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### **New Report Shows Community Connections Produces Substantial Savings**

The Northwest Michigan Community Health Innovation Region (CHIR) Community Connections clinical community linkages network saves money, according to a report recently issued by Michigan Department of Health Services. The report, Claims Data Reports by Local CHIRs, analyzes Medicaid Health Plan claims from the clinical community linkages models in the five CHIRs in Michigan.

The report details decreases in Emergency Department visits and inpatient stays that resulted in \$13.4M in savings statewide, since CHIRs were launched in Michigan in 2018, including \$1.5M in savings from the Northwest CHIR, a 10-county region. A key goal of clinical community linkages models is to reduce unnecessary medical expenses.

“As important as it is to see a doctor when you’re sick, clinical care only accounts for about 20% of health outcomes like length of life and quality of life,” said Jenifer Murray, who directs the CHIR’s Community Connections network of four hubs, each operated by a different local health department. “The other factors are ‘social determinants of health’ like affordable housing, healthy food, transportation options, and referral to medical care, among others. In Clinical community linkages models like Community Connections, community health workers help clients to find—and use—community resources they need in order to increase health and improve health equity.”

Murray added she was very pleased that the statewide analysis documents savings in the Northwest CHIR. “A study by Michigan State University showed that Community Connections transforms individual lives and another by University of Michigan confirmed clients report high levels of satisfaction and feel capable of navigating community resources themselves after participating in the program. And now we know it saves money too.

Client needs have changed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Murray said. “Our referrals increased by about 25% in 2020, and many new clients never had to navigate health and social services before.” They types of needs they experienced also shifted. In 2021, highest needs were for medical care cost/health insurance, employment/income, housing/shelter, food security, and utilities.”

Community Connections services are free and there are no eligibility guidelines. It is supported financially with a grant from Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, reimbursement from Medicaid Health Plans, and a matching mechanism available to local health departments.

To learn more or to make a referral to Community Connections, visit  
<https://northernmichiganchir.org/linking-people/community-connections-hub/>

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