

# Patient Assistance Programs: Providing Access to Medications at Low or No Cost for Uninsured and/or Underinsured Patients at Philadelphia Health Centers

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## COMMUNITY PARTNER

- Interns placed at eight health centers (HC) operated by the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH)
- HCs located strategically in under-resourced neighborhoods
- Services provided include, but not limited to, primary Care, family planning and prenatal Services, dental care, social, and legal services
- HCs accepts Medicare, Medicaid, HMO plans, as well as uninsured patients
- Uninsured patients: small fees charged based on patient's household size and income
- BTG interns worked in the Patient Assistance Program (PAP) offices within the HCs
- PAP office helps patients with no or limited prescription coverage get medications for free through pharmaceutical company Patient Assistance Programs

## BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

- Approximately 8.5% of individuals living in the U.S. currently do not have insurance<sup>1</sup>. This includes 27.5 million lawful permanent residents<sup>1</sup> and 10.5 million unauthorized immigrants<sup>2</sup>.
- The absence of insurances makes taking control over your health very difficult especially when it comes to accessing and paying for medication. Prescription drug spending in the United States reached \$1,310 per person per year in 2020, which is far higher than in any other industrialized nation in the world<sup>3</sup>.
- To help those that cannot afford to pay these costs, 375 PAP Programs operate nationally and have helped roughly 36 million people over the past decade<sup>4</sup>. The PAP offices work alongside physicians in the Philadelphia City Health Centers to help connect patients to these programs.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS, CHALLENGES, JOYS

- Accomplishments:
- 7 new enrollments, 97 refills, 35 re-enrollments in June of 2022
  - \$325,420.27 worth of medication provided to patients.
  - Increased overall awareness of cardiovascular disease, smoking cessation and oral health by creating an infographic flyer which was distributed to patients.
  - Screened patients for social determinants of health through surveys and resource distribution.
  - Completed a Service Area zip code analysis based on poverty levels for two health centers.
- Challenges:
- Language Barriers
  - Certain Medications Not being Covered
  - Limited programs for undocumented citizens
- Joys:
- Providing Services for uninsured, underinsured and undocumented citizens
  - Spreading Awareness of PAP
  - Helping patients gain control over their health

Prescription Assistance Program

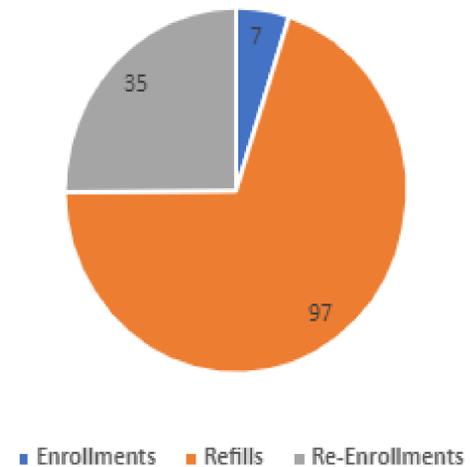


Figure 1. Number of patients across all the Health Centers in Philadelphia for the month of June 2022

## TEAM'S EXPERIENCE

Helping patients with limited or no medical insurance obtain prescription medication is a highly rewarding experience but certainly not an easy one, as pharmaceutical companies require copious paperwork and follow-ups for enrollment in their programs. Patient advocates are responsible for working with patients to get them enrolled in the appropriate programs for their medications. The patient advocate's role does not end once a patient is successfully enrolled; the advocates are also responsible for making sure the patients get their medication refills and reenroll patients every year. For many patients, any lapse in their medication can lead to life-threatening consequences.

## REFLECTION

Our summers at the health centers served as a reminder that health is something that is not easily obtained for most Americans. For many of the patients that we saw, social determinants of health had an enormous influence on wellbeing. Our small contribution to helping patients achieve a state of health was both rewarding, since our work had direct and tangible results, and difficult. The slow and inefficient process of ordering medications and delivering them to patients left us with insight into the fact that even if patients do have resources to help them, they are often imperfect or incomplete. We all saw how doctors' visits and prescription allocation play only a small role in improving someone's life condition but came out of our experience optimistic having seen the comprehensive way that the health centers approach helping their patients.

## WORKS CITED

1. Tikkanen, Roosa, et al. "International profiles of health care systems." *The Commonwealth Fund* (2020).
2. Radford, Jynnah. "Key findings about US immigrants." (2019).
3. OECD (2022), Pharmaceutical Spending (indicator).
4. Patients Rising Now (2022), "The Need for Patient Assistance and Access Programs."