Choose HEALTH pairs vulnerable patients with community health workers, helping to improve the patient’s well-being and prevent avoidable and expensive emergency hospital visits.

THE ISSUE
Emergency rooms are the least effective way for people with routine or chronic health conditions to be treated, and the most expensive for the hospital and community. When we are sick or simply need a check-up, most of us go to the doctor and pay a relatively modest co-pay included in our health insurance. People who have limited income or no insurance wait until their pain or condition is so severe they cannot get turned away even though they cannot pay: the emergency room of a local hospital. In Metro Atlanta, there are more than 300,000 preventable emergency department (ED) visits. At an average cost of $1,500 per visit, this amounts to more than $450 million in excess healthcare costs.

UNITED WAY’S ROLE
United Way partners with local hospitals and health centers to employ and train community health workers (CHWs) to improve the health of patients and to prevent unnecessary and avoidable returns to the hospital. The partnership looks to bridge the gap between community-based providers and larger health systems. Choose HEALTH partners with Grady Health Center and four federally qualified health centers: The Family Health Centers of Georgia, Inc. Mercy Care, Oakhurst Medical Center and Southside Medical Center. Recently, Choose HEALTH expanded to Gwinnett County, working with Gwinnett Medical Center to target individuals in need of a medical home. In addition, United Way provides program and technical assistance for program partners.

The goals of Choose HEALTH are three-fold:
- Increase access to quality healthcare in the most appropriate setting.
- Reduce or eliminate inappropriate use of hospital resources.
- Improve overall patient health outcomes.

THE RESULTS
Choose HEALTH has worked with over 400 patients at Grady Health system. In 2015, participants saw an 83.9% reduction in ED usage and 76.6% reduction in hospital readmissions. Patients linked to a primary medical home reached 86.6% with a 65% reduction in hospital utilization costs.