, and about 50 community and non-profit organizations all serving the Greater Bridgeport Region. The mission and vision of PCAG is to work together to identify, prioritize, and measurably improve the health of the community through prevention, education, and services.

PCAG leads a comprehensive regional triennial Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) effort to identify the health-related needs in the region and create an implementation plan to prioritize and plan on how to address those top health needs. The current 2016-2019 priority areas for PCAG are cardiovascular and diabetes, healthy lifestyles (obesity and chronic disease), behavioral health and substance abuse, and access to care. PCAG oversees the work of all four task forces that address each of the priority areas.

As one of its first collaborative projects, in April 2011 PCAG helped launch the Dispensary of Hope Greater Bridgeport, a charitable pharmacy dedicated to serving low-income and uninsured individuals in the Bridgeport community. A member of the national Dispensary of Hope Network, Dispensary of Hope Greater Bridgeport provides short-term and long-term medication assistance to eligible patients through a licensed pharmacist and trained personnel. The Dispensary of Hope Greater Bridgeport served over 4,500 patients in fiscal year 2017.

Partners

PCAG convenes on a monthly basis. This core group consists of the team leaders from each task force, leaders from both Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center, health directors from the departments of health of Bridgeport, Fairfield, Monroe, Trumbull, Stratford, and other decision makers from the other partner agencies including Optimus Healthcare, Southwest Community Health Center, AmeriCares Free Clinic of Bridgeport, LLC and more. PCAG oversees the work of all four task forces that work to address the health priorities identified through the CHNA process. These task forces consist of representatives from each partner organization, plus others interested in improving the health of the community through collaboration. Each task force also meets on a monthly basis and works to ensure their specific community health improvement plan (CHIP) goals are met and progress is tracked.

Major Accomplishments

In addition to the launch of the Dispensary of Hope in 2011, PCAG partners have collaborated on numerous other successful endeavors over the past 14 years. The Cardiovascular and Diabetes Task Force developed a Cardiovascular and Diabetes Provider Directory for the region and have conducted over 1,500 Know Your Numbers health screenings at local food pantries and soup kitchens. In 2010, the Healthy Lifestyles Task Force launched Get Healthy CT, (www.GetHealthyCT.org), a clearinghouse of information around healthy eating and physical activity and started Get Healthy Walk 'n Talk, a walk with a doctor/allied health program that has since spread throughout southern Fairfield and New Haven Counties. The Mental Health and Substance Abuse Task force worked together to establish a high emergency department utilizer Mental Health Patient Community Care Team (CCT) and supported several public awareness campaigns to de-stigmatize issues around mental health and provide training to providers and support to patients and their families. Finally, the Access to Care Task Force has worked to increase the number of primary care and specialty clinic visits while reducing wait times for appointments, developed and implemented a brochure on the need for a Primary Care Medical Home and advocated for the use of Community Health Workers.

Lessons Learned

There are several factors that have helped with the success of this long running collaborative group. One of the assets of PCAG are the regularly scheduled monthly meetings with the decision makers of our partner organizations at the table. This regular interaction, around a shared mission, helps keep the work of the four task forces as a top priority of each organization involved. In order to keep this group active for so many years, we have found that these regular monthly meetings help to keep all of our partners engaged in the work. The monthly PCAG meetings are also a way for organizations to share resources and connections which is seen as a valuable resource and a reason to stay involved. In a time where many organizations are facing budget constraints, the sharing of resources is now more important than ever. Another asset to the structure of PCAG is that our mission is directly tied to CHIP/CHNA process that the hospitals are required to be involved in and the Accreditation process that health departments are striving for. This helps all partners feel they have stake in the work being done and keeps them engaged year after year.

Another key component of the success of PCAG has been the backbone organizations of Bridgeport Hospital and St. Vincent's Medical Center. In order to see long term success of any coalition, you need to have partners that help oversee and drive the work. Senior staff from both lead organizations help co-chair PCAG and convene the monthly meetings. Both hospitals dedicate staff time to the work of PCAG, the task forces and the CHNA process. In addition, Bridgeport Hospital has staff from their Community Health Improvement Department that help support each of the four task forces and they play a key role in helping each group actively track progress towards their CHIP goals.