

Taking Services On The Road

Sponsor: Cedars-Sinai Health System

Location: Los Angeles, CA

An impoverished mother in central Los Angeles might recognize that her children need care, but a host of factors forces her to put off seeking treatment until there is an emergency. Community Outreach Assistance for Children's Health, also known as COACH for Kids and Their Families, overcomes barriers like limited English proficiency, no insurance or transportation. With two mobile vans, COACH for Kids goes into underserved communities and provides primary care and mental health services on-site. It also helps parents get support to improve their lives and create healthier environments for their children.

The net effect: since 1994, more than 42,000 visits for over 28,000 children and their families, immunization rates above 90 percent, a 97 percent completion rate for specialty follow-up care and 100 percent of patients reporting good or excellent satisfaction ratings. "If you need an emotional pick-me-up, go watch it in action, and see how gratified and appreciative the children and families are," says Thomas Priselac, president and CEO of Cedars-Sinai Health System, which operates COACH. "They understand the importance of good health in being productive citizens and in working themselves out of difficult circumstances."

COACH vans operate approximately 64 hours each week, making regularly scheduled stops at schools, churches, homeless shelters and other sites. Each van has five staff members--all bilingual. They also provide on-call support after hours to direct families to appropriate treatment. Prescriptions are filled at the time of service, and specialty referrals are made to either Cedars-Sinai or a network of affiliated physicians who donate their care.

Case management is a key component of COACH. "Every family gets it. We discuss their needs and refer them to our community partners," explains Michele Rigsby, R.N., program manager and director of clinical service. "It helps them connect and achieve the little successes that keep people going forward." Families receive referrals for job training and placement, housing and other community resources.

COACH launched a mental health component in 2000. "Because of the situations they're in, there's a huge demand, but limited services available with long waiting lists," Rigsby says. COACH patients and families with immediate needs now receive individual and group counseling.

With Cedar-Sinai's support and partnership with other organizations, COACH has made a real difference in the lives of its client families, says Lloyd J. Brown, M.D., medical director. "Our philosophy is that healthy children can't exist without healthy families. We've been able to provide terrific comprehensive care for children, plus see that their families' other needs are addressed. That's improved the overall life of the families."

THE PROBLEM: Impoverished families in Los Angeles face barriers to care.

THE PLAYERS: Cedars-Sinai Health System and 23 community partners.

THE PLAN: Bring primary care and mental health services to children via mobile vans. Provide case management services to help families find resources and improve their lives.

THE RESULTS: More than 42,000 visits for over 28,000 children and their families since 1994; immunization rates above 90 percent; a 97 percent completion rate for specialty follow-up care; 100 percent of patients reporting good or excellent satisfaction ratings.

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