

Improving Utility Assistance and Resource Access

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Background

Patient screeners at the University Hospitals Rainbow Ahuja Center for Women and Children demonstrate significant utility insecurity along with resource need for other social determinants of health. Demonstrating the extent of the problem in the patient population can help guide advocacy efforts along with addressing barriers for access to social services or programs. All families are pediatric patients or women's health patients at the UH Rainbow Ahuja Center for Women and Children in midtown Cleveland, which is a majority African-American and Medicaid population. The clinic was established carefully considering its context and the historically marginalized clinical care experiences of the Black community.

Learning Objectives

1. Determine the demographic of families that requested medical certificates at the UH Rainbow Ahuja Clinic
2. Understand the impacts of utility insecurity and advocate for utility reform legislation
3. Learn how to deliver and develop easily accessible social determinant of health resources to patients

Activities

- Conducted data analysis on patients that received medical certificates at the clinic
- Created an issue brief for a moratorium on utility disconnections for pregnant mothers and families with infants
- Assessed which programs to prioritize for the patient population based on needs assessments
- Developed comprehensive resource infographic for patients to easily access social services and programs

Deliverables

Call for Moratorium on Utility Disconnections for Pregnant Mothers and Families with Infants

Utility disconnections pose dangerous health threats to families with infants or pregnant mothers. We must protect these vulnerable populations from disconnections so that no one has to choose between feeding their families or keeping them warm.

Concern for Healthcare

- Ohio's infant mortality rates remains one of the highest in the country
- Utility disconnections during pregnancy may contribute to poor birth outcomes and infants can be affected by hazardous exposures to unsafe alternative heating or lighting or chronic illness exacerbation
- Energy insecurity is also linked to direct impacts on mental and physiological wellbeing along with financial distress as families make budget trade-offs even in warmer months, spending less on food, medical care, and housing, so they can pay utility bills.

Utility Assistance in Ohio

- A 30-day medical certificate can be used three times in a 12-month period to postpone termination for certain health conditions or vulnerable people
- Winter reconnection program available from November 1st - April 15th
- Patients are left vulnerable outside of this winter period and pregnant women/families with infants are not eligible for medical certificates.

Introducing Utility Reform Legislation in Ohio

- Advocate for Senate Bill 150 to be passed to add language to Ohio utility legislation that specifically protects pregnant women and families with infants from utility disconnections

Alameda County Department of Public Health Brief: <https://www.ohio.gov/2022/04/14/utility-consequences-energy-costs-and-child-health>

Call Ohio state senator Kent Smith (D) at (614) 466-4857 to advocate for utility reform legislation!

Figure 1 – Issue Brief

- Demonstrates the importance of utility reform
- Communicates statistics from UH Rainbow Ahuja clinic data
- Provides future steps and options for advocacy

Figure 2 – Social Services Infographic

- Provides a comprehensive overview of the programs at the UH Rainbow Ahuja clinic to address the social determinants of health

UH RAINBOW AHUJA CENTER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN AT MIDTOWN SOCIAL NEEDS SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

- 1 Rainbow Connects**
Patients or caregivers who are seen in the Midtown clinic may receive 2 free packs of free diapers once a month. Patients can also stop by on the 2nd floor to learn about other social needs resources or to ask questions. Volunteers will follow up with you if interested. Call 216-675-6635 to learn more.
- 2 Attachment Vitamins**
Attachment Vitamins is a free, virtual, supportive group of parents and caregivers of children ages 5 and younger. This program offers free, virtual group sessions to encourage positive and nurturing caregiver-child relationships. Call 216-675-6715 to learn more.
- 3 Centering Pregnancy**
Centering Pregnancy is a unique prenatal appointment that teaches you about your changing body and the growth of your baby in a group of women who are due around the same time you are. You'll learn together and your group supports you and helps to prepare you for labor and the birth of the baby. Call 216-675-6667 if interested.
- 4 Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)**
The WIC program aims to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating and referrals to health care. Call 216-675-6605 to schedule an appointment.
- 5 Legal Aid Society of Cleveland**
Legal Aid may be able to help with legal problems related to housing, education, public benefits, family law, and other civil legal issues impacting your health. There is not a guarantee that a lawyer from this service will be able to help you. These Legal Aid services are free. For more information, call 216-675-6604.
- 6 Midtown Pharmacy**
The pharmacy is located on the 2nd floor of the UH Midtown Ahuja clinic. They sell discounted toiletry items, including diapers and snacks. Currently only card payments are accepted. Call 216-675-6640 if you have any questions.
- 7 Medical Certificate**
The medical certification will postpone the termination of electric/gas service for 30 days. Call your utility company and ask them to fax a copy of the Medical Certificate to the Rainbow Connects Office at 216-201-4500. Also, tell them the name of the patient who the medical certificate is for. Patients must have been seen at the UH Rainbow Center for Women and Children in the past year.
- 8 Food For Life/Healthy Harvest**
Food For Life is free monthly access to an upscale, appointment-only food pantry for six months (may be renewed). Ask your physician for a referral and then call the dietician Lacretha Johnson at 216-286-5434 to make an appointment. Healthy Harvest is a free bag of fruits and vegetables every Monday from 9 AM until supplies last at the clinic.

© 5805 Euclid Ave, Cleveland, OH 44103 | 216-844-3971 to schedule an appointment

Lessons Learned

Through this practicum experience, I learned about the importance of improving utility assistance along with examining utility policy in Ohio. I explored the legislative process and the steps to advocate for action from a state senator. Further, I learned how to navigate conversations with patients around social needs along with providing resources for social services and programs. I have also learned the importance of accessibility of education and effective communication. Additionally, I observed how the implementation of policy on moratoriums for utility disconnections and addressing social determinants of health could reduce families' allostatic loads to allow them to focus on improving other health factors.

Public Health Implications

Implementing utility reform legislation in Ohio and increasing access to social determinant of health resources can contribute to positive health outcomes. Considering other determinants of health in the healthcare setting can help reduce longstanding health inequities along with improving physical and mental health outcomes, especially for vulnerable populations.

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