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Community Health Network of Washington Receives \$1 Million Digital Navigator Grant to Extend Digital Access and Equity Resources to North Central Region

Initiative to provide regionally and culturally specific digital navigation resources, services to Chelan, Douglas, Grant, and Okanogan Counties

SEATTLE – January 26, 2023 – Community Health Network of Washington (CHNW) announced today it has been awarded a \$1 million Digital Navigator grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce, Office of Broadband to launch the [North Central Washington Digital Equity Initiative](#), expanding its efforts to bridge the digital divide in North Central Washington. CHNW is the parent of the not-for-profit insurance carrier [Community Health Plan of Washington](#).

The grant funds will support the Initiative, which will establish the North Central Coalition for Digital Access and Equity in partnership with the [North Central Accountable Community of Health \(NCACH\)](#) and the [NCW Tech Alliance](#). This Initiative will provide regionally and culturally specific digital navigation resources and services across Chelan, Douglas, Grant, and Okanogan Counties, such as real-time aid for patients unfamiliar with internet use and personal devices that make online connection easier. CHNW, NCACH, and NCW Tech Alliance are inviting regional community-based organizations to participate in the Coalition. Organizations can find more information to get involved at <https://www.ncwtech.org/techhelp>.

The Digital Navigator grant will help expand CHNW's [Link to Care WA program](#) resources to North Central residents, so they can receive localized digital navigation support and connection to resources. With support from Community Health Plan of Washington (CHPW), the Link to Care WA program began offering comprehensive digital navigation services to community health center patients across Washington state in January 2022. To date, the Link to Care WA program has provided digital navigation support to over 7,000 community health center patients. The North Central Washington region's community health centers include Moses Lake Community Health Center, Columbia Valley Community Health, and Family Health Centers.

“The partnership among these regional organizations is an exciting opportunity to promote digital equity across North Central Washington and is a model for expansion into other regions of the state,” said Leanne Berge, CEO at CHNW and CHPW. “We know that eliminating technological barriers to health care by putting phones in people’s hands, connecting them to the internet, and equipping patients to navigate technology, not only improves their health, but also improves their access to employment, education, and other essential social supports.”

NCW Tech Alliance Executive Director Jenny Rojanasthien states, “NCW Tech Alliance is excited about the opportunity to work with the Community Health Network of Washington to build a coalition for digital access and equity for North Central Washington. As the region's technology alliance, we are deeply invested in efforts that bring more technology resources and education to our region. We also look forward to bringing our local partners into this work as we work to bridge the digital divide across our rural communities.”



Current Link to Care WA program resources available to community health center patients include a customer service Hotline staffed by Community Health Plan of Washington (CHPW), a [website](#), and in-person support with pre-paid smartphone distribution at partner community health center sites, including Yakima Neighborhood Health Services and HealthPoint. Digital navigation services have also included connection to federal subsidy programs such as the Affordable Connectivity Program and Lifeline (for broadband internet and cellphones, respectively), as well as ongoing digital literacy education that equips people with the knowledge to comfortably use the internet to meet daily needs.

“We’ve seen our patients use the Link to Care WA services not only to maintain communication with their doctor but to stay in touch with loved ones from afar and stay plugged in at school remotely,” said Rhonda Hauff, CEO of Yakima Neighborhood Health Services. “We know digital equity is about whole-person health care and have seen how Link to Care WA moves Washington closer to that robust health care vision we all share.”

“Helping the people we serve access quality health care is core to our founding mission by CHNW’s community health centers 30 years ago,” said Berge. “Today, that access includes bridging the digital divide so people and their care providers can stay in communication about their health needs.”

“The digital navigation services that this grant will fund meet a very real need in our community,” said Wendy Brzezny, Director of Clinical Integration at North Central Accountable Community of Health. “Due to the rural and frontier nature of our region, the lack of broadband services and cost to access internet services is a barrier to accessing critical resources.”

“These barriers are compounded by some residents not having personal devices such as cell phones or internet-enabled tablets and laptops. The resulting digital exclusion has many adverse impacts for our residents, including lack of access to healthcare through telemedicine or electronic health record, decreased economic opportunities and lack of access to educational opportunities in one’s home setting. Meeting these challenges head on will make a real difference in their lives, and the Digital Navigator grant is critical to this important work,” Brzezny continued.

In addition to bolstering the work to expand Link to Care WA, the Digital Navigator grant will fund the creation and deployment of a digital navigation training curriculum to all interested community-based organizations and the development of a community-directed regional team that can connect people locally with technology to meet their individual needs. The grant award period is October 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023, with the possibility of two additional year-long extensions.

“The Link to Care WA program has been a wonderful addition to HealthPoint’s support of its patients and communities,” said Lucy Sutphen, MD, MACP, Clinical Programs Consultant at HealthPoint, a community health center member of CHNW. “So far, we have distributed more than 260 smartphones to patients who did not have a device. This has enabled them to access their care provider via telehealth, call their provider’s site with questions, access the patient portal, be reminded of appointments, and coordinate with their pharmacies, along with many other opportunities. Most importantly, it has provided patients with the ability to maintain their privacy and dignity, and has also helped them with achieving employment, housing, and other goals,” she added.



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To learn more about CHNW, visit chnw.chpw.org.

About CHNW:

Since 1992, Community Health Network of Washington (CHNW) clinics have been providing Washington state residents with affordable, community-based care. Informed by their understanding of social determinants of health, CHNW brings together Community Health Centers (CHCs) and other health leaders with their shared values of equal access to care and social justice. Through leveraging their shared resources and expertise, CHNW has been able to undertake strategic public policy and advocacy efforts in both Olympia, WA, and Washington, D.C., to ensure access to health care for every Washington state resident. Community Health Network of Washington serves nearly one million individuals across Washington through its member federally qualified community health centers across the State of Washington, and now offers Individual & Family Plans on the Washington health exchange. To learn more, visit chnw.chpw.org or connect on [LinkedIn](#).

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