



## Bridging the health equity divide

### **The Telehealth Transformation Initiative**

*An Initiative to Support Health Centers in Implementing a Mature, Sustainable Telehealth Capability*

#### **The Need**

The FQHC Telehealth Consortium was formed in March 2020 as an immediate response to the crisis of COVID and its impact on Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) and the communities they serve. It quickly grew to include 35 or 95% of the FQHCs located throughout the Massachusetts that collectively serve more than 700,000 of the Commonwealth's most under-resourced population.

When it became clear that the Consortium was on its way to meeting its initial charge of supporting health centers to strengthen their telehealth capability and restore their revenue stream, the Consortium began to focus on what it would take to convert this rapid rate of telehealth adoption into a sustainable model of telehealth that would meet the needs of under-resourced communities for the long term.

FQHCs have come a long way in developing a primary care platform that addresses the physical, behavioral, and social needs of their patients, and the Consortium is resolved to ensure that telehealth will be a key component of the ongoing evolution of that platform. Full integration of telehealth will make a huge difference in both ensuring FQHCs remain competitive in the changing world of primary care, and in addressing health equity for the communities they serve.

Last spring, the Consortium, in collaboration with the CEOs of Consortium FQHCs, designed a holistic roadmap for building a telehealth platform that is fully integrated into the primary care team at each health center. Based on this "maturity model," we conducted assessments of current telehealth capabilities at each Consortium member and prepared a gap analysis based on these assessments for planning future implementation. At the same time, we developed a Telehealth Playbook which outlines best practices for each of the key areas of the maturity model, and serves as the "instruction manual" for the health centers to implement the capabilities of the maturity model.

During this process, we heard from many that the staff at Consortium FQHCs do not have the bandwidth or expertise to implement the clinical integration and patient engagement necessary to fully realize the potential of telehealth. While health center leaders are enthusiastic about the potential of telehealth to improve access and equity, they are looking to the Consortium to provide funding for project managers and other on-the-ground support needed to implement the changes necessary for a robust and sustainable model of telehealth.

#### **The Telehealth Transformation Initiative**

The FQHC Telehealth Consortium is addressing this need through a Telehealth Transformation Initiative that will ultimately allow all health centers that choose to participate to implement their priorities for telehealth maturity.

We are delighted that an anonymous donor and the Massachusetts Executive Office of Human Services have provided seed funding that will support launching this initiative with an initial cohort of nine pilot health centers. With this funding, these health centers will:

- Design and implement a telehealth transformation plan based on the maturity model and reflecting the health center's priorities including testing one to two strategies for community and patient engagement
- Support a full-time Project Manager based at the health center to lead the implementation of telehealth there for a period of eight months
- Support a provider champion for four hours a week over the eight-month period, to lead the strengthening of telehealth among providers and care teams
- Obtain practice coaching and other hands-on expertise from trained Improvement Specialists engaged by the Consortium;
- Access tools and materials including an on-line *Telehealth Playbook* of curated telehealth tools, resources, and best practices, and participate in a pilot-wide Learning Community of Project Managers and Provider Champions
- Provide data on the results of their efforts to be used in evaluating this approach.

This funding also will fund evaluation activities in order to identify best implementation practices that can be applied to subsequent cohorts of health centers. These best practices as well as the Telehealth Playbook will be accessible to all health centers throughout the county, state, region, and nation. The activities of cohort 1 will kick off in March 2021 and will be completed by the first quarter of 2022.

### **The Funding Request**

We look forward to working with funders to build out this Initiative to all members of the Consortium. The cost per health center to join the Telehealth Transformation Initiative is \$158,000. We are raising funds in the coming months to support a second cohort of health centers to begin in the fall of 2021.

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*For more information on this initiative and ways in which you can bridge the telehealth divide for our most under-resourced populations, please contact Abby Akoury (857) 302-4261, or [aakoury@C3aco.org](mailto:aakoury@C3aco.org).*