



NEWS RELEASE
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New National Initiative To Transform Safety-Net Clinics Into Medical Homes In Five States

Project Supported by The Commonwealth Fund and Several Co-Funders Will Help Local Organizations to Better Coordinate Primary Care, Use Health Information Technology and Improve Patient Experiences for More Than 500,000 Patients in Colorado, Idaho, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Pennsylvania

New York, NY, May 6, 2009—The Commonwealth Fund, in collaboration with eight co-funders, is launching a national Safety Net Medical Home Initiative, which will provide \$6 million dollars over four years to help 68 community health centers in five states transform into patient-centered medical homes. Health centers in Colorado, Idaho, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Pennsylvania will be given technical assistance, training, and ongoing support in order to improve how they deliver care to patients, including better coordinated care, enhancing access to care, improving doctor-patient interactions, and implementing quality improvements.

“In order to have a truly high performing health care system in this country we must have high-quality, well-coordinated, patient-centered primary care,” said Commonwealth Fund President Karen Davis. “This initiative is an investment in the long-term health of these clinics as well as this model of care. With safety net clinics leading the way, we hope to show how all primary care practices can transition into true medical homes providing the best care possible.”

The initiative is being led by Qualis Health, a Seattle-based quality improvement organization, to provide support to the states and health centers to improve quality of care. “While many of the participating community health centers and other safety net clinics have implemented creative innovations to provide high quality, cost effective, patient-centered care, all have identified—and are committed to closing—gaps between their current systems and the best achievable performance,” said Jonathan Sugarman, M.D., the principal investigator and president and CEO of Qualis Health.

The Commonwealth Fund is joined in support of the project by eight co-funders, including the Colorado Health Foundation (www.coloradohealth.org), Jewish Healthcare Foundation (Pittsburgh)(www.jhf.org), Northwest Health Foundation (Portland, Oregon) (www.nwhf.org), Partners HealthCare (Boston) (www.partners.org), The Boston Foundation (www.tbff.org), Blue

Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation (www.bcbsmafoundation.org), Blue Cross of Idaho Foundation for Health (www.bcidahofoundation.org), and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center (Boston)(www.bidmc.org).

Working closely with the MacColl Institute for Healthcare Innovation, Qualis Health will support health centers' efforts to improve coordination of information between primary care and specialty care or community providers, use information technology to identify patients with unmet needs and improve care for those with chronic conditions, and systematically obtain feedback from patients for quality improvement. The model has shown promise as a way to provide high-quality, cost effective health care to low-income and minority patients while simultaneously reducing racial and ethnic health disparities.

The goals of the multi-pronged initiative are to transform these specific health centers and to promote state policy options to ensure that the model is sustained and spread throughout each state. It is anticipated that at the end of the initial grant period, all 68 health centers will be unequivocally recognized as models of excellence.

The four-year initiative will work with existing safety net clinics and community stakeholders to help clinics reach high benchmark levels of quality, efficiency, and patient experience. In addition to extensive technical assistance, each state coordinating center will receive \$500,000 dollars over the life of the grant period. The initiative will include significant funding and support to help health centers make the most efficient use of their existing health information technology and resources. To best leverage funds, funders sought participants that had already demonstrated a commitment to the patient-centered medical home model and had taken initial steps to improve the care they provide.

“We are extremely pleased to be able to partner with such a wide range of health care experts and funders on this initiative, one of the few efforts to specifically target safety-net clinics,” said Melinda Abrams, Assistant Vice President, Commonwealth Fund Patient-Centered Medical Home Initiative. “Ideally, at the end of the grant period, these states will have an established network of high quality health clinics serving their most vulnerable residents and we will have a model for improving health care practice and policy that can be replicated across the country.”

The Commonwealth Fund is a private foundation supporting independent research on a high performance health system.