CASE STUDY

Flexible Services System Implementation

ACO: Community Care Cooperative

Community Care Cooperative (C3) is a network of 18 federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) serving over 125,000 MassHealth members. They are currently the only ACO in Massachusetts founded and governed exclusively by FQHCs.

TA Vendor: Massachusetts eHeath Collaborative

Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative (MAeHC) was a health information technology firm focused on improving the safety, quality, and cost-effectiveness of healthcare in Massachusetts. The organization disbanded in 2020.

Project Description:

MAeHC provided project management support to help C3 implement a referral management and software platform developed under a previous TA engagement. The software platform allows C3 care teams to communicate and collaborate directly with social service organizations contracted to provide housing and nutrition support to their members as part of the MassHealth Flexible Services program.

TA Project Timeline: January - August 2020

Identified Challenge

C3 sought technical and project management support to implement a robust, centralized referral process between its health centers and social service organization partners in the MassHealth Flexible Services program.

Background

Over the course of 2020, C3 contracted with 14 social service organizations across Massachusetts to provide housing and nutrition support to its members as part of the Flexible Services program. C3 worked with their health centers and these social service organizations to design program plans for flexible services and develop a software platform to collect, share, and analyze relevant data (e.g., meals delivered; case management provided) for the Flexible Services program. The platform, developed by a vendor as part of a prior TA engagement, enables tracking, authorization, and analysis of care provided by social service organizations. The platform also captures data and provides reports and analytic insights so C3 can assess and refine approaches to care provision.

TA Project Objectives

C3 sought TA from MAeHC for project management of the Flexible Services program, including implementation support for the nascent Flexible Services program and software platform. The main goals of the TA project were to enable effective, closed-loop referrals between C3 health centers and social service organizations, with the ultimate goal of improving members' health outcomes.

TA Project Development

MAeHC's TA focused on developing workflows to optimize the Flexible Services referral management process with the partner social

service organizations, using an extant, but still new, software platform. C3 reported that establishing clear goals with MAeHC early contributed to a successful scope development and project execution. The C3-MAeHC project team clearly defined roles and delegated responsibilities among the C3 and MAeHC members appropriately. MAeHC brought IT-specific project management skills and experience with electronic health management technology, to optimize the Flexible Services software and facilitate implementation. This specific expertise complemented C3's big-picture organizational perspective and strategic thinking necessary for successful Flexible Services implementation.

We quickly identified what team members were good at...We very much felt like we were part of a team [with MAeHC].

— C3 TA project team member

TA Activities

MAeHC completed three main TA activities with C3 as part of this TA project:

1 **Created standardized workflows for providers who refer members to Flexible Services.** MAeHC worked with C3 and the care management teams across C3's 18 health centers to develop workflows to refer eligible members to Flexible Services. MAeHC conducted interviews with health centers and social service organizations to better understand what was working and what was not, and to ensure the program could best support their ability to make referrals and share member data.

2 **Trained staff on the referral workflows.** MAeHC supplemented C3's initial software training for health center staff to provide additional context on how to identify members who need referrals to Flexible Services. MAeHC and C3 trained all health center staff on how to use the software, make referrals, and follow-up with partner social service organizations.

3 **Documented training materials and implementation process workflows in a manual for C3 to reference in the future.** MAeHC created a program manual documenting the referral processes, training materials, and other key resources such as slide decks about the program, to facilitate ongoing training and onboarding of new staff. They consulted both health center and social service organization staff as part of a "co-design" process to ensure the interfaces and processes met all their needs.

Outcomes and Global Impact:

Since the overall Flexible Services program began, C3 has referred over 5,000 members to social service organization partners. Through these referrals, C3's program has provided members with over two million dollars in grocery store gift cards and 80,000 meals delivered. Members are securing housing and receiving case management to help navigate the housing system which includes skills such as learning how to apply for subsidized housing and how to negotiate with landlords. Impacts have spread beyond C3 as well: Multiple other ACOs now use a version of C3's referral software platform after its successful use case for Flexible Services.

MAeHC's TA contributed to this impact by making Flexible Services referrals "seamless" for providers, according to C3 staff. The ability to make closed-loop referrals and share case notes across organizations on an ongoing basis allowed providers to see "the rest of the picture" of how their members were doing outside of the care they provided and to follow up in a timely fashion. MAeHC also sought extensive input from providers and the social service organizations to optimize the software's specifications to meet users' needs. This level of buy-in was integral to optimizing the software's use and strengthened cross-organization collaboration, which is fundamental to a program built on referral partnerships. As a C3 staff person noted, "[This project put] infrastructure in place to create strong relationships that will last".