

## **Rhode Island Prioritizes Social Determinants of Health with Statewide Rollout**

The Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) is excited to announce the procurement of a Community Referral Platform and partnership with technology company Unite Us, that will help connect Rhode Islanders to the health and social service resources within their communities. EOHHS is committed to improving health outcomes for all Rhode Islanders and to improving community conditions where Rhode Islanders live, work, and play.

“Access to medical services is crucial to being healthy. But research shows that up to 80% of a person’s overall health is driven by other social and environmental factors and the behavior influenced by them, the social determinants of health (SDoH),” said Ana Novais, Assistant Secretary at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. “We are excited about using the Unite Us Platform with our Medicaid partners, building upon work that has been carried out by Rhode Island's Office of Veterans Services and Unite Us since 2017.”

Ben Shaffer, Rhode Island’s Medicaid Director added “Rhode Island is committed to providing the critical infrastructure to address Medicaid members’ social needs to improve overall health and wellbeing, which we know has the potential to reduce overall healthcare spending. Bringing a unified Community Referral Platform to our accountable entities, community partners and managed care organizations, is a key part of our SDoH strategy.”

The healthcare system, most notably through Medicaid’s [Accountable Entity \(AE\) program](#), is increasingly accountable for identifying Rhode Islanders’ health-related social needs and supporting them in providing appropriate services. The AE program requires providers to screen for unmet needs such as housing and food insecurity and encourages closer ties between healthcare providers and community-based organizations (CBOs) to address individual health-related social needs.

Currently, when healthcare organizations screen and refer patients to CBOs to address social care needs, there is generally no feedback mechanism for the healthcare organization to know the outcome of the referral, preventing effective follow-up and outcome measurement. Because SDoH are such a significant driver of health, knowing the outcome of these referrals is foundational to providers’ ability to manage whole-person health. CBOs receiving referrals from healthcare providers generally have no access to the health care providers’ information about patients, which may limit the CBOs’ ability to provide holistic care and require an individual to repeatedly share the same information with different service providers. This can be a daunting

process for the individual. Relying on anecdotal information is widely unreliable. In order to effectively address health-related social needs, there must be a way to document system-level service delivery data more intentionally.

Following significant stakeholder engagement and public dialogue as of late 2020, EOHHS published the [Health System Transformation Project Social Determinants of Health Investment Strategy](#). This plan describes the vision and purpose of the Community Referral Platform in more detail, as a solution that directly responds to the infrastructure needs articulated by AEs and CBOs to enable better coordination.

The Community Referral Platform (CRP) from [Unite Us](#) offers a seamless, accessible, and secure solution. The Platform will support AEs in systematically screening for members' health-related social needs, identifying appropriate resources in the community, referring members to those resources, and effectively coordinating service delivery and follow-up with CBOs. The system will be able to initiate referrals and enable the CBO to close the loop on each case file, informing the referring provider of the status or outcome of the referral. Unite Us has vast experience in implementing its highly regarded solution in other states and health systems. Such partnerships include the states of North Carolina, Virginia, Oklahoma and New Hampshire, and enterprise arrangements with multi-state organizations such as Kaiser Permanente and CommonSpirit.

“Having EOHHS’ support is critical to the continued success of the [Unite Rhode Island](#) network, as it expands across the entire state,” says Taylor Justice, Co-founder and President of Unite Us. “We applaud EOHHS’ vision to ensure that all Rhode Islanders have equitable, accountable access to health and social care services, and that their zip codes will no longer dictate their health outcomes,” he adds.

United Way of Rhode Island is a critical partner in this project by serving as a network coordination center and the home of the statewide 211 call center since 2007 and The POINT Healthy Aging help desk since 2010. The two call centers serve as the front door to social services answering 300,000 calls for assistance in 2020.

Together, these call centers help Rhode Islanders navigate community-based programs and enroll people in services they need. In collaboration with Unite Us, these resources can ensure that clients are connected to the best program to address their needs, that providers are closing the loop on those clients' needs, and that all providers in the network are meeting network standards.

“The best way to ensure the health and wellbeing of every Rhode Islander is to make sure they have safe housing and nutritious food in addition to access to effective health care,” shared United Way of Rhode Island Chief Impact & Equity Officer, Larry Warner, a co-chair of the Unite Rhode Island executive steering committee. “We are proud to partner with Unite Us and the State of Rhode Island to connect people with all the resources they need to thrive through 211.”

Other interested partners can contact Unite Us to learn more about partnering with this system. Please reach out to Laudine Koster, the Community Engagement Manager, at [Laudine.Koster@UniteUs.com](mailto:Laudine.Koster@UniteUs.com).

###