Telehealth Navigator Program
Training, Coaching, Learning, and Disseminating

The Need

Telehealth became a critical tool during the Covid pandemic for Massachusetts Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to provide primary and behavioral health care to the more than 700,000 patients they serve, and to remain financially viable. Sustainable telehealth, beyond the pandemic, is now vital to ensuring its continued use, its integration into patient care, its opportunity to engage new patients in integrated primary care, and its major role in advancing health equity. This is especially important for FQHC patients who are disproportionately low-income, non-English speaking, and Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).

Indeed, it has become clear that sustainable digital access and capability is a significant social driver of health for the communities FQHCs serve, one that must be addressed for health and racial equity to be achieved. Unfortunately, there are many barriers, as outlined below, to effectively accessing telehealth and, in particular, tele-video visits and remote patient monitoring (RPM), an important innovation for patients and caregivers.

Based on patient surveys conducted by the FQHC Telehealth Consortium, a collaboration of Community Care Cooperative (C3) and the Mass League, key barriers were identified that inhibit sustainable telehealth for the more than 700,000 patients served by our 35 member FQHCs, including:

- Reliable access to broadband internet
- Reliable access to smartphones and/or computers
- Reliable access to private spaces to carry out telehealth visits
- The need, in many instances, to add interpreters to appointments
- Understanding of and engagement with telehealth as a safe and effective modality of care
- Digital literacy in general and knowledge of the telehealth interface, specifically

To address these issues and train existing and new patients in accessing and using telehealth for primary care inclusive of behavioral health, FQHCs are prioritizing highly trained and specialized "Telehealth Navigators." These new positions, recruited from the communities served, whether existing health center staff, such as Community Health Workers, or new staff hired from the community, are dedicated to helping patients understand the benefits of telehealth services and working with patients to learn to adopt and "navigate" digital access, including technology.

Telehealth Navigators are not necessarily new to FQHCs in the Commonwealth. What is new is the opportunity to develop, implement, and evaluate the efficacy of a cohort of Telehealth Navigators and to create a learning community among them, based on shared training, shared experiences, and the identification of best practices for engaging patients.

The Consortium seeks funding for the Telehealth Navigator Program to support scaling telehealth navigation and best practices in under-resourced communities throughout the Commonwealth. These funds will strengthen our core platform and enable the Consortium to share resources, lessons learned, and best practices for advancing telehealth sustainability and health equity locally, regionally, and nationally.

The Consortium Telehealth Navigator Program

The Funding Request
The Consortium launched the Telehealth Navigator Program in the fall/winter of 2021-2022, having raised fifty percent of its core project funding. We are now seeking additional funds to provide 12 months of full support for the Telehealth Navigator Program Manager at the Consortium who will lead the development and implementation of this pilot program at a **minimum of six Consortium** member health center sites over two years.

Specific components of the Consortium's program manager position are to:

- Support the Health Centers in the recruitment and hiring of their Telehealth Navigator
- Train the Telehealth Navigators
- Partner with the pilot sites to develop workflows and to successfully integrate the Telehealth Navigator into each health center's care teams, with an emphasis on identifying and addressing patients' barriers to accessing care via telehealth
- Participate in collaborative meetings with the pilot Telehealth Navigators and identify best practices, opportunities for improvement in the optimization of telehealth, and adapt accordingly the programmatic support for the Telehealth Navigators and their health centers
- Ensure that the learnings and best practices from this pilot collaborative learning community will be spread to other interested FQHCs, throughout the country through the online Telehealth Playbook, conferences, blog posts, and more.