

CHICAGO, Dec. 9, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- Mary, a North Lawndale resident, had no idea she had diabetes. That is, until a community health worker carrying a bag labeled *Lawndale Diabetes Project* knocked on her door last year. One year later, Mary, and other community residents like her, are managing their Type 2 diabetes and are attending nutrition and exercise programs hosted by Sinai Health System. They are now part of a broader success story.

Sinai Urban Health Institute (SUHI) today announces significant results of the first phase of a landmark community health initiative that launched in March 2012 – *The Lawndale Diabetes Project* – in partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL). These results represent statistically significant health improvements on the diabetes epidemic front in the North and South Lawndale communities. In response to the progress SUHI has made, Blue Cross announces that it is providing an additional grant of \$550,000 to continue funding SUHI's work for a third year. Blue Cross enabled the project through an initial \$1.2 million community investment grant.

Joseph West, ScD, program director and senior epidemiologist at Sinai Urban Health Institute at Sinai Health System, says the project's goal of improving self-management behaviors among diabetic populations in Chicago's Lawndale communities has materialized in a statistically significant manner. "In our initial work, we discovered some of the highest rates of diabetes yet identified. Through outreach efforts such as door-to-door assessments, follow-up home visits, healthy cooking schools and diabetes self-management classes, we've helped participants to improve their A1C values."

Measurably improving A1C values in a population is considered the gold standard of success in diabetes programs. Dr. West, a Harvard-educated epidemiologist and Lawndale native, adds,

"We're not only pleased with the results; we're honored to be counted among the small proportion of community health projects that have been able to accomplish this."

To date, preliminary findings indicate that fully 40.5 percent of all persons with diabetes in North Lawndale, a predominately African American community, and 66 percent of all persons with diabetes in South Lawndale, an almost entirely Latino population, have improved their A1C values between their initial home visit and follow-up visits.

Even more drastic are the measurable improvements that are seen in individuals with uncontrolled diabetes, according to these same preliminary findings. Dr. West goes on to explain: "While it's statistically more difficult for persons with uncontrolled diabetes to improve their A1C values, we have found that 47.7 percent of North Lawndale residents with uncontrolled diabetes who completed follow-up visits had improved their values. In South Lawndale, a staggering 86.7 percent improved. These numbers are remarkable for a project's initial results."

After reviewing these preliminary findings with the Sinai clinical team, Opella Ernest, M.D., Blue Cross's chief medical officer, says the data informed her thinking. "These results speak to improving the quality of life for people in communities that need greater access to care and require continued focus on chronic disease management. The Sinai team's progress, if it tells us anything, is that this is no time to let our foot off the gas."

The Lawndale Diabetes Project sends SUHI caregivers, known as Diabetes Block Captains (DBC's), to conduct household screenings for diabetes and childhood obesity in

Lawndale

, a predominantly underserved and at-risk neighborhood on

Chicago's

West side. Home visits provide important information regarding diet and exercise, and offer opportunities to gather family histories and share information about medical care and medication for individuals. These trained community health workers are

Lawndale

residents themselves, and are able to effectively communicate this information and offer support and motivation for making positive changes.

The visits also provide insightful data that paints a broader portrait of the health of the community at-large. For example, after interviewing 2,110 Lawndale residents, the DBCs concluded that Type 2 diabetes affects 51 percent of the adult population in

North Lawndale

and 43 percent of adults in

South Lawndale

, over five times the national average. Since the project's inception, the multi-level community intervention has reached over 4,600 homes. The project's educational campaign, community engagement strategies and individual self-management training impacted an additional 350 persons.

Donna Gerber, vice president of public affairs and community investment for Blue Cross, explains the company's philosophy when it comes to such large scale initiatives. "This (Lawndale

) project is a perfect example of our mission: to improve the quality of care delivered and the lives of the people of

Illinois

, to expand greater access to care, and to help to lower the overall cost of healthcare.

Certainly, no one can debate that managing and controlling diabetes in the first place is a far more effective approach than paying for costly, often ineffective medical treatment in the disease's aftermath."

"Going forward, our work focuses on following through with our enrolled participants and improving the quality and accessibility of the diabetes care they receive," Dr. West says.

"Through Blue Cross's sustained funding, we plan to train and employ lifestyle coaches for our participants, expand our community partnerships, and strengthen Sinai Health System Diabetes Program. In reducing the burden of Type 2 diabetes for those at risk in Lawndale, lowering costs and improving health outcomes, we hope to become the national model for urban diabetes care."

About Sinai Health System Sinai Health System, a Chicago-based private, not-for-profit organization, is comprised of seven member organizations: Mount Sinai Hospital, Holy Cross Hospital, Sinai Children's Hospital, Schwab Rehabilitation Hospital, Sinai Medical Group, Sinai Community Institute and Sinai Urban Health Institute. The system has over 800 physicians on its hospital medical staffs, 695 licensed beds, 100,000+ annual emergency department patient visits and eight physician residency training programs.

www.sinai.org

About Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Illinois (BCBSIL) With 7.6 million members, BCBSIL, a division of Health Care Service Corporation, a Mutual Legal Reserve Company, is the largest health insurance company in Illinois.

Begun in 1936 in

Chicago

, BCBSIL remains member owned rather than publicly traded, and is committed to promoting the health and wellness of its members and its communities, fostering greater access to care, and working to lower the overall cost of care while improving the health care quality and patient outcomes.

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