

# Success Stories

## Building Collaborative Contracts with Health Care: Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence, a Division of MAC Inc. Area Agency on Aging and TidalHealth

Since 2016, The John A. Hartford Foundation and USAging's Aging and Disability Business Institute (Business Institute) have honored exemplary models of effective contracting partnerships between community-based organizations (CBOs) and health care entities through The John A. Hartford Foundation Business Innovation Award.<sup>1</sup>

In 2022, the Business Institute honored the Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence (LWCE), a division of MAC, Inc., as a runner-up for The John A. Hartford Foundation Business Innovation award for its work contracting with TidalHealth, a health system operating in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia. Contracting with TidalHealth has created additional opportunities for LWCE to work with other health care organizations to provide non-clinical social services to ensure a true continuum of care. MAC, Inc. is an Area Agency on Aging on the eastern shore of Maryland.

Since 2015, its work with LWCE has been a line item in TidalHealth's annual budget. By linking with Maryland's Health Information Exchange and Electronic Privacy Information Center<sup>2</sup> (EPIC), LWCE has full bi-directional interoperability and can receive direct referrals from TidalHealth's physicians and hospitals. These referrals allow LWCE to connect older adults with needed services, document service delivery and submit invoicing for services delivered utilizing the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Health

Equity Advancement Resource and Transformation (HEART) payment initiative funds.<sup>3</sup> The HEART payment, developed by CMS and the state of Maryland, provides additional financial support for those serving socioeconomically disadvantaged populations and working to improve health outcomes, advance health equity and lower medical costs. Participants in the HEART payment program serve people with high medical complexity and an elevated area deprivation index (ADI). ADI measures neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage associated with increased health care costs and poor outcomes from health care interventions.<sup>4</sup>

**This partnership further shows how an effective health care contracting model reaches underinsured and underserved communities with much-needed evidence-based programs—and results in expanded partnerships to do the same in other communities.**

This Success Story describes how LWCE used its partnership with a combined medical system (TidalHealth) and its role as a Community Care Hub (CCH) to bring evidence-based health promotion programs and additional services to the people of Maryland and the surrounding area. Community Care Hubs promote an equitable health and social care

1 Aging and Disability Business Institute, The John A. Hartford Foundation Business Innovation Award, <https://www.aginganddisabilitybusinessinstitute.org/partnerships-in-action/the-john-a-hartford-foundation-business-innovation-award/>.

2 Electronic Privacy Information Center, <https://epic.org/>.

3 Maryland Primary Care Program, *Heart Payment Playbook*, December 2022, [https://health.maryland.gov/mdpcp/Documents/MDPCP\\_HEART\\_Payment\\_Playbook.pdf/](https://health.maryland.gov/mdpcp/Documents/MDPCP_HEART_Payment_Playbook.pdf/).

4 Administration on Community Living, *Advancing Partnerships to Align Health Care and Human Services*, March 2023, <https://acl.gov/>

ecosystem by serving as the bridge between CBOs, health care payers and providers, and public health systems, increasing a community's capacity to reach underserved populations.<sup>5</sup> LWCE has attained contracts with other medical systems in the area due to these accomplishments. This partnership further shows how an effective health care contracting model reaches underinsured and underserved communities with much-needed evidence-based programs—and results in expanded partnerships to do the same in other communities.

## About the Partners

Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence  
The Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence (LWCE) is a part of MAC, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Salisbury, Maryland. MAC, Inc. stands for Maintaining Active Citizens and was established in 1972 as one of the country's five original Area Agencies on Aging and the first in Maryland. MAC, Inc. is also an Aging and Disability Resource Center (known as MAP: Maryland's Access Point) serving older adults who may be underserved and/or underinsured. LWCE, Maryland's Community Care Hub for evidence-based programs, addresses the social, health and economic needs of older adults and people with disabilities. LWCE's mission is to improve the quality of life and health care outcomes of Maryland's older adults and people with disabilities, especially underserved rural and minority populations. LWCE provides evidence-based programs and wrap-around services to improve health and reduce health care costs statewide. The Maryland Department of Aging (MDoA) designated LWCE as a *Center of Excellence* in August 2015 to serve as the statewide resource for training and workshops across a wide array of evidence-based programs.

In 2021, LWCE was one of 12 organizations nationally awarded grants by the U.S. Administration for Community Living to build its infrastructure and capacity as a Community Care Hub, linking individuals with appropriate services and ensuring connections to health care providers. Working with other Maryland AAAs, nonprofit multicultural organizations and local health departments, LWCE connects individuals to health care networks to ensure their health and

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social needs are met. LWCE links to multiple partners, especially those who can connect underserved, at-risk individuals with needed clinical and non-clinical services, increasing LWCE's ability to reduce health inequities.

## TidalHealth

TidalHealth is a combined medical care system that brings together health care entities such as health systems, medical centers and medical groups to establish a channel of care and a reliable network that is available to all residents within the region. TidalHealth has a 123-year history of health care and offers patient-centered care across the Delmarva Peninsula, a large peninsula that includes most of the state of Delaware and part of the eastern shore regions of Maryland and Virginia. ([www.tidalhealth.org](http://www.tidalhealth.org))

Kathryn Fiddler, TidalHealth's Vice President of Population Health, noted, “We are all on the same page; we get people into our programs and systems and have the same subset of questions for the social determinants of health. More individuals are being enrolled in evidence-based workshops and LWCE's workshop leaders are identifying other issues impacting health, such as not having health insurance, money for food or housing, or adequate safety ramps, etc.”

## About the Contract

In 2014, Maryland's hospitals transitioned to a single-payer capitated reimbursement rate in an act known as Maryland's Total Cost of Care Initiative. At that time, Maryland's hospitals became accountable for improving

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Chronic Disease Self-Management Program, [https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/marketing-support/1-2-3-approach/docs/pdf/provider\\_fact\\_sheet\\_cdsmp.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/marketing-support/1-2-3-approach/docs/pdf/provider_fact_sheet_cdsmp.pdf).

population health and medical care—and reducing health care costs. This transition required hospitals to use a person-centered approach to care. In 2015, due to Maryland’s Total Cost of Care Model, TidalHealth began its first contract with LWCE to implement evidence-based Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs<sup>5</sup> (CDSMP) across the region.

Thanks to the TidalHealth contract, LWCE has established additional agreements with other partners to provide programs and services to older adults, such as shelf-stable meals, home-delivered meals, transportation and evidence-based programs, including the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives<sup>6</sup> (PEARLS) depression, Enhance<sup>®</sup> Fitness program<sup>7</sup> and the Stepping On fall program.<sup>8</sup> TidalHealth’s physician practices and the hospital directly refer patients to LWCE for services. LWCE also trains TidalHealth Community Health Workers to facilitate evidence-based workshops.

LWCE and TidalHealth collaborate to ensure older adults and people with disabilities have the resources and support needed to help them remain independent. Examples of their work together include:

- creating a coalition of academic, foundation, government, nonprofit and for-profit organizations to serve as a hub for providing community-based health promotion programs;
- collaborating with multicultural organizations to address the social needs of underserved populations across the state;
- screening individuals referred to behavior change programs and connecting them to services including home-delivered meals, transportation and utilities connection before participating in evidence-based programs; and
- participating in a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Association of State and Territorial Health Officials/National Association of County and City Health Officials (CDC/ASTHO/NACCHO) grant<sup>9</sup> to evaluate the return on investment of

activities addressing food insecurity and reducing social isolation. This project measures improved and maintained health and hospital and emergency department utilization changes. Outcomes assist LWCE by establishing the value of non-clinical services in improving health and reducing health care costs.

The original health care contract between LWCE and TidalHealth resulted in additional LWCE projects primarily focused on improving health and health equity in the community. For example, as a component of a regional grant, LWCE collaborates with TidalHealth to improve health disparities through community interventions in prioritized ZIP codes. In addition to funding from TidalHealth, physician practices affiliated with TidalHealth and the Maryland Primary Care Program fund workshops, social needs screenings and an array of social services. LWCE has increased its contracts and partners with several other health care entities. The TidalHealth partnership was crucial in demonstrating the value of these non-clinical services and in receiving contracts with other hospital systems, including Johns Hopkins, MedStar and the University of Maryland Medical System.

## Impact/Outcomes

Since 2015, 2,542 older adults and people with disabilities have participated in evidence-based programs funded through federal grants and multiple contracts, including TidalHealth’s contract. The participation breakdown is 1,269 participants in Chronic Disease Self-Management Programs, 975 in Stepping On fall prevention programs and 291 in PEARLS depression reduction programs. LWCE’s program participation is a diverse population: 49 percent are Black, 14 percent Hispanic and 3 percent Asian. LWCE continues to connect with area multicultural nonprofit organizations to reach underserved minority populations.

Another positive outcome from this grant and originating from the quarantining effects of COVID-19 was that LWCE distributed 5G loaner tablets to help

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *PEARLS*, March 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/prc/resources/tools/pearls.html>

7 Enhance Fitness, <https://projectenhance.org/enhancefitness/>.

8 Stepping On, <https://www.stepsingon.com/program/>.

9 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Getting Further Faster*, December 2022, <https://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/healthequity/sdoh-and-chronic-disease/nccdphps-programs-to-address-social-determinants-of-health/getting-further-faster.htm>.

ensure that isolated and underserved individuals had access to LWCE's virtual programs and resources. LWCE continues to provide these tablets to individuals who do not have the technology to access the internet. Because of the initial contract with TidalHealth, LWCE now links directly with Maryland's Health Information Exchange (HIE), called the Chesapeake Regional Information System for Our Patients, or CRISP, to assess the effectiveness of evidence-based programs in reducing length of hospital stay, readmissions and emergency department visits. The outcomes from this health care contract show the financial benefits of partnering with a health system. Patient panels one year prior and one year post-programs demonstrate total health care cost savings. From 2021, two evidence-based programs, CDSMP and Stepping On, contributed to a total cost savings of \$564,868.

An essential outcome of the TidalHealth-LWCE contract has been the increased confidence and knowledge of the medical community in LWCE's programs and services. Physician practices are now referring and contracting with LWCE to provide non-clinical services and programs to their highest-risk clients. TidalHealth is informing and advocating for LWCE by encouraging network providers and others to refer individuals for LWCE's programs and services.

Outcomes from the CDC/ASTHO/NACCHO evaluation grant assist LWCE in providing a true continuum of care by establishing the value of non-clinical services in improving health and reducing health care costs.

The most recent Maryland Department of Aging Master Plan<sup>10</sup> recognizes and praises the work of LWCE: "Maryland's Living Well Center for Excellence is leading the way for the state to change the landscape of recognizing the needs of older adults and respecting the power of community partnerships within Maryland's health care system. LWCE has engaged a cadre of hospitals in revenue-generating partnerships. LWCE is also a key partner in the state's chronic disease self-management efforts."

## Partnership Building and Sustaining

The partnership between LWCE and TidalHealth began in 2015 because hospitals were required to connect all

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individuals in their regions to needed services under Maryland's all-payer model. As Maryland's Total Cost of Care Model expands to physicians and hospitals, LWCE receives additional reimbursement for services to Medicare beneficiaries via the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' HEART initiative. Medicare HEART funds are now available throughout underserved areas of the state, including rural areas, low-income populations and people with multiple chronic diseases.

LWCE has proven to be an essential partner for organizations working to enhance health and health care in their communities. LWCE is also involved in community grants and plays an active role in several hospital grants reaching at-risk and underserved populations. TidalHealth continues to support LWCE's efforts to meet with health care providers and offer programs and services for their highest-risk patients. To further strengthen and sustain these collaborative partnerships, TidalHealth and LWCE hold monthly meetings with an array of more than 60 diverse partners to highlight successes, identify service gaps and explore new partnership opportunities.

## Lessons Learned

From its original health care contract to its current contracting activities, LWCE learned several valuable lessons. Volunteering for hospital-related committees and participating in hospital meetings to help identify community priorities is necessary. Being involved and active in these meetings allowed LWCE to help guide and lead community initiatives. Being at the table gave LWCE opportunities to discuss its strengths and advocate for its programming, resulting in additional funding and participation in research activities. A critical factor in this successful partnership is that Kathryn Fiddler, TidalHealth's Vice President of Population

<sup>10</sup> Maryland Department of Aging, *2017-2020 State Plan on Aging*, September 2016, [https://aging.maryland.gov/Documents/MDStatePlan2017\\_2020Dated092216.pdf](https://aging.maryland.gov/Documents/MDStatePlan2017_2020Dated092216.pdf).

Health, has become a true champion for this work, frequently sharing how LWCE can assist other hospitals in achieving community goals.

Another valuable lesson for LWCE has been the importance of working with state health information systems. CRISP, enables LWCE to connect directly with local primary care providers for referrals. The HIE's direct connection to physicians for referrals has dramatically increased LWCE's ability to connect individuals needing social services to programs and services quickly. As a CCH, LWCE can forward referrals to the appropriate AAA or other community-based organization. Additionally, LWCE can run its own reports to demonstrate the return on investment by program and service.

LWCE also learned that sharing stories and demonstrating how its services improve the lives of

older adults and people with disabilities at hospital board meetings is a meaningful way to advocate and promote its successes. Another tool, a promotional video highlighting LWCE's innovative approaches to improving and maintaining the health and well-being of Maryland's older adults and people with disabilities, is in the final stages of production at the time of publication.

LWCE and TidalHealth continue to discuss ways to expand their work together. Due to Medicare HEART funds, shelf-stable meals, transportation, other non-clinical services and evidence-based programs are being delivered to growing numbers of underserved people in its region. LWCE's contracts continue to provide needed services and programs as part of a true continuum of care to enhance the lives of Maryland's residents.

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*This publication was produced by the Aging and Disability Business Institute at USAging. Led by USAging in partnership with the most experienced and respected organizations in the Aging and Disability Networks, the mission of the Aging and Disability Business Institute is to build and strengthen partnerships between aging and disability community-based organizations and the health care system. Funded by The John A. Hartford Foundation, The SCAN Foundation and the Administration for Community Living, the Aging and Disability Business Institute provides community-based organizations with the tools and resources to successfully adapt to a changing health care environment, enhance their organizational capacity and capitalize on emerging opportunities to diversify funding. Learn more at [www.aginganddisabilitybusinessinstitute.org](http://www.aginganddisabilitybusinessinstitute.org).*