

'Promotoras' educate needy Latinos on health care

Thousands in county served by program

Traditionally in Hispanic culture, a woman's role is to care for her home and family, which usually includes the extended family. According to Cultural Diversity in Nursing, Hispanic women are protected and revered by their families and their communities, with full authority as the matriarch in their homes and neighborhoods.

Magellan of Arizona realized the power of this role for women. In 2007, it partnered with the Women's Health Coalition of Arizona, an organization dedicated to community-based engagement and positive change, to bring the "Promotora" model to Maricopa County. A promotora is a Spanish-speaking community health worker.

The Promotora program is a nationally recognized best-practice model in which neighborhood women engage in



My Turn

ANDREA SMILEY

their communities via churches, community centers, parks and other neighborhood gathering places to disseminate health information to members of their community. "Health disparities for those challenged with mental illness are significant and are leading to a diminished quality of life and shorter life expectancy," said Richard Clarke, CEO of Magellan of Arizona. "We discovered through our research that this was an even greater concern for the Latino community, and we had to find an effective way to build trust and educate in order to get individuals who needed help into the appropriate care."

Magellan's program incorporates mental-health and substance-abuse information as the promotoras establish themselves as a trusted source for people seeking help in those areas.

As part of these efforts, the promotoras help individuals discover if they are eligible for public health-care services through the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, Arizona's Medicaid system. Since the program's inception, nearly 15,000 families, primarily Spanish-speaking families and individuals, have been contacted via one-on-one outreach efforts by the promotoras for help in such areas as filling out AHCCCS eligibility paperwork.

Through the end of 2012, the promotoras have helped process nearly 10,000 AHCCCS applications. Originally, the program targeted Latino residents in the south Phoenix area, especially those in the 85040 ZIP code due to the area's high concentration of Latino families eligible for mental-health and substance-abuse services that were not using them.

The promotoras program proved to be a success in 85040, so Magellan expanded the promotoras' outreach in 2010 to the rest of Maricopa County.

Additionally, the activities of the promotoras are being carried out by other organizations, in addition to the Women's Health Coalition or Arizona, that are reaching other traditionally underserved minority populations. These other organizations include Asian Pacific Community in Action, Helping Families in Need, Golden Gate Community Center and Centro Amistad.

"Working with Magellan on the Latino Initiative has been a true example of collaboration and partnership," said Lonnie Rubio Jones, director and founder of the Women's Health Coalition of Arizona. "The investment we make together makes for healthier children, which in turn makes for healthier families. After all, it's not about us, it's about our communities."

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