

Primary Link: Closing the Loop
Linking and Coordinating Care Across the Safety Net
Project Summary

San Diegans for Healthcare Coverage (SDHCC) has been funded for a collaborative safety net integration proposal by the Blue Shield of California Foundation (BSCF) in partnership with the Council of Community Clinics (CCC), the Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties (HASD&IC), and the San Diego Regional Healthcare Information Exchange (SDBeacon) to include clinic, hospital and payer participants from throughout the county.

Project Goal

Develop and implement standardized processes, systems and improved capacity and relationships for effective care transition and coordination across San Diego hospitals and community health centers.

Project Summary

The primary focus of this grant is to develop and implement common process steps and systems to support post acute (inpatient and emergency department) care transitions/coordination between hospitals and clinics and to strengthen care transitions/coordination capacity across the safety net.

We will assess existing expertise, resources and relationships, select pilot sites from among interested clinics and hospitals, convene working meetings to identify key workflows involved in care transition processes, to establish common understandings and process steps, and to establish the Primary Link care transitions process, including secure messaging systems to support timely communication and processes.

With our partners, we will facilitate staged implementation of Primary Link and monitor care transitions processes in pilot sites, while assessing and adjusting as necessary. Based upon the findings from pilots, we will develop a Toolkit and provide training on processes and roles for implementation across the broader system of safety net providers.

These activities will not only build on and complement many local initiatives focused on care transitions and coordination, preventing readmissions and expanding medical homes, but also encourage participation and use of the San Diego Regional Health Information Exchange (HIE) to improve care and reduce duplication of services.

Project Results

While there are specific and measurable outcomes identified for this proposal, overall, the project is expected to achieve several key results:

- Common definitions, processes and tools and improved relationships to support transitions of care and coordination between hospitals and clinics across the San Diego region
- Primary Link Toolkit/user manual, reference documents and a secure system for providing hospital notification, patient summaries and discharge instructions to clinics when a clinic patient is discharged from the hospital emergency department or inpatient setting
- Improved capabilities and capacity through education and training on care transition and coordination, methods, and tools for clinic and hospital care coordinator staff based on successful experiences and models
- The proposed *Primary Link: Closing the Loop* project seeks to transcend, support and complement other worthwhile efforts with processes, systems and expertise. The lessons learned from prior and ongoing projects have been incorporated into planning for this grant and include: reaching agreement on a common vision and goals, sharing progress and celebrating milestones, focusing on relationship building and user engagement, systems to facilitate secure exchange of patient information across the health system, and flexibility to accommodate unique workflows, and barriers to effective care transitions and coordination functions.

Organizational Partners

The **Council of Community Clinics (CCC)** provides centralized support services to 16 member community clinic and health center organizations operating nearly 100 sites in San Diego, Imperial and Riverside Counties. The mission of the CCC is to represent and support community clinics and health centers in their efforts to provide access to quality healthcare and related services for the diverse communities they serve with an emphasis on low income and uninsured populations.

The **Hospital Association of San Diego and Imperial Counties (HASD&IC)** represents over 35 hospitals and integrated health systems accounting for over 8,100 licensed beds in the two county region. Members range from small, rural hospitals to large, urban metropolitan medical centers. The HASD&IC mission is to support their members by advancing the organization, management and effective delivery of affordable, medically necessary, quality health care services for the communities they serve.

The **San Diego Regional Healthcare Information Exchange (SDBeacon)** is the Beacon Community chosen in the State of California to lead the nation in advancing health information technology (HIT). SDBeacon goals include measuring and improving outcomes, reducing readmissions, improving childhood immunizations and care of heart attack patients through HIT innovations and a community-wide Health Information Exchange (HIE). SDBeacon will allow participating clinicians to view patient clinical care information provided by partner hospitals, clinics, physicians and other partners to improve communication and share medical information. Under this project, SDBeacon will provide the secure messaging system for the Primary Link processes; a system which is not part of their HIE.

Differences Between Primary Link and Beacon Health Information Exchange

The secure messaging system will be developed with user input by the San Diego Regional Health Information Exchange (SD Beacon). Under this project, SD Beacon is establishing *secure messaging for patient encounter summaries/discharge instructions* to connect and coordinate transitions of care between hospitals and clinics; however, it is ultimately intended to support a single, mainstream workflow independent of population, provider or program. Primary Link processes, including the secure messaging system are expected to be ready for testing and implementation in March or April 2013.

Even when SD Beacon is fully implemented, *Primary Link* is a separate and independent process. The distinction between the SD Beacon HIE and *Primary Link* are that Primary Link is a standardized process that is supported by a “push” system, while Beacon is a “pull” system:

- *Primary Link* secure messaging will allow the hospital case manager/discharge coordinator to send the summary information provided to the patient at discharge to the identified primary care provider to prompt review and follow-up for compliance with discharge instructions (a push system). *Primary Link* does not rely on the patient complying, scheduling and/or presenting to the provider. Even providers not participating in SD Beacon HIE can use the system (with a participation agreement).
- Beacon HIE provides edge servers, mapping and the network, but a provider must know to query the system to secure patient information, generally when the patient presents (a pull system).

The technical development of *Primary Link* will be funded by Beacon. Primary Link project will support the development, testing, refining of the Primary Link processes and the convening and training of staff.

Beacon will provide in-kind funding for securing messaging system development and implementation. UCSD faculty members Theodore Chan, MD and Anupam Goel, MD are the Beacon principals; they will dedicate time to user meetings, documentation and development direction to their software/systems vendor.