

# CASE STUDY SPOTLIGHT

## North Hudson Community Action Corporation (NHCAC)



### Type

Federally Qualified Health Center

### Location

Union City, NJ

### EHR

eClinicalWorks

**58,896**  
patients

- 96.6% of patients at or below 200% Federal Poverty Guideline
- 76.2% of patients are best served in a language other than English
- 46.3% of patients are uninsured



### Patient Strategies

- Patient reminder or recall/in reach
- Patient education
- Reducing client out-of-pocket costs
- Navigator/Community Health Worker
- Automated campaigns



### Clinician/Staff Strategies

- Care team/team-based approach
- Standing orders
- Follow up to abnormal (positive) FIT



### Reducing Structural Barriers

- Mailed FIT
- Expanded office hours

## Background

In 2017, North Hudson Community Action Corporation (NHCAC) had a colorectal cancer (CRC) screening rate above 71.4%, higher than the national average for FQHCs. They still prioritized reaching a CRC screening rate of 80% or higher in their clinics, which serve over 50,000 predominantly Hispanic/Latino patients.

## Results

By 2018, NHCAC's UDS CRC screening rate increased to 87.1%. Like other health centers, the health center experienced a decline in their UDS CRC screening rates to 77.1% during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As of June 2021, the health center reported that their screening rate had started to improve again and was up to 82%.

## Evidence-based Strategies and Innovations

NHCAC prioritized increasing CRC screening rates by continually improving screening processes and addressing patient barriers to screening, including hesitancy to complete CRC screening. They provided patient education as well as funding for screening costs if needed. A team-based approach, standing orders, expanded hours, and a mailed fecal immunochemical test (FIT) campaign were also used to increase rates. The health center shared the following key interventions they implemented, and lessons learned:

### Outreach to Existing Patients/Patient Reminders

- A data analyst provides a list of patients reaching the initial age of screening in that year to patient navigators who conduct outreach to bring patients in for screening.
- The practice developed a Happy Birthday Letter to remind patients that they are due for CRC screening.

### Standing Orders

Standing orders are available so medical assistants can order the test for eligible patients without waiting for an order from a primary care clinician.

### Location of FIT/Guaiac-based Fecal Occult Blood Test (gFOBT)

Tests are kept in the clinical area for easy access. Medical assistants provide the education to the patients rather than the patients going to the lab.

### Mailed FIT/gFOBT

- The practice mails FIT/gFOBT to patients during telehealth visits with specific instructions on how to return the test. Patients return tests to the practice in-person, they do not mail tests back.
- The practice was able to utilize some of the American Rescue Plan (ARP) COVID-19 funding to assist with implementation.

### Test Affordability

For patients without health insurance who cannot afford a FIT, gFOBT is provided. The practice also offers charity care and the CDC-funded [NJ Cancer Education and Early Detection \(NJCEED\)](#) program provides free screenings to patients in need.

### Patient Education and Communication

- Most non-compliance arises from patients not wanting to perform the test, so the practice relies upon patient education to address patients' reluctance to screening.
- The practice utilizes the EHR to send out reminder letters, texts, calls, and campaigns. Patient education is sent through the patient portal.

## Team-based Approach

- Medical assistants perform chart scrubs the day before every patient visit. They also order the test where appropriate and educate the patient on the testing instructions.
- **Negative/normal FIT/gFOBT results** – once results are received, they're communicated to patients by the provider through the portal within two weeks.
- **Abnormal FIT/gFOBT results** – the provider signs off on any abnormal results within seven days with a plan of care and follow-up. The patient navigator reviews abnormal results and follows up with the patient.
- **Positive FIT/gFOBT results** – Patient navigators follow up with patients who have had positive results to schedule them for an appointment to review the results. Referral navigators follow up on referrals for patients for diagnostic colonoscopies. The referral navigators make appointments for the follow-up colonoscopy and assist patients with the process.

## Extended Office Hours

The practice has office hours until 7 p.m. some days and also provides services on Saturdays. This allows patients to return kits outside of normal business hours.

## Robo-calls

The practice uses an automated system to send robo-calls to patients overdue for returning lab tests.

## Tool Shared

Sample Happy Birthday letter – in English and in Spanish



### Interviewees

**Rita Knause, MD**  
Chief Medical Officer  
North Hudson Community Action Corporation



**Jeannette Sujovolsky, DO**  
Director of Adult Medicine  
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**Nishie Perez, MA, BSN, RN**  
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