



A simple, Web-based scheduling solution leads to 44% increase in completed preventive services and a reduction in time spent by staff at Arizona managed care plan

INTRODUCTION

Some of the most costly health problems facing health care today can be prevented, especially through early detection. But in the United States, more than 95% of every dollar goes to treatment rather than prevention.¹ Medicare and Medicaid are increasingly establishing standards to ensure that preventive services are regularly obtained by its enrollees.

One of the most important ways to facilitate preventive care is to make it easy for health plan members to be scheduled in a timely manner with appropriate health care providers. It's an objective that Health Choice Arizona faced and addressed successfully with MyHealthDIRECT's innovative scheduling platform that allows care managers to search, compare, and schedule timely appointments for members. Using a web-based scheduling solution, Health Choice Arizona was able to improve the completion rate for preventive services by 44% for the pilot group.

THE CHALLENGE

Health Choice Arizona provides health care to approximately 195,000 members throughout nine counties in Arizona's Medicaid Program, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System. The managed care plan wanted to improve HEDIS (Healthcare Effectiveness Data and Information Set) scores among its providers by enabling more members to obtain the preventive services they needed.

Specifically, Health Choice Arizona targeted members who had the lowest completion rates for obtaining preventive services, including those who needed early periodic screening, diagnostics, and treatment (EPSDT), well woman exams and complete physicals. In addition to improving community health, Health Choice Arizona wanted to raise HEDIS scores to ensure it was meeting state standards. The state of Arizona uses data from preventive services to evaluate health plans; those plans that do not meet the standards for 29 separate measures, including completion rates for preventive services and physicals, are subject to Sanctions of up to \$100,000 for each requirement not met.

¹ McGinnis JM. Observations on incentives to improve population health. *Prev Chronic Dis* 2010;7(5). http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2010/sep/10_0078.htm. Accessed [08/16/2011].

Previously, Health Choice Arizona used a variety of approaches to encourage members to visit providers for preventive services. Reminders were mailed to members' homes when they were due for preventive services. Messages were also left on voicemail to remind members to schedule appointments. In many cases Health Choice Arizona staff also attempted to assist members in making appointments by phone when requested. Scheduling appointments with providers by phone, however, proved time-consuming and inefficient. Health Choice Arizona staff would spend as many as 20 minutes scheduling a single appointment; much of that time was spent "on hold." Additionally, providers' office hours varied, necessitating numerous attempts to arrange appointments. In the end, Health Choice Arizona determined that these methods alone were not enough to guarantee results.

SOLUTION

Health Choice Arizona turned to MyHealthDIRECT, which provided the missing link needed to effectively and efficiently connect the health plan's members with the appropriate providers. Through a combination of a unique web-based scheduling platform with an onboarding service to build provider inventory, MyHealthDIRECT offered a comprehensive solution to connect the plan with its provider network for the purpose of making appointments.

"Implementation of MyHealthDIRECT is straightforward and manageable - much easier than a typical technology implementation," said Mike Uchrin, COO. The contract for services was signed March 22, 2010, and **in less than one month**, the first appointment was made using MyHealthDIRECT's software solution. Staff training for the Care Coordinators lasted one hour and the solution was found to be intuitive. Training was conducted both in person and via the web; MyHealthDIRECT's client services team helped Health Choice Arizona seamlessly incorporate the program into the workflow. MyHealthDIRECT account managers provided valuable support in scripting the messages that were used. In collaboration with the client, MyHealthDIRECT met with the providers to discuss the project and build an inventory of their appointment slots that they would make available to the plan.

At first, the provider offices expressed understandable hesitation about making appointment slots available to an outside process, as they were already at capacity. However, soon the providers realized that this approach improved the scheduling process for appointment requests they were already getting by allowing them to eliminate time spent on the phone and in its place receive automated appointment confirmations. The provider offices made appointment slots exclusively available to the health plan, subject to the frequency, dates and appointment types they controlled. Appointments unused within two days prior to the appointment were returned to the provider office to ensure slots did not go unused.

RESULTS

Health Choice Arizona's completion rate of preventive services increased by a notable 44%². This improvement was calculated by comparing the rates of completed services for EPSDT, well woman, and complete physicals in 2008-09 (prior to MyHealthDIRECT), with the rates of completion for those services in 2010 for members receiving appointments through MyHealthDIRECT's scheduling platform.

² In 2008-09, prior to MyHealthDIRECT deployment, members assigned to participating clinics completed their preventive services 47.72% of the time. In 2010, for appointments scheduled through MyHealthDIRECT, members who obtained appointments with MyHealthDIRECT completed their preventive services 68% of the time. This represents a 44% improvement ($68 - 47.7 / 47.7 = 44\%$).

MyHealthDIRECT, in combination with Health Choice Arizona's existing efforts, not only helps Health Choice Arizona achieve state quality standards. It also demonstrates a successful, innovative approach to improving quality of care that can be touted when Health Choice Arizona enters the state's next contract bidding process. The plan also is better positioned to continue to avoid Sanctions levied by the State against any of its contracted plans that do not achieve standards associated with members obtaining preventive services. And new enrollees basing their plan selection on quality data will be more inclined to select Health Choice Arizona.

Members themselves are obtaining value from the plan's deployment of MyHealthDIRECT technology by not having to wait on hold to have an appointment scheduled. Members also receive text and e-mail confirmations that are automatically generated with their consent, providing them with an enhanced concierge-level of service.

In addition, Health Choice Arizona staff found implementation to be simple and straightforward. "MyHealthDIRECT is incredibly intuitive and easy to use," said Ivette Palacios, EPSDT Supervisor. Appointment call times were reduced dramatically to under five minutes from the previous 20 minutes, freeing staff to perform other necessary duties.

The scheduling software similarly benefited care providers. "Providers in our network like receiving appointments from us through MyHealthDIRECT. They make an ample supply of appointment slots available to us," said Linda Ross, Director. In the initial nine months of deployment, there were 1,200 appointment slots available on demand from the first two clinics to go-live.

MOVING AHEAD

Following the success of scheduling in the target group, Health Choice Arizona plans to expand its use of MyHealthDIRECT's technology and services. As part of its medical home initiative, Health Choice Arizona plans to schedule needed appointments for members who have completed in-patient care or have been discharged from the emergency department. Health Choice Arizona also intends to use MyHealthDIRECT's solution to improve its care coordination efforts by ensuring that members with chronic disease are regularly scheduled for care.

CONCLUSION

"MyHealthDIRECT is an essential part of our approach to improve HEDIS outcomes and to avoid several hundred thousand dollars of financial penalties in our State contract," said Mike Uchrin, COO. Using MyHealthDIRECT's scheduling solution, Health Choice Arizona improved health access and quality of care for its members, is able to remain compliant with state standards requirements and is saving time and cost.

As with Health Choice Arizona, other managed care plans, hospitals, health systems, and health information exchanges in nine states have realized immediate benefits by using MyHealthDIRECT's web-based solution, which helps advance access to care, facilitate care management, increase quality measures and improve operational efficiency.