

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 1 million emergency department (ED) visits by patients per year including a disproportionate number of uninsured and underinsured adults utilizing the ED for preventable conditions. At an average cost of \$1,500 per visit, this amounts to millions in excess healthcare costs.

## UNITED WAY'S ROLE

Choose HEALTH partners with local hospitals and health centers to employ and train community health workers (CHWs). CHWs seek to improve the health outcomes of patients and to prevent unnecessary and avoidable returns to the hospital. CHWs help connect patients to a medical home, accompany patients to provider visits and provide in-home services: health education, informal medication counseling and connections to vital community resources. CHWs also assist patients in reducing barriers to housing, transportation and food insecurity, which greatly affect health outcomes. Most recently, Choose HEALTH expanded its work to include services for high risk expectant mothers and the detection of developmental disabilities in newborns. Georgia ranks high in preterm and low weight births – particularly, Fulton and DeKalb are among the highest-ranking low birth rate counties in the state. Partners for this work include the Fulton County Board of Health and Grady Health System.

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

Since 2013, Choose HEALTH has worked with over 1,500 patients across partner sites. In 2017, participants saw an 89.5% reduction in emergency department usage and a 93.1% reduction in readmissions. Approximately 86.6% of patients were linked to medical home.

