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Culture of Collaboration brings together healthcare providers and government
Access DuPage Provides Health Coverage for County's Low-Income and Medically-Uninsured Qualified Residents

CAROL STREAM, IL (September 3, 2009) – With healthcare taking center stage on the national scene, one organization in DuPage County, Illinois has found a way to bring together hospitals, physicians, government and human services agencies to provide healthcare for the county's rising number of low-income, medically-uninsured residents. Established in 2001 with the help of 14 organizations, Access DuPage began providing healthcare to qualified residents, referred to as members, in February 2002. Today, Access DuPage is comprised of 225 organizations and last year served over 13,000 DuPage County residents who would otherwise have no access to affordable healthcare. The direct cost of operating Access DuPage has averaged slightly more than \$400 per member, per year.

How is this possible? Richard Endress, President of Access DuPage, believes the organization's success is due in large part to the culture of collaboration that exists among all entities involved. "We can get a lot further in addressing a complex problem such as caring for the medically uninsured by working together rather than by working separately," said Endress.

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As a vice president of Central DuPage Hospital in Winfield, IL for 16 years, Endress saw first-hand the increasing need to find a way to bring healthcare providers and governmental agencies together to develop a cost-effective continuum of medical care for the low-income, medically-uninsured residents of DuPage County. In the late 1990s, he witnessed a number of failed attempts to develop a program for the county's uninsured. He contends that these efforts failed for several reasons including the fact that some key partners were not at the table, and issues arose over turf. "The focus wasn't there," he said.

With coalition partners including all hospitals in DuPage County, physician practices, townships, foundations, the DuPage County Board and other county health and human services departments, as well as numerous community organizations, Access DuPage has been able to provide a full range of medical services to each member, including assigning each member a "medical home," and then providing access to a continuum of more intensive services, if required. According to Endress, "a medical home provides members with primary care, a sustained relationship, care in the context of family and community, support to take responsibility for personal health, entry to the broader health system and coordination of care with those components of the broader health system. The continuum of care provides access to diagnostic services, specialty care, prescription medication and hospital services for each member."

A person is eligible to become a member of Access DuPage if he or she has resided in DuPage County for at least 30 days; is under age 65; has a household income below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, has no medical insurance; and is not eligible for public health insurance programs such as Medicaid or Medicare. Qualified applicants are enrolled in the Access DuPage program for a period of one year, after which they must reapply for membership in the program and their eligibility criteria must be re-verified.

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Currently, 35 community organizations throughout DuPage County assist Access DuPage in verifying eligibility and assisting eligible persons through the enrollment process.

“Since all persons in Illinois under age 18 are presumptively eligible for Medicaid coverage through All Kids, all members of Access DuPage, since 2005 have been adults,” said Endress.

Some members pay a \$5 co-payment per office visit, according to Endress. If diagnostic services are required, members with a proper physician’s order can obtain these without charge at any hospital in DuPage County. Specialty referrals are arranged by the primary care physician or by Access DuPage.

“The vast majority of the services received by Access DuPage members are contributed at little or no cost by physicians, hospitals and other partners,” said Endress. “The direct cost of operating Access DuPage has averaged slightly more than \$400 per member, with approximately 52% of these costs going toward the purchase of prescription medications from the organization’s pharmacy benefit manager, CVS Caremark. Additionally, 26% of the direct cost underwrites the operations of the various clinics and practices that serve as “medical homes” for Access DuPage members and 22% operates the program,” he said.

The upfront funding to pay for these direct costs is provided by seven DuPage County hospitals, DuPage County government, Community Memorial Foundation, State of Illinois Bureau of Refugees and Immigrants, the United Way of the DuPage Area, DuPage County townships, and other small grants and miscellaneous income, according to Endress.

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“We are often asked about the cost effectiveness of our program,” said Endress. Both our age-adjusted hospitalization rates and our use rates of Emergency Rooms are about 70% of national rates, and our total cost of care, if we were paying typical managed care rates for our donated services, is about 20% less than the average cost of individual employer-sponsored health care premiums. Those numbers speak for themselves,” he said.

“It is imperative to note, that this program works because all of the players came to the table ready to work together,” Endress said, “they came to give and take, and to create the culture of collaboration that allows Access DuPage to take care of those individuals in our communities who are most in need.”

Note to Editors: *Mr. Richard Endress is available for interviews, as are representatives of DuPage County government, hospital administrators and physicians. To arrange interviews please contact:*

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