SNI Webinar Recap: Understanding and Addressing Digital Disparities

On November 9, 2020, SNI hosted the webinar, Understanding and Addressing Digital Disparities *with Contra Costa Health Services (CCHS) as a part of a [series of offerings on telehealth](). The webinar slides and recording are available [here](). Below are key takeaways from the session.*

Recognizing that the rapid expansion of telehealth could exacerbate disparities, leaders at CCHS formed a Digital Disparities Working Group to understand and address the digital divide.

Strategies to Address Digital Disparities

Collect Baseline Data

Initial data analysis showed surprising results: the Working Group found that Spanish-speaking patients have the lowest MyChart enrollment levels compared to speakers of other languages, even though the patient portal is offered in Spanish, suggesting the need for further qualitative research.

Screen for Digital Disparities

CCHS' Outpatient Social Services staff are currently testing screening questions to identify digital disparities and connect patients to resources:

- *Do you have a smartphone, tablet, or computer and wifi access?*
- *In the past 12 months, have you been worried that you would not be able to pay your phone and/or Internet bill?*
- *Do you know how to use MyChart & video visits?*

Connect Patients with Resources

California LifeLine offers a **free smartphone** with unlimited talk/text & 3-5GB/month for recipients of Medi-Cal and other government programs. Systems can either bring community vendors on-site or train staff to provide phones directly. *Tip: Smartphones with video capability are available by request, so advise patients to clarify what they need.*

Comcast offers **low-cost internet** for $10/month and computers for $149. CCHS's Human Services Department partnered with [California Emerging Technology Fund]() to promote awareness of affordable options.

Outreach to Patients

Outpatient Social Services staff educate patients about the benefits of MyChart and video visits, teaching patients to access telehealth and, in particular, promoting telehealth for bilingual patients.

Measure Success

CCHS tracks data to measure the impact of their efforts on digital disparities, using metrics such as English vs. Spanish MyChart account activation, video visits by language and race/ethnicity, patients who have changed phone # in the last 12 months, and patients who have a device but don't know how to access virtual care.

*"**We think of addressing digital disparities as part of our COVID-19 response.** This is what we've accomplished in about 2 months, meeting every other week. I'm very lucky to have this amazing team. **We've laid the groundwork to make interventions happen quickly, and soon.**"*

– B. Yoshi Laing, Ambulatory Telehealth Lead, CCHS