



HCHA Newsletter

Harris County Healthcare Alliance

Member Spotlight

Bering Omega Community Services



The Alliance welcomes new member Bering Omega Community Services, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization providing compassionate care to people living with HIV/AIDS. With programs in operation since August 1986, Bering Omega was created in 1999 when two of the city's leading HIV/AIDS service providers -Omega House Inc. and Bering Community Service Foundation - combined forces.

Today, a continuum of care is offered to people living with HIV/AIDS, completely free of charge, through four programs: Dental Clinic, Adult Care Center, Housing Assistance and Residential Hospice. Bering Omega provides care to more than 2,700 of the Houston area's most vulnerable residents each year with a mission to nurture the well being, and meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of persons

affected by HIV/AIDS through compassionate health care and social services.

While Houston is known as a city rich in ethnic diversity, racial and ethnic minorities have been disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS and poverty is a constant barrier for People Living With HIV/AIDS. This being said, Houston has the 7th largest population of people with full-blown AIDS in the nation (CDC 2001). Bering Omega is bridging the gap however by serving 1 in 3 people reported to have HIV or AIDS in Houston/Harris County and targets indigent, uninsured and under-served HIV+ individuals and their caregivers who have no other healthcare alternatives. Bering Omega saves the taxpayers of Harris County an estimated 6.4 million dollars each year by providing a range of services to people whom otherwise would turn to the public charity health-

care system for care.

For more information on Bering Omega's services and programs, visit www.beringomega.org.

Disaster Relief

The Alliance recently completed and submitted a needs assessment to the State of Texas for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds for disaster relief. Assessment results show total Health and Mental Health Facilities, Supplies and Equipment needs of \$143,636,436 for recovery from the devastating hurricanes.

81st Legislative Session

With the 81st Legislative Session having just begun, the Alliance Senior Policy Advisor has been busy in Austin, meeting with State Representatives and Senators, as well as other advocacy groups, to further issues of the Alliance Consensus Agenda that were approved by the Board in October 2008. The majority of our work has been focused on securing the \$24 million requested by the TexHealth Coalition to subsidize 3-share coverage programs across the state. This amount constitutes approximately one-sixth of the premium amount needed to operate the programs being launched among the six TexHealth Coalition communities, the remaining one sixth expected to come from local match. Senior

Policy Advisor, Harry Holmes, stated that legislators have been receptive to the idea of allocating funds for the program, particularly in light of its potential economic impact (see related story "Why 3-Share?"). However, as anyone would guess, the main factor that will affect allocation of 3-Share programs as well as other State initiatives is the current economy. For Fiscal Year 2010-2011, Texas Comptroller Susan Combs has projected a 10.5 percent decrease in funds available for general-purpose spending compared to FY2008-2009, although estimates remain subject to revision as the state and national economies evolve.

With a number of issues for which to advocate (see Harris County Consensus Agenda under "Links" on the

Alliance website), the Alliance has been working with various other policy/advocacy organizations such as the Texas Hospital Association, Texas Medical Association, and Texas Association of Community Health Centers, to promote legislation affecting Medicaid/CHIP, the Texas Department of Insurance's role in increasing the availability and affordability of coverage, and other health coverage policy. At this time, it is early to be very active on some issues as they are, in part, dependent on the outcome of the President's federal stimulus package. Much more information will be available in the May newsletter after the majority of bills have been filed and are up for consideration.

HCHA Quarterly Business Meeting

Wednesday,
February 11th
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.

United Way
Community Resource Center
50 Waugh Drive

Guest Presenters:

Prof. Stephen Linder
UT School of Public Health

Houston Health Interview
Survey



Alissa Williams
HillCo Partners

Healthcare Components of
the Stimulus Package

NOTICE

South Central Houston
Community Health Center
has changed its name to
**Central Care Community
Health Center**

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Alliance Receives Hogg Foundation Grant to Begin Transformation of Behavioral Health System

The Harris County Healthcare Alliance was awarded an \$87,874 grant from the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health to transform the region's behavioral health care system and improve services for more than one million uninsured county residents. The alliance is one of six Texas-based organizations that received a total of \$456,565 in grants from the Hogg Foundation in November. The foundation awarded the grants to support timely, mean-

ingful projects that address key issues related to mental health and are likely to improve mental health policies affecting Texas residents.

The project is a collaboration of critical stakeholders (e.g. consumers/families, mental health and substance abuse providers) who will provide knowledge/experience and ensure that the initiatives resulting are evidenced-based, as well as responsive to the individuals directly affected.

Partners include key decision-makers as well as area mental health organizations such as Mental Health America of Greater Houston (MHA), Network of Behavioral Health Providers (NBHP), The Coalition of Behavioral Health Services (CBHS), National Alliance for the Mentally Ill -Metropolitan Houston (NAMI) and The Council on Alcohol and Drugs – Houston.

The Hogg-funded Mental Health Policy Project will comprise the first of what is envisioned to be a three-phase effort to improve major components of the behavioral health-care system.

Phase II will entail comprehensive, all-inclusive strategic planning towards realizing the vision and implementation is planned for Phase III.

Alliance Moves Forward with Primary Care Access Projects

In response to recommendations of the Houston Endowment-funded report, *Strategic Assessment of Primary Care Capacity in Harris County*, and in collaboration with member community clinics and the philanthropic community, the Alliance is moving forward with executing various primary care access projects, that soon will be coordinated by a dedicated staff member. Clinic executive directors are meeting on a monthly basis, and as requested by the directors, peer groups are being established for other clinic administrative positions as well -- chief operations officers/clinic managers, chief financial officers, and medical

directors. The purpose of these groups will be to expedite major projects undertaken that aim to strengthen the safety-net's organizational and collective capacity, as well as provide an informal means for clinics to share best practices and voice common concerns/issues that can be addressed with the assistance of the Alliance.

The first major projects the Alliance clinics plan to execute include identifying the various legal structures and assessing the feasibility of forming official partnerships between federally qualified

health centers (FQHCs) and Texas Children's Pediatric Associates (TCPA), and the Network Sciences Medicaid software that will improve clinics' abilities to qualify patients for Medicaid, SCHIP, and a hundred or so third party, public health coverage programs. Many Alliance member clinics are also working with Gateway to Care to procure and implement a common Electronic Health Record (E.H.R.) system in 2009. The Alliance is assisting with securing funds for that project. In addition, the Alliance is working with City of Houston to propose various projects to a group of philanthropic funders that will facilitate cross-provider, system-building initiatives, increase

Medicaid reimbursements to the community as a whole, and foster major collaborative projects among clinics and key community entities (TCPA, the City, Medicaid HMOs).

The Alliance is currently reviewing applications for the Primary Care Access Project Manager position that has drawn a number of well-qualified candidates across the nation, and expects to have the position filled in March 2009.



Why 3-Share?

Consultants commissioned by the TexHealth Coalition recently performed an analysis, *The Potential Economic Impact of 3-Share Programs in Texas*, which includes information on how 3-Share programs will benefit the state. As noted in the analysis, "the uninsured tend to spend far less for healthcare than those with coverage, thus the reduced spending by the uninsured translates into less economic activity and fewer jobs across the economy." The report shows how 3-Shares have been estimated to improve this negative economic

trend. The report also notes that while 3-Share programs are not the sole solution to the problem of the high level of uninsured in Texas, 3-Share programs can make a significant contribution to reducing the number and rate of uninsured. For example, implementation throughout Texas could:

- enroll a potential 386,831 employees and dependents in a health care coverage plan in the early years;
- reduce Texas number of uninsured by 6.8 percent (if implementation had occurred 2006);

- increase annual economic activity of just over \$1.7 billion state-wide;
- create 16,000 permanent jobs; and
- provide the State with just under \$30 million in additional revenue.

A presentation of the analysis, including the economic impact per TexHealth partner, can be viewed at www.texhealth.org.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Do you have any news or changes you would like to share?

Is there something specific you would like to see on this newsletter?

Send your news or ideas to tdehoyos@hctx.net.

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