

“Cultivate Health”: A Unique Resident-Centered Healthy Neighborhood

Background

The concept of a patient-centered medical home has emerged as a practice model to support the core functions of primary care and the management of chronic disease. This project, Cultivate Health, takes the concept one step further to build a healthy community from the ground up. The opportunity presents itself to build and test a “*resident centered healthy neighborhood*,” intertwining the concepts of healthy communities and medical homes. This proposal is for a range of health services designed to improve the health of Coloradoans who live, work, and learn in an identified neighborhood.

This is a unique chance to design, build, and test a comprehensive view of “community” and a holistic view of “population health” within one project. The initial collaboration of Urban Ventures/Perry Rose with Regis’ Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions and Regis College-- and potentially with The Colorado Health Foundation (TCHF) and other funding agencies -- provides the opportunity to bring this concept to life. Grant funding for a year of construction followed by three years of service and program development and growth will be requested from TCHF. Supplementary grants for various sub-projects are planned for the Colorado Trust, Caring for Colorado and other agencies.

This project will provide Regis University with a “working laboratory” for students and faculty in Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions, Regis College, and other potential Regis programs. It will expand the experiential education possibilities in the health professions schools while giving health professions faculty active practice sites. The cooperative innovations between Regis and the neighborhood community in the areas of health promotion and health care coupled with healthy eating and active lifestyle initiatives provide many opportunities for research.

Description

The identified neighborhood is centered on Regis and the Aria Denver Neighborhood being developed on the former Marycrest convent at 52nd and Federal Blvd. This includes four census tracts with a population of 14,495 plus an additional 1500 employees of Regis University. Urban Ventures/Perry Rose is developing a mixed-socioeconomic community (Aria Denver) in this north Denver neighborhood with some housing units already completed and occupied. This project would add healthy living, healthy eating and health services to this collaborative.

This proposal brings together three primary efforts to improve the overall health of the residents and workers of this identified community:

- Community-based mid-level provider primary health service (Health Care)
- Programs / initiatives to improve childhood and adult fitness including pphysical and environmental infrastructure to encourage an active lifestyle (Healthy Living). Urban agriculture and scratch cooking classes to improve access to healthy foods and to encourage healthy food choices and preparation (Healthy eating)
- Infrastructure improvements in the neighborhood

I. “Regis Cares” clinic: Community-based mid-level provider primary health service

Designed and operated by the Rueckert-Hartman College for Health Professions at Regis University, the health service will be a new model for community health management in a medically underserved neighborhood of Denver. This teaching clinic will be operated by Regis Faculty and students, and will serve existing residents of the surrounding neighborhood, new residents of Aria Denver, Regis University faculty and staff, residents of Warren Village’s First Step program for homeless women and children, and Marycrest Assisted Living Residents. The 4 census tracts surrounding the Aria campus have already been designated as a Federal Health Professional Shortage Area (score:12) and encompass residents of mixed socioeconomic status. This community is unique for such a project in that:

- Of the families in the neighborhood for whom income data are available, 39.6% are below the federal poverty level
- Of the adults for whom educational level is available, 24% have not completed high school
- Thirteen percent of the residents in the neighborhood are not legal U.S. citizens.

The nearest health clinics that provide primary care are not within walking distance, and public transportation is inadequate. However, this proposal focuses on the health of those who are underserved as well as those in the middle class employee base of Regis University. It offers a unique opportunity to discover how a healthy neighborhood concept can apply to a population such as the Regis employees, which, in many ways, is also underserved. Of note:

- 55% of employees have had no wellness visit or primary care examination within the past two years. This includes screening examinations such as mammograms, pap smears, and prostate exams.
- The employees do not follow a typical pattern of age distribution due to the extensive educational requirements for employment. The average employee of Regis has more than 10 years tenure, and the average age is 49.6 years.
- The relatively low turnover of employees, as well as the unlimited access to longitudinal employee data, allow for the measurement of the effects of population health management strategies on outcomes in a middle-class population, including financial return on investment.

It would be misleading to call the health service a clinic, even though it will occupy a portion of a physical structure to be built in the Aria Denver neighborhood. Along with a fitness center, community room with teaching kitchen, educational spaces and a dispensing pharmacy (other facilities needed to provide the services and programs included in Cultivate Health), the health service will occupy around 10,000 square feet of space. It will be totally staffed with an interprofessional group of mid-level providers including faculty who are nurse practitioners, physical therapists, pharmacists, and licensed mental health counselors. The health service will also provide a clinical site for the education of their students. The health service, as proposed, would include space for physical examinations and treatment, counseling, education, therapy and a pharmacy. Navigation services and assistance in accessing insurance will also be provided.

The health service is envisioned as proactive, preventive and personalized care provided in the neighborhood. The medical home model, demonstrating success with chronically ill patients, will be adapted to a community with a range of health needs that exceed traditional episodic care and include

management and prevention of chronic illness. Focus will be on primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention activities driven by data-based analysis of risk and potential risk in the community. The service will also treat common and minor primary care and chronic illnesses, and will develop a roster of physicians and other providers for referral of specialized cases.

A final aspect of this proposal that is unique is the capacity to study the effects of these strategies using both evaluation and research methodologies. Access to the research infrastructure and faculty of a university enables real-time information about outcomes as well as methodologically sound study of the effects on the community.

II. Programs and Initiatives to Improve Health and Reduce Childhood Obesity

The close proximity of Beach Court Elementary School to Aria Denver provides an opportunity to engage youth and their families in programs that will encourage childhood fitness and healthy eating. This school serves low income families as evidenced by its 100% free lunch program. Services that can be provided through the healthy neighborhood initiative include:

- a. **Health Impact Assessment of the neighborhood**- conducted by a capstone group of Regis graduate students, the HIA will be modeled after the work of the Mariposa project.
- b. **Cooking classes:** “Cooking Matters” will organize and provide healthy cooking classes for neighborhood residents, with a specific emphasis on educating children and their families. These classes will integrate with Aria Denver's garden education program by using local, homegrown food to teach children and families how to eat healthfully. The cooking education program will invite nearby Warren Village residents to participate. Warren Village is a non-profit serving single women and their children who are transitioning out of homelessness. There will also be a model program developed to teach healthy cooking techniques to the kitchen staff at Beach Court elementary.
- c. **Gardening education:** UrbiCulture Community Farms is a local non-profit that is committed to growing and providing food to people of all income levels. UrbiCulture is a multi-plot farming operation with urban agricultural locations throughout Denver, including the Aria Community Garden. UrbiCulture will spearhead the gardening education program for Beach Court Elementary students, featuring classes to teach children about the origins of food, the beauty of edible landscapes and the value of having nearby food production. This has been requested by the Principal.
- d. **Permaculture Certificate program** – Dr. Damien Thompson, Professor of Anthropology at Regis will develop the curriculum and offer a summer program for Regis students to learn about Permaculture food production. They will work in the Aria Denver community garden and will involve residents in the neighborhood in this work, especially reaching out to parents of Beach Court Elementary School. Permaculture is an agricultural practice that is centered around community cohesion and self-sufficiency. This past summer, early phases of this program produced 80-100 pounds of produce weekly that was sold in a farmers market in the Aria Neighborhood.
- e. **Healthy Living Coordinator:** The health service will provide a Healthy Living Coordinator who will serve as the lead to teach physical and mental well-being classes to the community, and will coordinate the various services delivered to the community. The Health Living Coordinator will be responsible for youth and family educational programs, physical fitness programs, and well-being programs. This will be a full time position and will not be a faculty member, but rather employed by the health services.

- f. **Wholesome Wave Prescription Nutrition:** Aria Denver will serve as a pilot community for an initiative in which clinicians "prescribe" vegetables and fruits to encourage healthy eating among community members. This program, which has been established and proven successful in several east coast cities, will be administered by a nurse practitioner in the Aria Denver Clinic. The NPs will issue "prescriptions" of healthy foods to underserved children and their families that can be redeemed for free or low cost fruits and vegetables at the Aria Farm Stand or the market in the Aria Center.

- g. Regis University Doctor of Physical Therapy students will work the community and local schools (elementary and middle schools) to provide assessment of childhood fitness and will provide programs aimed at increasing the physical activity of children in these target age groups. The school has students involved in service learning activities and doctoral research projects that have worked with students in these age groups in the past (Stapleton- Odyssey School) providing fitness education along with assessment of physical measures and health attitudes of children and parents. These programs will be used as baseline data of the status of children in the community and to measure the effect of any interventions provided over the course of this project.

III. Physical Infrastructure Improvements to Promote Health

In addition to healthy living programming efforts, Aria Denver will promote walkability and physical activity by providing access and connectivity to local open space and recreational amenities. Currently, however, gaps in the built environment deter people from utilizing the parks, trails and recreational facilities in the neighborhood. With TCHF assistance, Cultivate Health seeks to develop the following infrastructure improvements to help residents access and use nearby health-promoting places in the following ways:

- a. **Right-of-way improvements:** Federal Boulevard is the north-south artery that separates Aria Denver and Regis University. This roadway, with its wide lane widths, high speed limit and lack of streetscaping, is not a pedestrian-friendly environment. To improve walkability and connections to Regis University, Cultivate Health seeks to enhance the right-of-way with crosswalks that will include better striping and demarcation of the pedestrian crossing, countdown signals with accessibility features to assist the hearing- and sight-impaired and planted medians to serve as a pedestrian refuge. This will also encourage Regis employees to walk to the health service and residents of the neighborhood to access trails and other facilities at Regis.

- b. **Sidewalk installations:** Non-existent sidewalks along 52nd Avenue also discourage neighborhood walkability. The Aria Denver development includes sidewalk installation on the north side of 52nd Avenue. Cultivate Health would like to install sidewalk improvements on the south side as well for purposes of aesthetic continuity, neighborhood equity and improved walkability. Walks/trails on the Regis campus to improve access to the Aria Denver area would also be needed.

- c. **Neighborhood Signage:** Aria Denver seeks to encourage residents to use nearby Zuni Park and other parks as well as nearby bicycle facilities. To do so, Cultivate Health will implement way finding signage throughout the immediate neighborhood to notify people of the walking distance to and from features of these amenities, and allow individuals to monitor their walking distance and physical activity. Stations that promote physical activity and exercise can be built along walking routes.

- d. **Park Improvements:** Cultivate Health wishes to include an adult fitness zone and community garden in Zuni park to promote outdoor physical activity and access to local food. Improvements in lighting

and access to the parks will promote a safer more child friendly environment and increase usage by families.