PROJECT INFORMATION

September 2018

Does an Offer by Phone of Community Health Worker Support Increase Access to Primary Care for Women Who Are Newly Enrolled in a Health Plan?

Principal investigator

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Organization

University of Arizona

What was the research about?

Medicaid is public health insurance for people who don't have insurance and can't afford to pay for it on their own. Women who are new to Medicaid may need help getting care from a primary care doctor, such as regular checkups or vaccines.

In this study, the research team wanted to learn if an offer by phone for support from a community health worker helped women new to a Medicaid health plan get care. Community health workers teach people about health and link them to health services. The team compared two groups of women. In one group, health plan staff called women and offered assistance from a community health worker. In the other group, women didn't receive a call offering community health worker assistance. All women in the study got standard health plan information.

What were the results?

Overall, the study found no difference in getting care from a primary care doctor between women that health plan staff called and those who they didn't call. However, health plan staff couldn't reach 78 percent of the women they called.

Who was in the study?

The study included 2,267 women ages 18 to 39 who had just joined the University Family Care Medicaid health plan in southern Arizona. Of these, 39 percent were white, 15 percent were other races, 32 percent

were Hispanic, and 14 percent didn't indicate a race or ethnicity. The average age was 27.

What did the research team do?

The research team assigned women to one of two groups by chance. Health plan staff called women in the first group to offer them help from a community health worker. Staff tried calling women three times. They called at different times and days of the week and left a message if no one answered the phone. The second group didn't get a phone call from health plan staff. After six months, the team looked at healthcare records for women in both groups to see if the groups differed in whether they got care from a primary care doctor.

What were the limits of the study?

The research team designed the study to look at whether the offer of community health worker support was helpful to women in getting primary care. The study didn't compare women who worked with community health workers with those who didn't.

Future studies could look at other ways to offer help to women new to Medicaid.

How can people use the results?

Health plans could consider the results from this study when deciding how to offer help to new members.

To learn more about this project, visit www.pcori.org/Garcia147.