Regional Health Connectors and Practice Transformation

A Regional Health Connector (RHC) is a local resident whose full-time job is to improve the coordination of services to advance health and address the social determinants of health. RHCs promote connections among clinical care, community organizations, public health, human services, and other partners.

RHCs support providers and their patients by:

- Connecting practices with resources to improve health, such as community tobacco cessation groups, chronic disease management programs, school-based health services, and mental health response trainings.

- Assessing the need for practice transformation support and making connections to the appropriate program such as EvidenceNOW Southwest, the Colorado State Innovation Model, Transforming Clinical Practice Initiative, Regional Care Collaborative Organizations, and more.

The RHC role from a practice perspective

Practices participating in transformation efforts will receive support from practice facilitators (PFs or coaches), clinical health information technology advisors (CHITAs) and RHCs. PFs, CHITAs, and RHCs will work with practices to determine how and when to integrate RHC support into a practice improvement plan to minimize duplication of effort and additional demands on staff time. PFs and CHITAs are employees of practice transformation organizations; RHCs work for local organizations with strong connections in the community.

The table below outlines potential roles for the PF, CHITA and RHC as they interact with practices.
How a RHC connects clinics and communities

RHCs improve clinical-community linkages, remove barriers to health care, and address factors that influence health by:

- **Providing** information about state and regional community health resources
- **Helping** practices incorporate community programs and supports into their practice transformation efforts
- **Engaging** local partnerships in region-specific projects that address physical and behavioral health
- **Building** ongoing supportive relationships with practices that will last beyond the support funded by programs

For example, a RHC would:

**Doug Miller, NP**, talks to a patient about managing his blood sugar during a recent exam at the Rocky Ford Family Health Center. The Regional Health Connector in the area could help Miller connect with community-based chronic disease management programs.

**Antonito Park** in the San Luis Valley is a great space to be active, but it closes when the sun goes down. In a community where there is a need for more places to exercise, the RHC can work with a local fitness center to expand access. The RHC can then inform primary care practices about the new arrangement and assist in coordinating a referral system linked to the provider’s electronic health record.

**In Northwest Colorado** there is a long history of collaboration to improve health. The RHC can promote shared decision-making among the host organization, providers, local public health agency, and other partners in the region. The RHC can increase practice engagement and community participation in implementation of local health improvement plans.

**At Inner City Health Center** in Denver, patients receive integrated physical, behavioral, and oral health care. The RHC can organize stakeholders to address transportation as a barrier to care and help develop and distribute materials to inform community organizations and providers about transportation options.

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