



Alliance for Rural Community Health

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Press Release

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Local Health Care Coalition Receives Federal Grant To Improve Care to the Chronically Ill

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The *Alliance for Rural Community Health*, a consortium of community health centers in Mendocino County, is pleased to announce they've received a Healthy Communities Access Program grant from the federal Health Resources and Services Administration. The newly funded Mendocino SHARE Project (Securing Health Access and Records Exchange) will foster the expansion of a comprehensive network of local health care providers united in the common goal of improving care for our county's neediest residents. Through the use of the innovative new technologies and collaborative activities funded by the grant, the three-year project will dramatically improve the care of our community's chronically ill patients. The SHARE Project participants include the following organizations: Anderson Valley Health Center, Long Valley Health Center, Mendocino Coast Clinics, Mendocino Community Health Clinics, Potter Valley Community Health Center, Redwood Coast Medical Services, Consolidated Tribal Health Project, Howard Memorial Hospital, Ukiah Valley Medical Center, Mendocino Coast District Hospital, and the Department of Public Health.

"This is an incredible opportunity for our health care community," says John Knapp, Executive Director of the Alliance for Rural Community Health. "The primary goal of the SHARE Project is to improve the health outcomes and reduce the costs associated with caring for our community's chronic disease patients. Ultimately, we believe that the SHARE Project will keep more people out of our overburdened emergency rooms, will allow patients and their care providers easier access to their own health information, and will form the basis for a more integrated and comprehensive health care system for our entire county."

One of the main benefits of the SHARE Project is the creation of a county-wide Health Records Exchange system that will allow physicians and case managers to access health records for the patients served by the coalition partners. The Project will also improve care for patients with chronic diseases like diabetes. In addition, increasing numbers of patients will be able to access health services through insurance and patient assistance programs.

"Throughout this entire project," says Knapp, "improving access to vital information while protecting patient privacy is our highest priority. Patients and their physicians will always have ultimate and final authority to designate who and in what capacity other health care providers can read their health records. We believe that the majority of our patients will immediately see the benefit of being able to share their health records with the many physicians and other professionals involved with their care. All of us are familiar with the frustration of having to repeat tests and information every time we see a different physician or are treated in a different health facility. As patient care data becomes more available, the SHARE Project will relieve some of that frustration and will give care providers access to vital information, particularly in complex cases or in an emergency situation. Ultimately, this project may save lives.

One of the most exciting elements of the Mendocino SHARE Project is the creation of a new partnership between health care organizations in the county. "This project brings together the most comprehensive group of local health care organizations to date. Simply having all of these organizations united in one common project is an accomplishment we can build upon," says Linnea Hunter, Executive Director of Mendocino Community Health Clinics. "I'm looking forward to strengthening our relationships with our sister health care providers throughout the county. My hope is that this project will act as a springboard for additional collaborative projects in the future."

"I think it is exciting that we will have the ability to analyze non client specific data to determine the incidence of various chronic diseases in the county," says Carol Mordhorst, Director of Public Health for Mendocino County. "While the physicians are addressing the medical needs of the patients, I'm looking forward to developing strategies to keep residents healthier and better informed on how to avoid chronic diseases such as diabetes."

George Provencher, Executive Director of Consolidated Tribal Health Project, is particularly pleased to be part of the SHARE Project. "This is the first time we have been able to participate in a community-based collaboration to improve healthcare," says Provencher. "Access to healthcare is a growing problem, and we want to be able to do our part to help people and providers deal with the complexities of what has become an over-burdened system."

For more information about the Mendocino SHARE Project, visit the Alliance for Rural Community Health website at www.ruralcommunityhealth.org.