

COVID-19 program helps the most vulnerable population

In March 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was rearing its head, Luminis Health received a distressing call from a low-income housing complex for seniors. The housing manager was hearing conflicting information about COVID-19 prevention and didn't know how to keep residents safe.

Luminis responded with a solid, innovative approach by launching its COVID-19 Community Prevention Program. It was designed to provide education and resources to the most vulnerable residents of the health system's service area, through comprehensive community outreach. The effort focused on low-income, senior apartment complexes, many of which are located in African American and Hispanic communities.

"We realized early on during the pandemic that certain communities we serve didn't have access to testing, hygiene products and the level of education they needed to deal with COVID-19," said Tori Bayless, Luminis Health CEO. "Our mission is to enhance the health of the people in those communities. And we wanted to do some myth busting, to let people know what they needed to do to protect themselves and their families."

The goals of the program were to:

- Educate residents about COVID-19 prevention measures — wearing masks, social distancing and hand hygiene.
- Connect residents with available testing resources and provide direction on quarantining and isolation procedures in response to positive tests.
- Provide available resources related to food

scarcity and financial insecurity to address social determinants of health.

- Prevent worsening health disparities by improving knowledge about COVID-19 infection, prevention and community resources for support.

"It was a scary time," said Charlotte Wallace, a Luminis community health nurse who built the program and headed the outreach team. "When we went door to door and talked to residents, some were terrified and others had no idea what was going on. There was a ton of confusion."

The biggest obstacle Wallace had to overcome was a lack of suitable educational materials. Materials were available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, but Wallace said she had to create content that was more accessible to the residents she was visiting.

Wallace said it was a challenge to persuade some apartment managers to let her go door to door as the pandemic ramped up, but she persisted until they agreed.

The approach was multipronged and offered unique support. Besides COVID-19 educational content, the team provided information about mental health and other resources. Team members screened residents for depression as needed and brought items like soap and laundry detergent. "On one visit, I called an ambulance for a well check and they took the resident to the hospital," Wallace said.

Wallace's team partnered with organizations that provided food. "At times I would notice that a senior wasn't doing well and I



Photo courtesy of Luminis Health

DOOR TO DOOR: Besides providing COVID-19 educational content, team members screened nursing home residents for depression and provided items like soap and laundry detergent.

would do a food insecurity screening. Two or three times I realized somebody needed help, and I contacted county resources to have food delivered to them."

The COVID-19 Community Prevention Program is funded by Luminis Health and a variety of individual donors and grant funds. Donations from 565 donors ranged from \$5 to \$50,000 for a total of \$1,087,497 in a few months.

The program has reached more than 50,000 residents and may have helped flatten the initial curve of COVID-19. Statistics show a

decline in positivity and hospitalizations in the Luminis service area after interventions began.

The program now is focused on COVID-19 vaccinations, which are administered in public areas of the apartment complexes. Luminis is also working with community leaders to increase vaccine confidence in communities of color.

Bayless said the program is replicable if hospitals and health systems "buy into this model. It's a departure from hospital-centric thinking and getting these teams out into the community." ●