



ABC for Rural Health, Inc.
Rural Health Network “Polk County SafetyWeb Project”
REQUEST FOR LETTER OF INTEREST (LOI)

Goal of this Notice: To secure a project evaluator for the *Polk County SafetyWeb Project*, a three-year initiative supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant award #1D06RH26830-01-00 (Rural Health Network Development Grant Program).

Project Summary: The SafetyWeb Network will expand, test, and implement a sustainable health benefits counseling network that integrates new technology to measurably improve access to health coverage and services for patients in Polk County Wisconsin. The project lead, ABC for Rural Health, Inc. is a leader in delivering effective Health Benefits Counseling to assure patient access to health care coverage programs. By enhancing a local network of providers with new technology and training strategies that include web based electronic “coverage plan” tools, the project partners will significantly enhance capacity and competence to proactively assist all patients evaluate and secure medically necessary coverage and treatment options.

Our model expands an existing network called Chronic Care Plus of Polk County (CCPPC). Locally, ABC for Rural Health and three medical provider partners collaboratively created a basic level of services using Health Benefits Counseling and My Coverage Plan as strategies and tools. The SafetyWeb project includes application of evidence-based policies that encourage enrollment and improve retention of coverage for patients indicate the project’s efficacy, efficiency, and sustainability. In this project, the CCPPC Collaborative will grow into the Polk County SafetyWeb Network through the use of patented technology available from our technology partner, My Coverage Plan, Inc.

The SafetyWeb Network will develop, test and deploy a proven health IT solution that replicates aspects of health benefits counseling in an integrated decision support technology in order to promote access to health care and coverage for rural Polk County patients.

Expected Project Outcomes: Overall: the SafetyWeb project will produce a sustainable, resource-producing Health Benefits Counseling effort engrained in partner provider workflows.

- The project will create an enhanced SafetyWeb network that promotes and disseminates results, redesigns health benefits reviews and records, and integrates staff training, competency, and capacity enhancement protocols.
- The project will demonstrate a rural community-based provider network that integrates new technology solutions that increase access to care and coverage for patients and promotes increased reimbursements for providers.
- Partners will reduce treatment delivery delays and increase third party revenues. The project provides tertiary prevention to delay the onset of disability and restore individuals to full health.
- The project responds to emerging technology solutions and accelerates use of health benefits counseling and electronic health coverage records.
- The SafetyWeb Project will emerge as a national model of community collaboration that serves needs of all patients.





Background:

For over two decades, ABC for Rural Health, the Polk County Health Department, and three Medical Centers in this Western Wisconsin County (Amery Regional Medical Center, Osceola Medical Center, and St. Croix Regional Medical Center), each of which is a Critical Access Hospital have collaborated to deliver, refine, and improve Health Benefits Counseling services for patients. Too often, patients face limitations, terminations, and denials of benefits and health care coverage by private insurance plans and public health care programs such as BadgerCare Plus and Medicaid. ABC's Health Benefits Counselors, who work hand in hand with ABC's team of staff attorneys, have specialized training in public, private and marketplace health benefits.

With lawyers as a back-up, our Counselors help people who have been improperly denied access to coverage or needed benefits. Counselors assess how public program rules and private insurance policies mesh with clients' situations and use formal and informal legal advocacy to correct errors. An intimate understanding of applicable rules combined with direct access to legal expertise is a difference maker for Health Benefits Counselors. The Polk County SafetyWeb Network is poised to take the next step forward in the Health Benefits Counseling process by integrating technology solutions that can significantly improve outcomes for patients and providers.

Project Goals:

The SafetyWeb Network's overall project goal is to **provide patients cost effective access to and retention of best available health care coverage options in a sustainable Polk County SafetyWeb Network**. By the conclusion of the project, staff will integrate My Coverage Plan technology into patient assistance workflow at partner sites. Network partners will provide health benefit review, analysis, and electronic benefit plan to patients. As patients see an increase in access to care and coverage, the medical centers will experience improved management of uncompensated care.

The project includes two major objectives to accomplish our project goal:

- **Project Objective 1:** Expand operation of the Chronic Care Plus of Polk County Collaborative into the Polk County SafetyWeb Network by adopting and implementing a Health IT solution to increase access to health care and coverage for patients at partnering rural medical center sites.
- **Project Objective 2:** Retain an evaluation consultant to establish protocols for tracking and reporting outcomes data and sustaining project objectives. With technology tools developed by MCP, the Network will expand opportunities to secure coverage for patients undergoing treatment. Medical centers will identify an increase in reimbursements for current patients that may have incurred bad debt or other uncompensated care. After the grant term ends, this model Network and technology solution could be replicated in other communities in Wisconsin and, with time, modified to adapt to other legal jurisdictions and states.



Evaluation Plan:

Throughout the SafetyWeb Network project, partners will prioritize an efficient, measurable evaluation process. A thorough evaluation will help sustain project objectives beyond the funding term and promote replication. To assist with the direction of the evaluation and sustainability planning, project partners will use a contracted evaluation consultant to help establish protocols for tracking and reporting outcomes data and sustaining project objectives.

Evaluation Plan Questions & Approach:

The evaluation is designed to answer these questions:

1. Does the My Coverage Plan, Inc. health IT intervention effectively promote increased access to needed medical services for patients at partner Medical Centers?
2. Does My Coverage Plan promote better customer service for patients?
3. Does My Coverage Plan promote improved employee morale for patient assistance staff? For Clinical staff?

Anticipated Deliverables:

1. Completed initial Evaluation Plan delivered to HRSA by October 31, 2014
2. Monitor the progress and evaluate the impact of the My Coverage Plan technology intervention and services at the SafetyWeb project's medical center sites.
3. Measure the extent that Network gained measurably improved capacity and competency to help patients secure and maintain access to coverage and improved health.
4. Review and measure project and work plan process and outcomes.
5. Oversee collection of the PIMS data (see more detail on "PIMS" on page 5).
6. Assess the fidelity of implementation across project sites.
7. Collaboratively develop exact data collection protocols that are both feasible and meaningful to measuring goals and outcomes.
8. Agree upon a timeline for defined activities that will serve as the dates for progress measurement reviews.
9. Analyze baseline (including PIMS) and outcome data in an on-going and iterative manner.
10. Review interval data monthly
11. Review sample cases, including all documentation.
12. Report summaries of outcome data quarterly to the project director.
13. Structure feedback loops around the intensive baseline, mid-point, and end-point assessment.



Specific Evaluative Measures:

The evaluation will include both process and outcome measures. The activities and associated outcomes within the project work plan provide the process measures. The attainment of project goals—increased access to appropriate care—will be determined by the difference in pre- and post- project rates of service coverage and delivery.

1. The project will survey key staff at partner medical centers about their experience with the MCP intervention into health benefits counseling services and medical center workflow. The contracted evaluator will conduct key informant interviews with medical center health benefits counseling staff, patient registration staff, IT managers, and CFO to assess feasibility and workflow, workload burdens and stress relieved.
2. To determine if the MCP intervention efficiently and effectively increased access to patient coverage, the contract evaluator will measure and evaluate outcomes related to both cost to patient and cost to the medical centers. This could involve following more substantive processes like tracking breaks in coverage for families, readmissions, third party payor coordination and cost measures that impact care delivery.
3. The evaluation consultant will review collected data regularly to ensure competent and accurate integration of My Coverage Plan with Health Benefits Counseling services for patients. The evaluator will identify and address any program weaknesses and design interventions to improve the health IT intervention or impacts on continuity and quality of care. The evaluation consultant will identify evaluation measures centered on frequency and specific nature of services for patients, continuity of care, quality assurance and cost savings.
4. The process includes a detailed but flexible design to conduct a process assessment that reacts to medical center staff reports on actual performance and outcomes early in the grant cycle. We will evaluate the services by monitoring the following: the types of health care access issues encountered by patients; the types of services to which patients are directed; communications.
5. The final evaluation measure is an effectiveness analysis (assessing efficiency and standardizing outcomes) along with a cost benefit analysis (dollar costs and value to patients/providers).
6. ABC for Health and HealthWatch Wisconsin will help define competencies for medical center staff and SafetyWeb Network partners trained to use the MCP tools. ABC and HealthWatch Wisconsin will develop materials, information and trainings for Network partners. The contract evaluator will review the simple process measures the partners use to gauge training and learning effectiveness. The easiest way for the evaluator to do this is anticipated to be through pre- and post- training testing of learners.



Preliminary Identified Evaluation Challenge:

The work of benefits screening and benefits counseling is always dependent on a variety of factors that are external to individual clients. Access to care and coverage in Polk County is limited, so working with new federal and state coverage programs presents some possibilities and a new pattern of challenges. From a standard evaluative practice standpoint, these sweeping changes in the coverage landscape might appear to confound data-gathering or control group identification and assessment across the next three years. Ultimately, the success of the project hinges on the appropriate individual evaluations and assessments of coverage opportunities for patients and not the macro level health care financing and coverage landscape.

Evaluator Expectations:

- The evaluator should have a minimum of five years of experience in program evaluation work related to health care financing and or rural populations.
- She/he will participate in kick-off meeting with partners.
- The evaluator shall work with an ABC for Health or Rural Health program assistant to facilitate data collection activities and meeting facilitation.
- She/he will participate in weekly evaluation meetings via SKYPE, WebEx or other remote meeting technology.
- The evaluator should participate in annual meeting of HealthWatch Wisconsin.
- The evaluator should participate as needed in technical assistance calls from HRSA or designees.
- The evaluator will sign a non-disclosure agreement with select project partners where appropriate.

HRSA Reporting Requirements: The Office of Rural Health Policy (ORHP) will create specific performance measures that grantees must report within the Performance Improvement System (PIMS) located in HRSA's Electronic Handbook (EHB). This data helps HRSA to determine the larger impact of its Rural Health Programs and in particular, will help determine the impact of the Rural Health Network Development Program.

Performance measures can be process or outcome measures that allow grantees to track their progress toward meeting stated objectives. The Project Director and Evaluator will track all project performance over the life of the grant. Once these measures are finalized by ORHP, we are prepared to use a subset of the approved measures, and to provide data on these measures annually for continued funding. The partners will first identify PIMS measures, and then identify "non-PIMS" measures to help capture the required data to sufficiently report on the outcomes of this project.

- The Evaluator will help the project identify baseline measures associated with the selected topical area: Integrated Health Network will collaborate to achieve population health goals of improved access through the use of technology that will be tracked throughout the duration of the grant.
- The baseline measures must align with the goals and objectives of the proposed project. It is expected that the evaluator will be able to articulate the outcomes of the project by utilizing these baseline measures.





Letter of Interest (LOI)

This is an open and competitive process.

Please draft a Letter of Interest addressed to Mike Rust, Project Director, to express your interest and perspectives on this project.

Contact Information

Mike Rust, COO ABC for Rural Health, Inc.

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Timeline

Date: This LOI is dated June 2, 2014.

Deadline: Interested Evaluators should submit a letter of interest to respond by **5pm, July 16, 2014**.

Include in your letter:

1. Describe yourself, your technical competence necessary to do a credible job, and experience with program evaluation work related to health care financing and or rural populations
2. Your perspective on the Polk County SafetyWeb Project
 - a. Include both your ideas and approaches. This is not a detailed evaluation plan, but instead a paragraph describing your impressions and planning strategies.
 - b. Describe the challenges you anticipate and any strategies for dealing with them.
 - c. Describe your experience of working with project staff as part of an evaluation team
3. Draft a list of questions for the Polk County SafetyWeb Team.
4. Define your approach to pricing – fixed bid, hourly rate, other.

Attachments:

Attachment 1: Introduction to ABC for Rural Health and Project Partners