

Strengthening the Safety Net 2024

Expanding access to care and supporting health equity in Michigan

Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is new this year?** The 2024 Strengthening the Safety Net program has many of the same priorities as last year:

- Grantees are expected to support patients impacted by Medicaid redetermination by caring for those who lose coverage and by assisting them with enrollment or re-enrollment in affordable health coverage.
- All are expected to expand access to high-quality care by participating in the National Association of Free and Charitable Clinics or the Free Clinics of Michigan quality standards program, or by submitting a board-approved quality assurance plan.
- Grantees must develop a mechanism for screening and intervening on health-related social needs and continue to develop a network of partners to provide food, housing, employment and transportation services.

In addition, grantees are encouraged to work with community health workers, or CHWs, when possible, to improve health outcomes and advance health equity. Patients covered by a Medicaid health plan can be referred to the plan for support from CHWs or case managers. Medicaid also began reimbursing health care providers for CHW services on January 1, 2024. **The Michigan CHW Alliance will maintain a registry of certified CHWs.**

2. **What are the additional grant requirements?** Grantees are expected to provide integrated care, to the extent possible. They must refer patients to and accept referrals from nearby emergency rooms, behavioral health providers, and others. All grantees are expected to develop or maintain robust partnerships with local public health departments and encourage patients to access services such as coronavirus and other immunizations, Women, Infants and Children, or WIC, sexual health services, lead and other health screenings, and clinical services. In addition, safety net clinic leaders must attend training in diversity, equity and inclusion.

Applicants interested in applying as a medical home must raise an additional \$10,000 to match the Blue Cross award. These matching funds are expected to be new to the clinic and documented in a letter from the matching donor, due August 30, 2024.

Specifically:

- Grantees must continue to provide high-quality medical, dental and behavioral health care, pharmaceutical assistance and referrals to necessary specialty care by integrating services within the clinic or providing referrals to external partners.
- Patient navigation can be offered on site or by a reliable partner who can accurately report on navigation encounters. Navigation should include helping

patients understand their options for obtaining health coverage and applying for the Healthy Michigan Plan or other health coverage when eligible.

- Patient navigators must also link patients to services that support good health, such as food, housing, employment and transportation.
- Medical directors must routinely report to the board of directors on clinical quality.
- Grantees are expected to maintain relationships with nearby emergency rooms and offer care to uninsured patients. This includes establishing contact with the emergency room leader, sharing clinic hours and services, and inviting referrals from the emergency room.
- Grantees are expected to continue to increase patient awareness of mental illness and substance use disorder and build an effective network of treatment partners.
- To address food insecurity, grantees are expected to maintain referral relationships with food pantries, gardens, markets, food assistance programs, and other available resources.
- Clinic leaders must attend training in diversity, equity and inclusion and encourage staff and volunteers to attend it.

3. **Are there any updates to the online application?** Applications will be submitted electronically again this year. There are no significant changes to the process. The link to the online application is available on the Strengthening the Safety Net website at bcbsm.com/safetynet. You will need to complete the online application and upload the required attachments.

Please fill out each required field on the online application and use the tabs at the top or arrows at the bottom to advance to the next page. The system will save your work automatically, even if you take a break. However, it does require that you work on only one computer and use only one internet browser. Please get started early. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to **safetynet@bcbsm.com**.

4. **For the purpose of this grant, how are medical and dental homes defined?** A medical home delivers team-based care led by a provider; it's intended to be comprehensive and continuous to maximize patient health. Clinics that provide this model of care and help patients gain coverage can be considered medical homes even if they help newly insured patients transition to a permanent health care home. Similarly, a dental home offers an ongoing relationship between a dentist and patient, inclusive of all aspects of oral health care delivered in a comprehensive, continuous, coordinated and family centered way.
5. **We are only open 15 hours per week, but we have a matching funder. Can we apply for the larger grant?** To be eligible for up to \$25,000, your clinic must be a health home and must be open 30 hours or more per week.

6. **We are a larger clinic, but we can't find a matching donor. Can we apply for an award without the match?** Any eligible clinic may request up to \$15,000 to support operations. No match is required.
7. **What is the time frame and process for securing a match?** Applicants are required to provide evidence of the match before August 31, 2023, by submitting a letter of commitment from the matching funder. These funds should be designated as a match for the Blue Cross award. If you need help raising the match, you may find it helpful to reach out to the local United Way or community foundation.
8. **What do you mean by enrollment assistance?** Enrollment assistance is helping patients understand what health care coverage they might be eligible for and how they can enroll in it. An eligible clinic must either provide enrollment assistance on site or work with a reliable partner who will assist patients with enrollment and inform the clinic about enrollment activities.
- This includes helping patients:
- Learn about potential options for health care coverage
 - Apply for health care coverage if they're eligible
 - Find a doctor who accepts their insurance if they gain coverage
 - Identify and apply for other public benefits as needed
9. **Do we need a fiduciary relationship with another organization to be eligible?** Awards are limited to nonprofit organizations designated by the IRS under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. If your clinic doesn't have its own 501(c)(3) designation, an organization that has this designation must serve as your fiduciary.
10. **If we don't currently have volunteers working at our clinic, are we eligible for the grant?** No, you aren't eligible unless volunteers are currently working at your clinic.
11. **Are students considered volunteers?** Students aren't considered volunteers if they're receiving course credit or payment or are required to complete an internship. If a volunteer happens to be a student and works at a clinic during his or her free time, this student can be counted as a volunteer.
12. **When does the requirement that a free clinic be operational for at least two years begin?** If your safety net clinic began treating patients on or before October 1, 2022, you're eligible to apply.
13. **If we don't have an annual program report, will you accept other documents?** You can submit copies of your 2023 board minutes or a one- to two-page summary of your activities.

14. **If we don't have an annual financial report, will you accept other documents?** You can submit a copy of your 2023 IRS *Form 990*.
15. **Can nurse practitioners or other health care providers serve as medical director?**
The medical director must be a physician, psychologist or dentist.
16. **Can grant funding be used to pay for services, such as specialty or oral health care?**
Grant funding can be used to pay for services if the services are provided by contract with a discount rate. Typical examples include dental services, labs, X-ray, information technology support and grant writing.
17. **We currently have the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan logo displayed on our website. Is this permissible?** While we appreciate the acknowledgement, any use of the Blue Cross name or logo must be approved by Blue Cross to ensure compliance with our branding policies. Please contact us so we can review the use of our name and logo on your website.