

I am Kathi Franklin, President of Access to Care. Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today and thank you for your past support of the Access to Care program. I am here today to urge you to reinstate funding for the Access to Care program in the Cook County 2018 budget.

Access to Care is a primary health care program for low income, uninsured and under insured residents of suburban Cook County and northwest Chicago. As a non-profit organization, we are able to provide primary health care services very efficiently by leveraging existing infrastructure and donated or discounted services. We will serve about 6,000 residents of Cook County this year thanks to your generous support .

I would like to take a minute here to tell you about a pilot that Access to Care recently started.

Every year, the top diagnoses for Access to Care patients include diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and depression and anxiety. Our participating physicians provide prescriptions to treat the depression and anxiety but, sometimes patients need more support. Our pilot allows us to provide access to limited mental health services to 2,000 patients. Up to three counseling sessions are offered through a mix of video conferencing, telephone or in-office sessions. Because transportation is an issue for our members, the option for telephone and/or video sessions will be helpful. If it is determined that the patient needs intensive therapy, the patient will be referred to other sources, including Cook County. If the patient needs more than three counseling sessions, they may continue with the Access to Care counselors and will then be charged on a sliding scale that starts at \$15 a session.

We know that stress, depression and anxiety have an enormous impact on overall health and overall health can greatly impact mental health. For example, according to Oxford University, recurring depression can shorten life expectancy by 7-11 years. Poor mental health can be more hazardous to life expectancy than smoking heavily.

We, at Access to Care, view treatment for these conditions to be an important part of the primary health care continuum. The patients taking advantage of these services so far, are presenting with just what we expected: depression and anxiety issues - people who are struggling with basic life issues. For example, one gentleman is seeking counseling because he is unable to work due to his medical conditions and that is causing his depression. Another patient is recently divorced and struggling with adjustment issues.

It is our hope that these patients will see improved quality of life but, also that they may see greater improvement in their productivity and have a positive impact on their families and communities.

Again, thank you for your support. The 2018 Cook County Health and Hospital System Preliminary Budget includes the complete elimination of funding for Access to Care. I urge you to reinstate that funding.