



Executive Summary

Specialty Care Referral Network Pilot Implementation Plan

Prepared for the Mile High Health Alliance

The Mile High Health Alliance partnered with the Colorado Health Institute to develop an implementation plan for a specialty care referral network pilot project. The purpose of the network — called the “Hub” in this report — is to increase access to needed specialty care by underserved Denver residents.

The Colorado Health Institute, after gathering data by conducting focus groups, key informant interviews and research, recommends the Alliance establish the Hub as a third-party resource responsible for assisting primary care providers in securing specialty care for their patients.

Hub staff will develop and maintain an e-consult

program and facilitate in-person visits with available specialty care services. They will help primary care providers who do not have referral specialists or care coordinators to access these supportive services for their patients being referred to the Hub. And they will help primary care providers to practice at the top of their license and minimize unnecessary referrals.

This plan details the steps necessary to establish and implement a pilot specialty care referral program.

Among other things, the Hub will:

- Monitor available appointments among participating specialty care providers.
- Connect primary care providers in need of a referral to specialty resources.
- Ensure that all participants are upholding expectations and guidelines.

- Communicate closely with participating primary care and specialty care providers.
- Provide care coordination services for patients from primary care providers as needed.
- Connect primary care providers to specialists for consultation by maintaining an electronic consultation system, building relationships and promoting the Extension for Community Health Outcomes (ECHO) Colorado program.

Key Components of the Implementation Plan

E-Consult: The Hub's e-consult system will give the primary care team greater oversight of treatment decisions and keep specialty care face-to-face visits available for patients with more acute needs.

Governance: The Hub Leadership Council will guide the Hub's strategic direction. The Council will include members of the Alliance Executive Committee and Board; chief executive officers (or assigned representatives) of participating health systems and specialty care groups; the Denver Medical Society; the Department of Health Care Policy and Financing; Colorado Access (or representatives of the Regional Accountable Entity); representatives from Denver's primary care safety net clinics; COPIC; and person(s) with legal background and expertise.

Financial Sustainability: The Council will implement a financial sustainability plan. Factors critical to sustainability include shared responsibility among health systems, provider recruitment and incentives, identification of champions and committed start-up funding.

Timeline and Decisions: The implementation plan calls for the Hub to launch by February 2017. Major decisions that the Alliance must make before then include:

- Will Hub services only be available to members of the Mile High Health Alliance?
- What guidelines should determine whether a patient is eligible to benefit from Hub services?
- Will patients be required to pay anything for a referral facilitated by the Hub?
- What system will the Hub use for e-consults and program management?
- What is the role of behavioral health providers in the Hub?

The Hub's Administrator will also pursue legal agreements — such as those between the Hub and providers — as well as develop an appropriate evaluation plan. The pilot program will inform future phases of the specialty care referral network, including expansion to additional patients and specialties and scaling up within Denver and beyond.