

## Heart Health Now!

*A Case Study on How Practice Support Can Help Improve Quality and Save Lives*

### BACKGROUND

UNC-Chapel Hill primary care researchers and collaborators including the North Carolina Area Health Education Centers (NC AHEC) Program and Community Care of North Carolina (CCNC) created a digital intervention using electronic health records to rank 437,556 North Carolinians at 219 primary care clinics according to cardiovascular risk, defined by the chance of heart attack, stroke or death over the next 10 years, and then help practices systematically and rapidly intervene to reduce risk of these devastating conditions among those at greatest risk.

This included mobilizing the North Carolina AHEC Practice Support team to partner with individual clinics and help providers and clinic staff implement procedures to proactively screen and manage high risk patients, and reduce cardiovascular risk as quickly as possible.

### WHAT WERE THE RESULTS?

The results, published in the national publication *Health Services Research*, show that practices were able to reduce the average risk for these patients from a high 10-year risk of serious cardiovascular events from 23 percent to 17 percent – a 25% reduction of experiencing cardiovascular events. After adjusting for clinical-patient efforts outside this intervention, the 25 percent reduction is essentially equivalent to preventing 6,000 patients from suffering a heart attack, stroke or death due to cardiovascular disease within 10 years. This is nearly 30 patients per practice!

### WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU?

This approach can extend beyond cardiovascular health. Such support can help practices with patients in need of social services support, COVID-19 prevention and testing, telehealth and EHR needs, life style and health education interventions, and prevention methods to avoid chronic illnesses (especially those prioritized and incentivized by Medicare, Medicaid and other payors) and control chronic illnesses before risks get this high.

NC AHEC has 32 practice support coaches located at 9 regional centers across North Carolina. These coaches provide free 1:1 onsite and virtual support with strong expertise in quality improvement, clinical workflow, EHR reports, using EHR data, and using telehealth options for care and the best ways to appropriately bill for this new service. All these avenues help practices optimize chronic disease management, preventive care, and patient outcomes. Other services that coaches can provide for you include integrating the NC Health Information exchange into your practice, advanced medical home support both for Medicaid managed care and patient-centered medical home recognition, and assistance with best practices regarding new managed care models for both Medicare and Medicaid.

### How to access NC AHEC Practice Support

If you need assistance or want more information, please email [practicesupport@ncahec.net](mailto:practicesupport@ncahec.net) or call 1-919-445-3508.