

Tips to Link Your Practice to Community Resources

Your community is rich with resources to provide a wider range of services to your patients and families. Many community-based agencies and organizations extend the reach of primary care professionals and support expanded counseling, extensive follow-up for patients who have complex conditions, and targeted services for routine problems. Identifying the strengths and needs of the individual child and family, then maximizing access to community supports to address the wide range of issues patients face, promotes a holistic approach to supporting patients and families.

Practices can undertake several key changes to more effectively connect with their community:

- Identify a community liaison (or team).
- Identify frequent community referrals.
- Determine high-quality community resources that serve the infant and early childhood population.
- Ask patients and their families to share what they know about helpful resources and services.
- Identify contacts at agencies for information exchange and support for referred patients.
- Create a community resources and agencies list to share with patients and staff.
- Develop simple tracking systems that support patient care among agencies and the practice (eg, eligibility criteria from agencies, uniform “release of information” forms).
- Gather and share information from community resources.
- Document referrals to and use of community services in patients’ charts.
- Update information about community resources systematically and regularly.

START SMALL

Creating effective partnerships with your community is an ongoing, evolving process.

Consider starting with a narrow focus of 1 or 2 services your patients need most frequently and 1 or 2 strategies for linking to agencies that provide those services. Direct your practice’s community liaison or team to research community resources for those topics and develop systems for working with the organizations that provide relevant services. What you learn by fully developing 1 or 2 links at a time provides lessons learned that your practice can use to create future partnerships.

ABOUT BRIGHT FUTURES

Bright Futures is a national health promotion and prevention initiative, led by the American Academy of Pediatrics and supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, Health Resources and Services Administration. The *Bright Futures Guidelines* provide theory-based and evidence-driven guidance for all preventive care screenings and well-child visits. Bright Futures content can be incorporated into many public health programs such as home visiting, child care, school-based health clinics, and many others. Materials developed especially for families are also available. Learn more about Bright Futures and get Bright Futures materials by visiting brightfutures.aap.org.





IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY RESOURCES SYSTEM

Careful preparation will help you successfully plan, implement, and monitor a new or enhanced community resources system. Systems to link with community resources can range from very simple to more complex. It often is easier to start with a narrow focus and build on that system as you go, rather than start efforts without a clear focus. Additionally, your community may have resources beyond those agencies or organizations discussed in this tip sheet. Consider including them in meaningful ways.

1. Form your improvement team.

- Involve families as you plan your community resources system. Hearing their experiences will help ensure their needs and perspectives are incorporated in your system. Ask, “What programs or services have you found helpful? What should we tell families whom we refer to this agency?”.
- Clarify your team's goals with staff input. Discuss the challenges the team anticipates and possible benefits to your practice.
- Seek ideas and input from your staff who can share their own experiences and relationships with community agencies.

2. Define community resources for your office.

- Determine the needs of your patient population. This will allow you to focus your efforts. You can expand your systems as you identify new needs. Identify resources your patients and their families need most frequently or urgently and consider reaching out to child care facilities and public clinics to learn from them.

- Identify local agencies and groups in your community.
 - If your office is in a fairly large community (more than 50,000 residents), a local agency (eg, public health department, Head Start agency, community hospital) may have developed a resources list. Start by determining whether such a resources list exists and how to make it available in your office.
 - The Community Resources Assessment tool (page 5) can help you focus your efforts.

3. Test new ideas.

- Evaluate the community partnership strategies that make the most sense for your practice. A clearer picture of your patient population needs, your office capacity, and community resources helps you prioritize the strategies you pursue. Questions to assess your practice include
 - What systems are already in place to connect patients and their families to community services?
 - What existing systems support communicating with community services?
 - Do you have contacts in the community already?
 - How can you build on these connections and partnerships?
- Identify a community liaison or team. Define the roles and responsibilities associated with this task and, if possible, select staff who already conduct these duties. Assigning staff to spend 2 or 3 hours per month focusing on this activity will produce measurable improvements.
- Develop systems for
 - Organizing contact information about community agencies.
 - Displaying information about community services.
 - Updating information.
 - Contacting and communicating with your office (eg, establishing a contact person).
 - Integrating materials with standard patient education handouts and information.
 - Submitting and following up on referrals, as well as maintaining contact information of referral organizations.

- Exchanging forms with local agencies and determining whether your office should email or fax referral information or give it to the patient.
- Assign staff to participate in existing coalitions or community meetings to stay informed about community activities, promote relationships, and represent your office's needs.

4. Solicit parent and staff feedback about the system.

- Provide different opportunities for parents to provide input. Consider
 - Setting up a comments section in your community resources to gather and display feedback about services or agencies that your patients have used. Create a simple form for families to rate agencies. Be sure to review the comments before they are posted publicly.
 - Asking parents to speak with other parents from the practice at an informational session or one-to-one (by phone or email).
 - Requesting recommendations to share with other parents about agencies or services during health supervision visits.
 - Including questions on parent surveys to elicit information and feedback about community programs.
- Track referrals to, use of, and feedback regarding community agencies. Use these data to improve coordination, communication, and patient compliance with referral.

DEVELOP STRATEGIES FOR LINKING TO COMMUNITY RESOURCES

When linking to community resources, use strategies that are internal to your office and those that are more externally focused. When possible, build on existing routines or expertise within your office.

1. Office-based Strategies

Create a “Community Resources” area in your practice for patients and families.

Create an area in your practice that houses information about community programs and resources including materials, such as

- List of local community agencies' contact information.

- Information about financial assistance for services.
- Pamphlets and brochures from local community programs and service providers.
- Marketing materials (eg, magnets, business cards, posters) from local agencies.
- Parenting education information.
- Feedback forms for parent input about community resources and topics of interest.

Other features that might be helpful in your Community Resources area are

- A telephone parents can use to call agencies.
- A private area to place a call.
- Pen, paper, maps, and public transit schedules.
- Computer terminal with online access.

Identify tools to support staff improvements in linking to the community.

- Make available standard referrals forms for local community agencies.
- Orient staff to referral forms from local agencies.
- Assign a referral specialist who is responsible for completing and processing forms and following up on referrals.

Consider co-locating agency staff at your practice.

- Offer space to both medical and nonclinical staffs.
- Identify or hire an in-house community referral specialist to handle coordination of referrals and to act as a practice-patient community resource.
- Encourage Medicaid; the Children's Health Insurance Program; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); or other services to enroll patients in your office.



2. Community-based Strategies

Participate in centrally coordinated community services efforts.

Often, the local public health department coordinates eligibility screening for identifying and referring families. Become involved by:

- Identifying the agency or group responsible for centralized triage.
- Regularly evaluating the pros and cons (including costs) of participating in the system for your practice.
- Participating in training to use the system (which may be at your practice).
- Understanding criteria and language for referral and enrollment.
- Maintaining an ongoing relationship with the system coordinator.

Capitalize on existing coalitions and coordinated efforts.

In some communities, community-wide coordination activities already exist in which you can get involved.

If there are, consider asking:

- Is there a network of providers collaborating on and coordinating needed services?
- Are there regular meetings to attend and learn more? Are there meeting summaries if you cannot send a practice representative?
- Is there a newsletter, website, or email list that will let you stay informed about the full range of community resources and services?
- Are there materials (eg, brochures, pamphlets) about community resources and services that your practice can provide to patients and their families?
- What referral systems exist? How do they work?
- Is there a community resources guide? How can your practice become listed in it? How can you get copies? How can you get updated versions?

Consider assigning health care professionals and staff to see patients at a satellite or community clinic where other service providers are practicing.

SUGGESTED TOOLS

Community Resources Assessment

- The Bright Futures Community Resources Check Sheet on page 5 helps your practice identify community resources that may enhance services for your patients. The tool allows you to evaluate and prioritize organizations you would like to develop or improve links with. The tool is organized around specific categories of services with examples of resources in your community.
- Consider 2 possible approaches for the community resources inventory. Either use this assessment tool to create an exhaustive list of all community resources in the area that might be useful for your practice then prioritize based on your knowledge of the patient population. Or assess the community resources that are needed by making a list of all community resources that are part of your current referral system and those that you need more information about. Prioritize this list by working on setting up those links first. Consult page 6 for a more complete list of services to which your practice might want to link.

To evaluate whether your practice's link with a particular organization is meeting needs, ask,

- Do we know what programs and services are offered through this organization?
- Do we know how to refer our patients?
- Do we know how to find out the status of our referrals?
- Do we have feedback from families that have used the services?



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Bright Futures Community Resources Check Sheet

Services and Potential Community Resources	Satisfactory Link in This Area?		Priority to Develop This Link		Made Information About Organization or Referral	
Health						
Title V Services for Children/Youth with Special Health Care Needs (CYSHCN)	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Medicaid	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Children's Health Insurance Program	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Local Child and Family Health Plus Providers	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Medical specialty care	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Public health nursing	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Home care	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Respite care	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Mental health resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Substance use disorder treatment	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Environmental health units	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Health literacy resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Physical activity resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Development						
Head Start and Early Head Start	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Early intervention programs	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Early education and child care programs	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
School-based or school-linked programs	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Recreation programs/literacy programs	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Playgroups	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Family Support						
US Department of Agriculture (USDA) WIC nutrition program	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Social service agencies and child protection services	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Parenting programs/support groups	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Faith-based organizations	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Home visiting services	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Intimate partner violence resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Bereavement and related supports (due to child death)	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Food banks/SNAP/diaper banks/car seat resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Child care resource and referral agencies	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Child care health consultants	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Parents Helping Parents organizations for CYSHCN	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Adult Assistance						
Adult education and literacy resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Job training resources	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Housing/rental assistance	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Adult education for English-language instruction	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Legal Aid Society	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Immigration services	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Racial/ethnic-specific support and community development organizations	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No
Volunteering opportunities	Yes	No	High	Low	Yes	No

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COMMUNITY RESOURCES LIST

1. American Red Cross
2. Behavior evaluation and treatment
3. Car seats
4. Child abuse and neglect prevention and treatment
5. Child care resource and referral (financial assistance with child care)
6. Child services coordination or case management
7. Child support enforcement
8. Civic, community-service groups (eg, Ruritan, Elks)
9. Community-based social service agencies (eg, Community Action Agencies Across America)
10. Community colleges
11. Department of Mental Health
12. Department of Public Health
13. Department of Social Services
14. Developmental delay assessment and early intervention programs (state Central Directory)
15. Early childhood development programs
16. Early childhood literacy programs (eg, Reach Out and Read)
17. Faith-based organizations (eg, mosques, synagogues, churches)
18. Family-to-Family Health Information Centers
19. Fire prevention services (eg, free smoke detectors)
20. Food banks/food kitchens
21. Health insurance (Medicaid, Children's Health Insurance Program)
22. Hearing or auditory referrals
23. Home visiting programs
24. Housing authority
25. Housing services, and homeless shelters
26. Intimate partner violence hotlines and safe houses
27. Issue-specific family support groups (eg, Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder [CHADD], 12-step programs, Parents Without Partners)
28. Job training and placement
29. Legal Aid Society
30. Licensed counselors and social workers
31. March of Dimes
32. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (1-800-273-8255)
33. Neighborhood associations
34. Parent to Parent USA
35. Parenting training and education
36. Poison prevention services (lead poisoning detection)
37. Safe Kids Worldwide
38. Smoking cessation services
39. Speech evaluation
40. Substance use disorder treatment programs
41. Temporary Aid to Needy Families
42. United Way 2-1-1
43. USDA WIC and SNAP nutrition programs
44. Work First programs
45. YMCA



Contact us by email or telephone at:
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