

Evaluation Report Brief

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley: Family Medicine Residency (FMR) Program

What is the community challenge?

The Rio Grande Valley in Texas is home to an underserved population with very high rates of poverty, low educational attainment, and poor healthcare access. As a result, the population living in this area has disproportionately poor health outcomes, including high rates of elevated blood pressure and diabetes.

What is the promising solution?

The Primary Care Behavioral Health (PCBH) model implemented by the FMR program utilizes Behavioral Health Consultants (BHCs) to improve population health, emphasize early identification and prevention, serve a high volume of patients, provide triage and clinical services in a stepped care fashion, use panels instead of a clinical case model, and provide measurement-based care. BHCs interface with the Primary Care Team and the patients in intervention clinics to develop behavioral modification and health care plans that will help to treat chronic conditions, including poor mental health, diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley's FMR program by Health Resources in Action (HRiA) began in 2016 and finished reporting in 2017. The impact study assesses the effectiveness of PCBH services on patient depression, BMI, blood pressure, blood sugar, quality of life, and anxiety levels. It uses a quasi-experimental design with no matching where the treatment group (n=364) is compared to an external comparison group (n=262). An implementation study was also conducted, which included an analysis of qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and focus groups, and an analysis of quantitative implementation data (e.g., administrative data regarding patient visits).

What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of SIF, The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley engaged an independent evaluator to evaluate the FMR program. The evaluation compared the treatment and comparison groups on a variety of health-related outcomes after one year of exposure to the intervention and also assessed program implementation.

- Impact results indicated a statistically significant decrease in depression for the intervention group compared to the comparison group. It is, however, important to note that the intervention and comparison groups differed in several important ways, including the severity of their mental health symptoms, the year in which data were collected, and the clinics at which they were treated.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: Primary care behavioral health integration

Subgrantee: The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Intermediary: Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas, Inc.

Focus Area: Healthy Futures

Focus Population: Adults with depression, anxiety or other symptoms requiring behavioral health care

Community Served: Rio Grande Valley Texas

- Impact findings for BMI and blood pressure were in the opposite direction than desired, with significant increases observed for these measures for the treatment group.
- Implementation results generally indicated the program was implemented as intended; however, program quality appeared to vary by location, with one of the two intervention clinics reporting greater adherence to Integrated Behavioral Health core principles than the second clinic.

Notes on the evaluation

The impact evaluation initially planned to utilize a Propensity Score Matching (PSM) design, with a comparison group formed from patients attending a similar clinic in the RGV. However, this comparison group was found to differ substantially from the intervention group at baseline. Therefore, an external comparison group with greater baseline equivalence to the intervention group was utilized, and instead of conducting PSM, evaluators used multiple regression to statistically control for baseline differences. The intervention and comparison groups did, however, have several important baseline differences. These included the fact that comparison group members were all diagnosed with severe persistent mental illness, while those in the intervention group did not qualify for an SPMI diagnosis; comparison data were collected one year before the intervention group data, reflecting a history confound; there was a site-level confound between intervention and comparison groups; and, although the intervention and comparison groups were more closely aligned at baseline than was possible with the initially proposed comparison group, the groups utilized still had baseline differences on important measures, including primary language and age.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Quasi Experimental Design with no matching

Study Population: Adults with depression, anxiety or other symptoms who needed behavioral care

Independent Evaluator: Health Resources in Action

This Evaluation's Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

How is The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley using the evaluation findings to improve?

The results of this study are being used to improve leadership, technical assistance, and staffing for the FMR program in the future. Improvements to data collection through student volunteers and hiring additional project staff will also improve future evaluation attempts.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.