

Staff / volunteer community outreach strategies to increase program impact

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Abstract

This poster details one organization's process for creating culturally humble community outreach strategies in collaboration with volunteers. It describes how partnership building with community organizations and engaging with hyperlocal media helped this organization increase awareness and utilization of their program services within specific geographic neighborhoods. This poster also explores ways in which staff and volunteers can work together, each using their distinct skill sets, to increase program impact.

Background

The Center for Health Care Rights (CHCR) is the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program (HICAP) for Los Angeles County. Staff and volunteers provide free, unbiased Medicare information and help. HICAP volunteers meet with Medicare consumers at community sites across the county to:

- Explain Medicare benefits and options
- Clarify Medicare plan choices
- Problem solve issues with billing or access to care
- Identify financial assistance programs that lower healthcare costs

Issue

Counselors at two HICAP sites were not receiving requests for counseling appointments. CHCR needed new strategies to connect with Medicare consumers near these sites and increase the number of appointments.



Intervention

CHCR recognized the need for personalized, culturally competent outreach strategies to raise awareness and use of HICAP services at these two community sites.

First, CHCR staff and volunteers completed needs assessments. We also spoke with key informants, including the volunteers themselves, to better understand the local media landscape and information hubs in the neighborhoods near the sites.

CHCR then implemented three main community outreach strategies starting in August 2018:

- 1) Publicize HICAP in hyperlocal print and online community media. This has included the following for:

Site #1

- Advertising in a community newspaper
- Adding counseling dates to the events calendar of a neighborhood blog
- Submitting information to a local classified ads publication

Site #2

- Posting on NextDoor
- Pitching press releases to a weekly neighborhood newspaper
- Promoting HICAP regularly in a neighborhood council email newsletter

- 2) Build connections with key community members who Medicare consumers go to for information and referral about their Medicare questions. These community members have included:

Site #1

- Resident service coordinators at senior housing facilities
- Senior center staff members
- Disability advocacy group leaders

Site #2

- Resident service coordinators at senior housing facilities
- Rabbis and synagogue staff
- Social workers

Staff and volunteers have jointly visited these members and their communities to introduce their local volunteer HICAP counselor, give presentations about HICAP services, and provide promotional materials.

- 3) Promote HICAP volunteers at health and wellness fairs. CHCR staff already attended these fairs but have been able to more consistently involve volunteers with additional planning and communication.



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Impact

The impact of these community outreach strategies is still being evaluated. As of May 2019, CHCR has achieved the following results:

- The number of appointments have stayed the same at Site #1.
- The number of appointments have increased approximately 30% at Site #2.
- CHCR has created new connections with seven community organizations and eight community media organizations.
- HICAP volunteers have logged 30+ hours of community outreach time since August 2018.



Key Lessons

- Assess who community members go to with healthcare questions, then connect with them.
- Value volunteers' expertise of their geographic and sociodemographic communities. Use their insight to guide promotion strategies.
- Build relationships with neighborhood newspapers and news websites.
- Collaborate with volunteers on community outreach efforts. Make sure volunteers are present at relationship building meetings and outreach events in their communities.
- Manage expectations of results. It takes time and sustained effort to build relationships and gain trust.



CHCR staff members and volunteers.