

Health Care Access Disparity Programs

Primary Care Program. The Wisconsin Primary Care Office (PCO) in the Division of Public Health conducts needs assessments to identify areas and populations which lack access to primary, dental or mental health care associated with different barriers (e.g., provider shortages, poverty, lack of health coverage, language, cultural, transportation, homelessness, and migrant/ seasonal employment). The PCO coordinates programs which increase access to care by expanding the number and distribution of safety net providers (e.g., community health centers, tribal health centers, rural health clinics, free clinics) and by helping clinics recruit and retain providers in inner-city and rural shortage areas (e.g., provider loan repayment programs, Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement incentives). The PCO collaborates with the Wisconsin Area Health Education Centers to disseminate information about federal scholarship and loan repayment programs that can help increase the diversity of the health professions workforce. For more information, see the PCO web page at: <http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/health/primarycare/index.htm>

A federal initiative for improving access to regular preventive services is “Take Your Loved One to the Doctor Day,” sponsored by the federal Office of Minority Health (OMS). The initiative targets racial and ethnic minorities and is unveiled each September. Advocates, health care organizations, and health professionals can sign up on the OMS Web site each year to become a local partner.

A hallmark of good access is providing services in a culturally and linguistically sensitive manner. As populations in Wisconsin become more diverse, health care providers must interact with patients from many different backgrounds. Culture and language are factors in how health care services are delivered and received. Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) guidelines issued by the federal Office of Minority Health have the potential to improve access to and quality of care toward improved health outcomes. The federal Agency on Healthcare Research and Quality also sponsored a literature review that outlines the specific benefits of cultural competence.