For over twenty years, the Open Door Health Center (ODHC) has provided medical, dental and behavioral health services for people across Southern Minnesota. Located in Mankato, ODHC is passionate about advancing access to quality, affordable, culturally appropriate and patient-centered health care for all people – though this mission is not always easy. Many people who live in this rural part of the state face significant geographic barriers and lack access to health services. Many struggle to find providers who will accept Medicaid or treat patients who are uninsured, and many patients are non-English speaking. (In fact, 27.5 percent of ODHC patients preferred to receive services in a language other than English in 2015.)

In order to continue to address these challenges, Open Door Health Center applied for funding from the Emerging Professions Integration Grant Program, part of the State Innovation Model (SIM) grant. This program focuses on expanding the number of patients served by team-based, coordinated care by supporting the adoption of emerging provider types. Once this money was secured, ODHC was able to further its mission by hiring a bilingual (Spanish/English) Community Health Worker (CHW) to work on their mobile medical and dental care teams.

CHWs are frontline public health workers who are trusted by the community. This relationship enables them to serve as a liaison between health care providers, social services workers and patients. They help health care providers

In February 2013 the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation (CMMI) awarded Minnesota a State Innovation Model (SIM) testing grant of over $45 million to use across a four-year period. The goal is to help its providers and communities work together to create healthier futures for Minnesotans. Minnesota’s SIM initiative is a joint effort between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Department of Health (MDH) with support from Governor Mark Dayton’s office.

Minnesota is using the grant money to test new ways of delivering and paying for health care using the Minnesota Accountable Health Model framework. Thanks to SIM funding, dedicated programs are now in place to improve health in Minnesota communities, provide better care to our state’s residents, and lower health care costs by expanding patient-centered, team-based care through service delivery and payment models that support integration of medical care, behavioral health, long-term care and community prevention services.
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increase cultural competence, in turn improving access to health care for racial and ethnic minorities, increasing the quality of care for chronically ill people and promoting healthy communities. As a member of the mobile health care team, the CHW for Open Door Health Center is able to provide health education, follow-up, support and resources to patients across Southern Minnesota.

One of these patients, “Ana” (not her real name), originally visited the Open Door Health Center for dental care. Although Ana has lived in the U.S. for over eight years, she had never received medical care here or in her home country. In getting to know Ana, the Community Health Worker learned that she was concerned about cost and did not want to owe anyone money. The CHW educated Ana about female health and the importance of preventive exams, and helped her schedule an appointment and a well-woman exam through the Sage Program.

The CHW also learned that Ana’s 10-year-old daughter had just arrived in the United States a few weeks earlier. Ana’s daughter had never had any medical or dental care, and was in need of immunizations in order to attend school. The Community Health Worker immediately helped Ana schedule an appointment for her daughter through the mobile medical and dental providers. Additionally, the CHW secured a clothing voucher from a local thrift store for Ana’s daughter, who had arrived with nothing but the clothing that was being worn. After multiple appointments at ODHC, the child is on the road to having healthy teeth and no longer has dental pain. She is enrolled in school.

As the only health center that provides a sliding fee scale for dental services in this part of the state, Open Door Health Center is a health care safety net for thousands of Minnesotans. Through integrating internal and external care coordination, serving all patients regardless of their ability to pay and prioritizing hard-to-reach populations, Open Door Health Center is expanding patient-centered care throughout Southern Minnesota.

For more information about Community Health Workers and other emerging professions, please visit the Emerging Professions website at: health.state.mn.us/divs/orhpc/workforce/emerging/index.html