



Community health workers: bringing “missing” patients into the fold

Conservatively, in Texas alone, more than 9,000 patients in the WellMed Network are not being seen for regular checkups and preventive care because they are not assigned to a primary care physician.

Others who have a PCP and who may suffer from a chronic illness simply aren't going to the doctor.

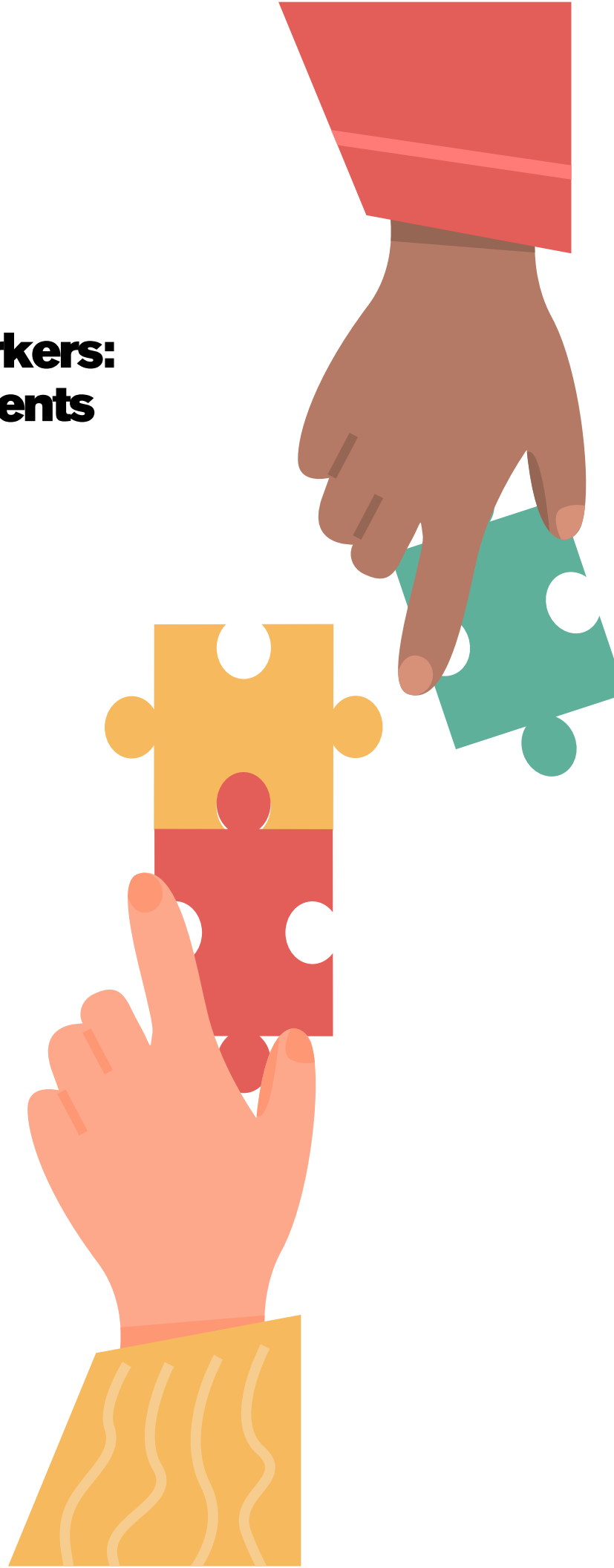
Often, cultural barriers and beliefs, particularly among some Hispanic communities, keep these patients from seeing a doctor, even when they are sick.

Recognizing an unmet need, WellMed developed a program that has its roots in health care outreach efforts in Latin America dating back to the 1950s.

They are called promotoras, community health workers, and their job is to find patients who should be seeing a health care team.

Because WellMed's focus is providing preventive care and helping the sick become well, clinic staff make numerous attempts to reach patients over the phone. If that fails, they will deploy a WellMed community health worker to visit the patient's home.

These home visits don't always work, but patients who are found usually listen to recommendations to go see their doctor. Every patient found and cared for is a potential life saved.





Identifying the problem and the need

WellMed is dedicated to helping patients live healthier lives through preventive care. Unfortunately, tens of thousands of WellMed patients do not have a PCP, do not seek medical care and are not reachable by telephone.

Some reasons patients don't have a PCP include:

- They signed up for new health insurance via a broker who didn't assign them to a PCP.
- The patient is on a PPO plan that doesn't require them to be on a provider's panel.
- The patient has been removed from a WellMed provider panel, through either an insurance update or inactivity.

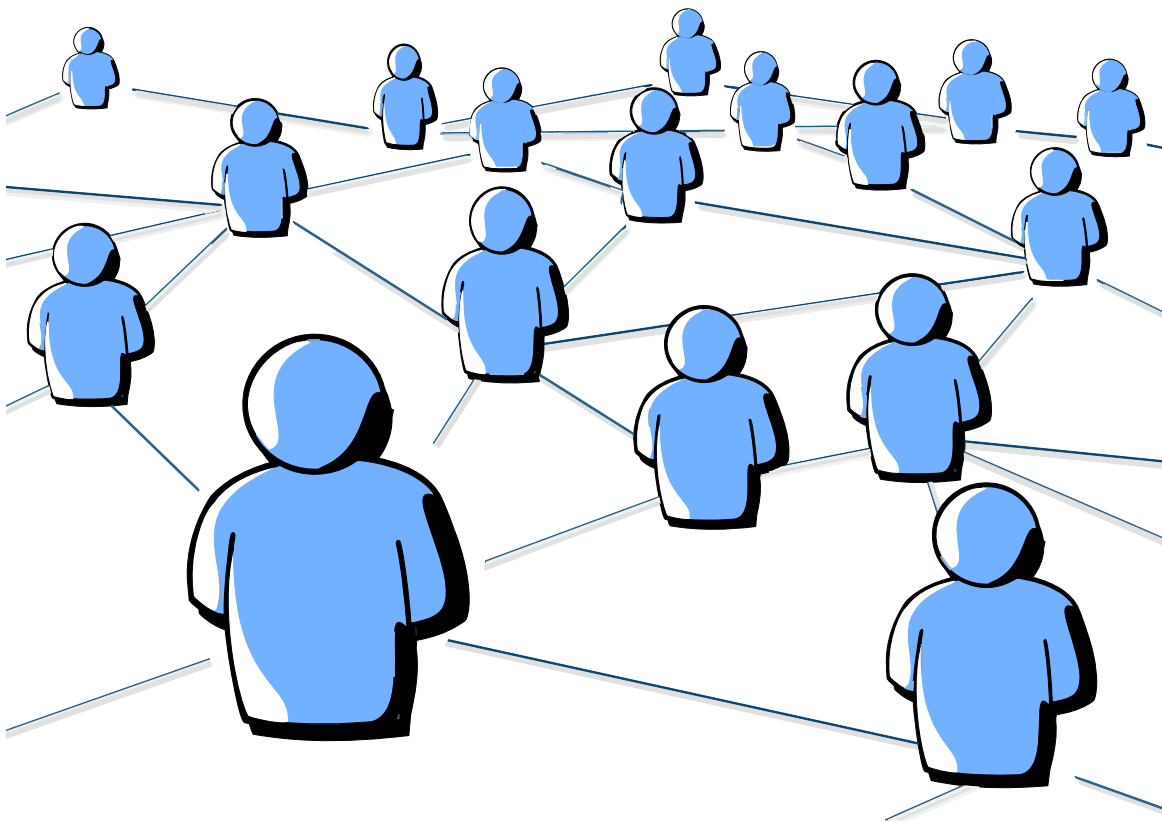
In addition to patients who do not have a PCP, many patients are considered high risk, but are not seeking or receiving appropriate care. These patients have been seen in an emergency room or are frequent ER users, patients with end-stage renal disease, and inactive patients.

What these patients have in common is WellMed has not been able to reach them by phone. Why? Many don't answer an unfamiliar phone number, or WellMed has the incorrect or no telephone number for the patient.

There are many other reasons these WellMed patients, especially those who are Hispanic, are not receiving, or do not want care regularly. According to a Pew Research Center study: ¹

- Hispanic adults are less likely than other Americans to receive preventative medical care.
- Language and cultural barriers, as well as factors such as higher levels of poverty, particularly among recent Hispanic immigrants, are among the social and economic dynamics that contribute to disparate health outcomes for Hispanic Americans.
- Forty-four percent of Hispanics experience communication problems when navigating the health care system.

The bottom line: WellMed needed alternative ways to contact hard-to-reach patients.



Solution – Direct Outreach

Community Health Workers

When traditional methods of delivering health care are not successful or possible (think COVID-19 pandemic) WellMed develops ways to overcome the barriers. Health care leaders believe the gold standard for reaching vulnerable patients is through face-to-face outreach. However, direct contact alone doesn't guarantee the patient will see a doctor.

Leadership also knew it would take specific, special kinds of people to make a true connection with most of these patients. Culturally, Hispanics in particular need to feel very comfortable, listened to and respected by a health care provider.

So WellMed developed a community health worker program with their inspiration pulled from the history of the “promotora.”

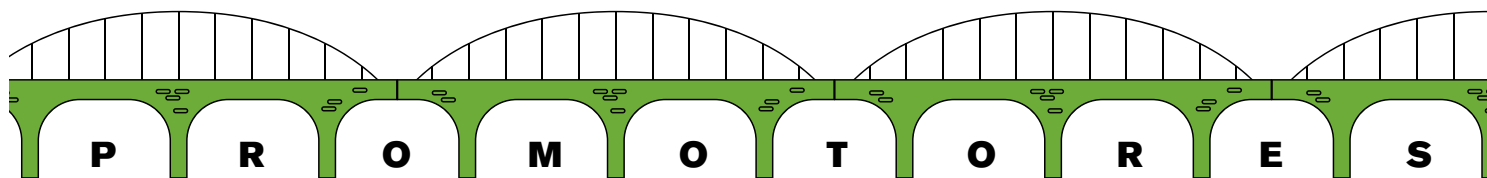
History of the promotora

Promotora is the Spanish term for community health worker. Traditionally, promotoras have been Hispanic women. The promotora model was used in Latin American countries since the 1950s, where it originated as a way for women to get information about reproductive health from women they trusted.²

While most of their work centered on educating target audiences about health issues affecting their community, they also provided help with accessing community health care resources.

Historically, promotoras were residents and leaders in their community who worked for community-based health promotion projects or as part of a research group. They served as liaisons between their community, health professionals, and human and social service organizations. As liaisons, they often played the roles of an advocate, educator, mentor, outreach worker, role model and interpreter. (Note: More promotora background information provided at the end of this document.)

Bridging the gap between patients and their primary care



- Conduct at-home patient visits and call campaigns.
- Connect the patient with a nurse practitioner who can talk to the patient about quality measures such as medications, blood pressure, body mass index, preventive testing, and more.
- Assign a PCP of the patient's choice and scheduling an appointment.
- Communicate with WellMed resources such as quality management, case management, social workers and the non-profit partner of WellMed, the WellMed Charitable Foundation.
- Talk with the patient about community resources.
- Assist the patient in communicating with their insurance provider.
- Track and monitor the progress of initiatives and quality objectives.

The WellMed CHW program

Today, the WellMed community health worker (CHW) serves the same role as a critical link between a community and the health care system. They are well educated. Some are certified. All are bilingual.

The CHW program supports patients who have not been assigned a PCP. CHWs encourage patients to participate in health initiatives beneficial to them.

They do not serve in a clinical role and provide no direct health care service. They don't sell any products or services, offer advice or information about health plans, nor take patients to and from a clinic visit.

The CHW process

Here's how CHWs work: The CHW will make two attempts to call a patient. If this fails, the CHW will

make at least two visits to patient's home. If the patient is not home, the CHW leaves a door-hanger goodie bag with a few WellMed-branded items and their contact information.

If the CHW does contact a patient at home, the visit is most often a fruitful and pleasant one. Most patients welcome the visit because they are isolated and lonely. Frequently, the CHWs will find themselves having a conversation over coffee and conchas (Mexican sweet bread).

This is the quintessential perfect visit. The goal is to gain the patient's trust and let them know WellMed is there to help. It's about spending quality time and building a relationship, so the patient will get to the doctor. While with the patient, the CHW will attempt to connect the patient (via phone or GrandPad) with a member of the PSU team to do an assessment of quality measures with the patient.

What are quality measures?

To truly provide preventive health care, WellMed monitors certain indicators of health. We call them quality measures. It is important that appropriate quality measures be monitored for each patient. Some of those measures include hemoglobin A1c for patients with diabetes, controlling high blood pressure, medication adherence for diabetes, cholesterol and hypertension; colorectal cancer screening, diabetic eye exam, body mass index, depression screening, breast cancer screening, functional status for older adults, pain assessment, and osteoporosis screening for older women.

Scope of the CHW program

The WellMed CHW program is relatively new, starting in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas with a single community health worker. Today there are three in the RGV market, two in Corpus Christi, one in San Antonio, one in El Paso/Southwest New Mexico and an opening in Austin.

Greater Texas Door-Knocking Initiative

The WellMed Greater Texas Door-Knocking Initiative is similar to the Community Health Worker program – with a few differences. This program focuses on patients assigned to independent physicians who contract with WellMed to provide support for their Medicare Advantage population.

In the Door-Knocking Initiative, a medical assistant (MA) and a customer service representative team up to find unreachable patients. This two-person team focuses on reaching high-risk patients – those who have been discharged from a care facility or have a chronic illness that requires monitoring and more frequent follow-up visits.

What is a GrandPad?

GrandPad is an electronic tablet with simple navigation, large buttons and enhanced sound to help older adults connect “face to face” virtually with anyone – including their care provider. WellMed purchased a large number of the tablets early in the COVID pandemic so patients without a smart phone or computer could borrow a tablet and be seen by a provider.

Houston CHW program

In the Houston market, the WellMed care management team operates a similar CHW program. The six CHWs receive requests to find high-risk patients due for care who have been out of contact.



WellMed representatives make three attempts to reach a patient before referring them to the CHW team. The CHW then calls the patient and, regardless of whether they make phone contact, plans to make an at-home visit.

When they find a patient, the CHW educates them about their specific health concerns and explains the recommended care plan. Using a GrandPad, they connect the patient with the original WellMed requestor, usually a provider at their home clinic.

The certified CHWs cover the area of Houston in which they live. Most are bilingual.

Results to date

Nationwide

Studies have shown small- and large-scale benefits of preventive care for Latinos when promotoras are part of the health care team. Cardiovascular disease is the leading cause of death in male Latinos, and second-leading cause of death among Hispanic women³. Several studies (including randomized clinical trials) show benefits of using promotoras to prevent heart disease and facilitate treatment adherence.

Research also shows CHW interventions combined with effective value-based care result in better health outcomes for patients at risk for chronic diseases and/or cancers.³

WellMed

Although WellMed does not have the data to quantify improved health outcomes, the fledgling program is finding patients every day and getting them the care they need.

In 2022, WellMed found and provided critical health education for more than 5,000 patients who would otherwise be without care.

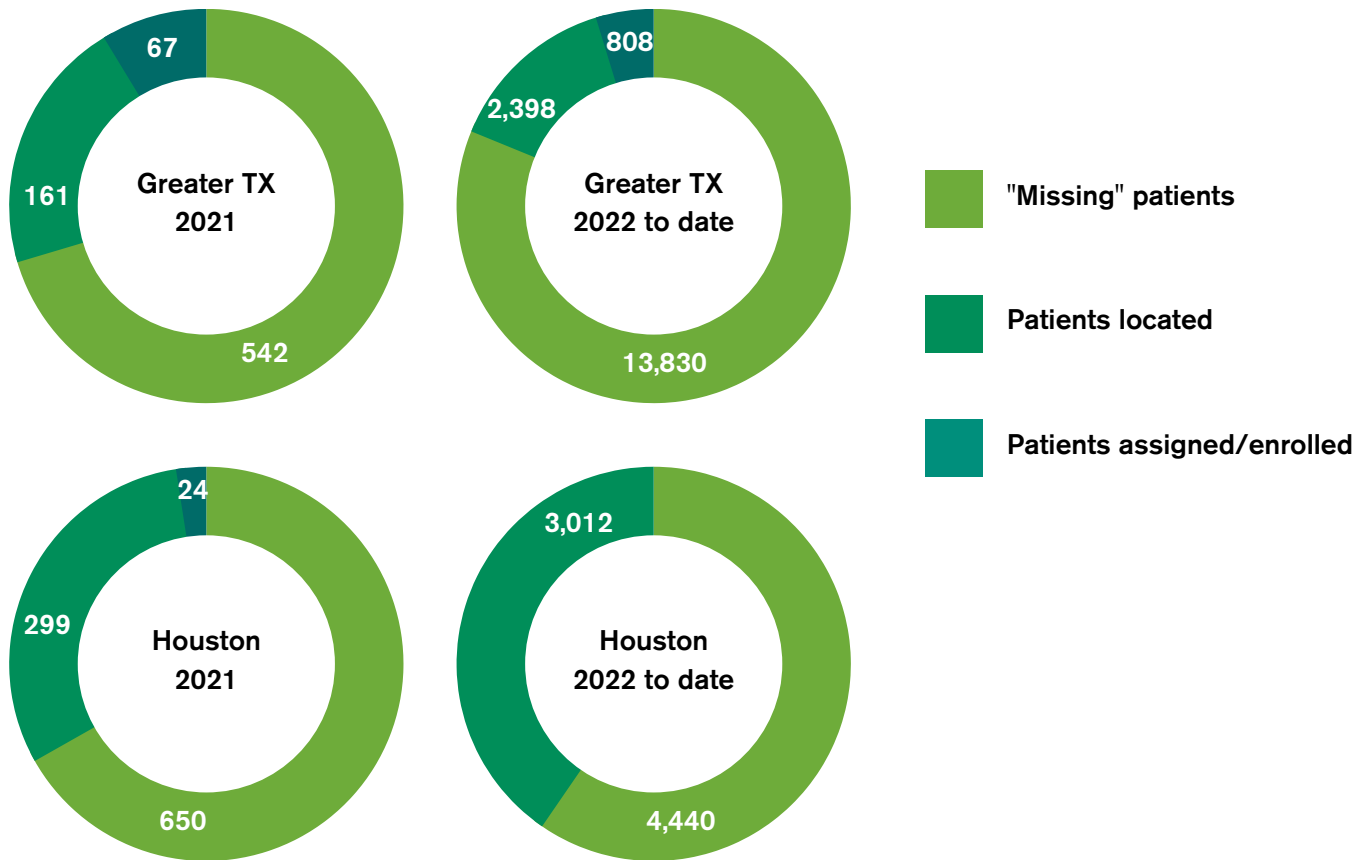
Community Health Worker 2022 (Mkts: SA, ELP, RGV, Corpus = 9 CHWs)

Unable-to-reach patients	Unable-to-reach patients located	Of those located, patients who agreed to have a PCP assigned
13,830	2,398 = 17.3%	808 = 33.7%

Houston CHW program 2022 (6 CHWs)

Unable-to-reach patients	Unable-to-reach patients located
4,440	3,012 = 67.8%

Community Health Worker Success Rates



Conclusion

Leaving no patient behind and no stone left unturned, WellMed community health workers, medical assistants and patient service representatives conduct intensive call campaigns and home visits to find “missing” patients.

Additional Background

Promotores is the Spanish term for “community health workers.” Traditionally, promotoras have been Latino women. However, more men are entering the field. The gender-neutral term “promotores” is increasingly used to be more inclusive.

While most of their work entails educating target audiences about health issues affecting their community, they also help patients find and access community health care resources. Often, promotores are residents and identified community leaders who work for community-based health promotion projects or as part of a research group. Promotores serve as liaisons between their community, health professionals, and human and social service organizations. As liaisons, they often play the roles of an advocate, educator, mentor, outreach worker, role model and interpreter.

Depending on the organization, promotores may volunteer their time, draw a salary or receive a stipend.



History

Promotores did not gain attention in the United States until the mid-1960s to the 1970s. That is when the federal government initiated outreach campaigns designed to improve access to care for rural, marginalized and hard-to-reach communities.

This model regained attention in the 1990s thanks to efforts from the Centers for Disease Control and the US Health Resources and Services Administration.

Promotores have improved access to care for the Hispanic population in the United States the past two decades. Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States and one with some of the largest health disparities. Citizenship, language and familiarity with the health care system are some of the most common barriers to access care for Hispanics. Because of these barriers, Hispanic immigrants to the United States are two to three times more likely than the rest of the population to be uninsured.

There is evidence that promotores affect Hispanic health outcomes via outreach and tracking⁴. Since promotores are often well-respected community

leaders, it is easier for them to communicate interventions with cultural sensitivity and experiential knowledge of community values, leading to faster rapport with program participants.

Research suggests promotores' ability to bridge the gap between community needs and health resources is one of the most viable solutions to meeting community health needs.

WellMed Medical Management is physician-led health care delivery company specializing in care for patients with Medicare. WellMed works to positively impact the health of nearly 2 million patients – both Medicare and commercial populations. The WellMed footprint spreads throughout Texas, Florida and parts of New Mexico through hundreds of owned primary care clinics and multi-specialty clinics, and through contracted medical management services and ancillary support services with thousands of medical practices. Founded in 1990, the company's vision is to change the face of health care delivery for the nation. WellMed is part of Optum, one of the nation's largest health and wellness companies.

1 Hispanic Americans' experiences with health care | Pew Research Center

2 Promotoras: A community model with heart — and teeth - Generocity Philly

3 Impact of Community Health Workers on Use of Healthcare Services in the United States: A Systematic Review | SpringerLink

4 Using Promotores Programs to Improve Latino Health Outcomes: Implementation Challenges for Community-based Nonprofit Organizations