

## Portico Healthnet Coverage and Care Management Program

Portico's Coverage and Care Management Program is the only health care coverage option for undocumented immigrants in the Twin Cities metro area. Portico has been offering the program for over 20 years, and Portico staff members have built a high level of trust with the Hispanic community. The program is in high demand: we currently serve over 1,500 people, and have a full waiting list. The program offers coverage for prescriptions and primary, preventative and specialty care at a time when there are very few options for those without insurance. Most clinics will not treat patients without insurance; community clinics that do aren't able to meet the increasing demand for affordable care. In addition to coverage for health care services, Portico offers critical care management services for participants and their children, many of whom qualify for public health care coverage. Our care management services help participants and families understand and navigate the health care system as well as address social determinants of health.

One hundred percent of people served by Portico's Coverage and Care Management Program are immigrants; approximately 90% are undocumented and the rest have complex immigration status, making them ineligible for government programs. Because of their immigration status, they do not qualify for public health care coverage nor are they eligible to receive coverage through their employer. Many are self-employed. Many earned degrees or licensures in their home countries that are not valid in the United States. They don't enjoy the privileges that most employed Americans receive such as benefits, worker's compensation, or disability insurance. Although many work multiple jobs they have low incomes: 89% have household income at/below 200% federal poverty level. In addition, 96% enrolled in the program do not speak English fluently. These circumstances make it difficult to understand and navigate Minnesota's health care system. Portico also serves participants' family members, many of whom are children with legal status.

Access to health care available through Portico's Coverage and Care Management Program for undocumented immigrants and their families is more critical now than ever. Since the 2016 election, Portico's coverage program has been fielding an increasing number of calls from participants requiring mental health resources; in January 2017 alone, mental health claims by Portico participants had increased by nearly 2% from the prior six months. Researchers have found that mental health symptoms related to the fear of deportation of oneself or one's family member have increased with the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric since the 2016 election. These physical and mental manifestations of stress include symptoms from anxiety and depression to chronic headaches and eating disorders. Roberto Gonzalez, an assistant professor of education at Harvard who studies undocumented youth, was quoted recently in a recent New York Times Opinion piece ("The Psychic Toll of Trump's DACA Decision," September 8): "This kind of elevated fear and anxiety can have detrimental physical and mental health effects in the long term. Many of the young people I've been studying have shown physical and emotional manifestations of stress: chronic headaches, toothaches, ulcers, sleep problems, trouble getting out of bed in the morning, eating issues. It will get only worse, with Mr. Trump's DACA announcement." ([https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/opinion/sunday/mental-health-daca.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/08/opinion/sunday/mental-health-daca.html?_r=0))

Stress levels for immigrant families have increased tremendously, and barriers to accessing primary and mental health care remain. Many of the undocumented people Portico serves are afraid to use the mainstream health care system for fear that they will be reported to Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and be deported. Mothers worry for their families and don't take the time to exercise self-care. Those without legal immigration status cannot have a driver's license and face barriers getting

to appointments. Many immigrants served in our Coverage and Care Management Program are not well educated and suffer from social isolation and trauma, preventing them from seeking out needed assistance. There are also cultural barriers: Many participants value family above all else and don't want health providers, social workers, or government to make important life decisions for them. Others face a cultural stigma of using mental health providers.

Portico's culturally competent Care Management Coordinators (CMCs) have trusted relationships with participants and their families and work to educate them about the importance of primary and mental health care, what resources are available to them, and assist them in getting the help they need. Portico CMCs provide referrals to organizations specializing in serving victims of domestic violence (incidents of domestic violence increase during times of high stress); legal resources (including immigration; workers compensation; housing; guardianship); and financial resources (including funding to assist with energy assistance; childcare; and transportation). Portico CMCs also provide cultural translation to families; important services and legal terms such as preventive care, health care directives, guardianship, and parental rights are new concepts to people new to United States health and social systems. The following stories illustrate the challenges faced by families served by Portico, and how Portico's care management services and systems advocacy help undocumented families remain resilient in the face of enormous challenges:

1. A 10-year-old boy with three attempts of suicide because of bullying at school and fear of deportation. He arrived in the US when he was just 3 years old, and is terrified by the idea of moving to a country that he does not know.

Portico intervention:

- Applied for Emergency Medical Assistance (EMA) to cover the family's expenses from two inpatient hospitalizations.
- Portico's Coverage and Care Management Program covered outpatient mental health services.
- A Portico Care Management Coordinator (CMC) served as a liaison between the boy's mother and his mental health provider.

2. An undocumented, non-English speaking 67-year-old woman with four severe medical conditions. She is the legal guardian of her 18-year-old grandchild with autism and a physical disability. Her grandson is a US citizen whose mother died when he was one year old.

Portico intervention:

- Helped woman maintain ongoing EMA and a Care Plan to manage her health issues.
- Assisted family in applying for a financial charity program to pay for expenses not covered through Portico's coverage program or EMA (including Home Care).
- Helped with applications for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medical Assistance (MA) for her grandson.
- Assisted woman in applying for Metro Mobility services to get free transportation.
- Translated legal information regarding Guardianship and legal custody for her adult grandchild. Provided cultural translation for the idea of "guardianship".

3. A 19-year-old transgender college student with DACA status suffering from hydrocephalus since birth.

Portico Intervention:

- Helped family deal with the emotional and cultural implications of his transition from female to male.
- Identified a medical providers specializing in his medical condition.
- Assisted with application for EMA services to cover emergency surgery expenses due to implanted shunt malfunction.
- Assisted with application for financial charity programs with his provider.
- Referred to an immigration lawyer to help him to apply for legal permanent resident status under a spouse petition.
- Reviewed information and assisted in applying for Tricare medical program (his spouse's coverage), which provides more comprehensive health coverage than the Portico coverage plan.

4. A 42-year-old woman finishing her cancer treatment and having a hard time paying for basic needs for her family. Her husband works part time at a temp agency and they have two children who are US citizens.

Portico Intervention:

- Helped family apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- Referred family to local food shelf.
- Helped woman schedule doctor and treatment appointments.
- Connected family to the Angel Foundation, a nonprofit that funds basic living expenses such as rent or mortgage, food, gas and utilities for families dealing with cancer.

Portico Coverage and Care Management services are a life line and a safety net for families with complex immigration statuses, enabling participants to take control of their health so that they can continue to provide for themselves and their families. But these services are in danger. In response to potential changes in health care service reimbursement, area health systems, health plans and long-time Portico supporters are reflecting on their own missions, services and financial resources. We have received indication from a number of health system funders that they cannot guarantee future funding for Portico. While Portico has a diverse funding stream, resources to maintain current service levels are needed. We are planning for changes in our annual revenue and have begun and will continue to invest further in public policy and advocacy efforts to influence change for those we serve as well as seek additional funding sources.