WHAT ISSUES DID PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE SEEK TO ADDRESS?

Healthcare is expected to be among the fastest growing occupations over the next decade, creating opportunities to enter skilled career paths. Almost all jobs in healthcare require some level of postsecondary education or training. Low-income individuals often face a range of resource- and skill-related barriers to obtaining needed educational credentials.

WHAT WAS PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE?

- **Launched** in 2010 by Pima Community College (PCC) in Tucson, Arizona.
- **Operated through a partnership** between PCC and Pima County One Stop (PCOS), the local workforce agency.
- **Funded** by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)* through a five-year Health Profession Opportunity Grant.
- **Recruited** low-income** Pima County (AZ) residents who were interested in careers in healthcare.

* Administered by HHS’s Administration for Children and Families.
** Low income = income at or below 70% of the Lower Living Standard Income Level for family size.

WHAT WAS PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE’S APPROACH?

- Mapped 16 existing training programs to five career pathways, which promote career advancement by outlining training “ladders” that show how completing one credential can lead to others.
- **Proactive staff guidance and advising** to help participants overcome barriers to participation, select and complete a training program, and obtain skilled employment.
- **Scholarships** for tuition and books to reduce financial barriers to completing training.
- Compressed **basic skills bridge programs** to help students with low basic skills rapidly enter college-level programs.
- **Employment supports** to help program completers enter healthcare careers.

Pathways to Healthcare is one of nine programs included in ACF’s Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Evaluation conducted by Abt Associates. The study used an experimental design in which program applicants were assigned at random to a group that could access Pathways to Healthcare (the treatment group) or to a group that could not access the program but could enroll in other programs and services in the community (the control group).
WHO ENROLLED IN THE PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE STUDY?
For PACE, the program randomly assigned 1,217 study participants, 609 to the treatment group and 608 to the control group. Across treatment and control members, the study participants were older than traditional college students, low-income, from disadvantaged groups and had limited education.

- 25+ age 25 or older
- 79% female
- 83% age 25 or older
- 56% Hispanic
- 57% had at least some college education
- <$15K made less than $15,000 in the previous year
- 49% reported financial hardship in the previous year
- 59% received SNAP or WIC benefits in the previous year
- 79% female
- 56% Hispanic
- 57% had at least some college education
- <$15K made less than $15,000 in the previous year
- 49% reported financial hardship in the previous year
- 59% received SNAP or WIC benefits in the previous year

WHAT TRAINING DID TREATMENT GROUP MEMBERS ENROLL IN AND COMPLETE?

- All Treatment Group Members: 100%
- 35% Enrolled Directly in Occupational Training
- 26% Enrolled in College Readiness Bridge (100% completed the bridge)
- 48% Enrolled in Occupational Training (35% directly, 13% after bridge)
- 13% continued to training (half of Bridge participants)

Of those who enrolled in occupational training...

- Most Common Pathways
  - Medical and Physician Support 18%
  - Nursing 36%

- Credentials Received
  - At least 1 credential 60%
  - At least 2 credentials 19%
  - Still enrolled at end of 18-month follow-up period 25%

PACE Evaluation: Pathways to Healthcare
**WHAT WERE THE IMPACTS OF PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE ON EDUCATION AND TRAINING?**

Pathways to Healthcare increased average total hours of college occupational training received.

The program increased training completed by about 63 hours in the 18-month follow-up period, or 50 percent, which translates to about one and a half additional courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HOURS OF OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING (#)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment Group: 609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Group: 608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>127.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample size**
- Treatment Group: 609
- Control Group: 608

*** Significant at the 1% level

**Source:** PCC records

Pathways to Healthcare increased rates of college enrollment.

The program increased enrollment in college-level training by about 20 percentage points, or 55 percent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENROLLMENT IN COLLEGE (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment Group: 609</td>
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<td>Control Group: 608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sample size**
- Treatment Group: 609
- Control Group: 608

*** Significant at the 1% level

**Source:** PCC records

Pathways to Healthcare more than doubled the percentage of participants earning a college credential.

The program also substantially increased the proportion who received a credential from any source. Most non-college credentials were professional, state, or industry certifications or licenses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREDENTIAL FROM A COLLEGE (%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treatment Group: 609</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control Group: 608</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.4</td>
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</table>

**Sample size**
- Treatment Group: 609
- Control Group: 608

*** Significant at the 1% level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CREDENTIAL FROM ANY SOURCE (%)</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Treatment Group: 609</td>
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<td>Control Group: 608</td>
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<tr>
<td>34.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>29.4</td>
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</table>

**Sample size**
- Treatment Group: 609
- Control Group: 608

**Significant at the 5% level

**Source:** PCC records and PACE 18-month follow-up survey

Impacts may not equal difference between groups due to rounding.
HOW DID PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE HELP PARTICIPANTS ENROLL IN AND SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE TRAINING?

**Mapping** training programs into career pathways helped participants see how they could follow a sequence of steps to get to future career goals.

**New advising positions** helped participants identify and overcome barriers to progressing along their chosen career pathway:

- At PCOS, a specialist helped participants solve barriers external to the program (e.g., child care, transportation).
- At PCC, advisors helped participants navigate college bureaucracy (e.g., fulfilling pre-enrollment requirements) and provided academic advising.

**Two bridges** helped low-skilled students remediate quickly: participants could choose a 10-week college readiness course or a self-paced open lab.

Both used adult learning techniques, including contextualizing basic skills to healthcare occupations and active learning such as group work and problem solving.

**Scholarships** covering both tuition and books made it affordable for participants to enroll in and complete training.

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**Occupations at Each Level in the Pathways**

**LEVEL 1**
- Medical Office Pathway
  - Medical Office Clerk / Specialist
- Nursing Pathway
  - Nursing Assistant
- Medical and Physician Support Pathway
  - Phlebotomy
- Emergency Medicine Pathway
  - None
- Other Pathway
  - Community Health Advisor
  - Direct Care Professional
  - Behavioral Health Specialist

**LEVEL 2**
- Medical Office Pathway
  - Medical Records Technician
- Nursing Pathway
  - Patient Care Technician
- Medical and Physician Support Pathway
  - Medical Assistant
- Emergency Medicine Pathway
  - EMT—Basic
- Other Pathway
  - Surgical Technician

**LEVEL 3**
- Medical Office Pathway
  - Health Information Technology
- Nursing Pathway
  - Licensed Practical Nurse
- Medical and Physician Support Pathway
  - Clinical Research Coordinator
- Emergency Medicine Pathway
  - EMT—Paramedicine
- Other Pathway
  - Pharmacy Technology

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**PRE-PATHWAY BRIDGES**
- College Readiness Class (10 weeks)
- or
- College Readiness Open Lab (< 6 months)
WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT PATHWAYS TO HEALTHCARE’S IMPACTS ON EMPLOYMENT?

Treatment group members perceive career progress.
The Pathways to Healthcare program positively affected two measures of self-assessed employment progress: perceived career progress and access to career supports in workforce and education settings. Some 57 percent of treatment group members scored higher on the perceived career progress measure than did the average member of the control group. Some 53 percent of treatment group members scored higher on the career supports measure than did the average control group member.

Early results show no program impacts on employment, overall or in healthcare.
Although the program resulted in more treatment group members than control group members enrolling in occupational training, the treatment group was not more likely to be employed at 18 months. Higher levels of college enrollment typically tend to reduce employment rates initially, which might explain why there were no impacts observed.

At least a quarter of treatment group members were still in training, which might explain the lack of employment impacts at 18 months.
Of treatment group members who enrolled directly in training, 25 percent were still enrolled at the end of the 18-month follow-up period. The program has set what appear to be solid foundations for stronger employment outcomes later. Longer-term results will show to what extent the program has had effects on participants’ employment outcomes.

HOW DID LEADERSHIP LEARN ABOUT AND REFINE THE PROGRAM DURING THE EVALUATION?

PCC leadership created a Transitions Workgroup to find ways to better help participants successfully navigate challenging transitions. That ongoing improvement effort led to the following enhancements.

To encourage enrollment in occupational training, program staff created the New Student Orientation to clarify the program steps (including pre-training paperwork and other requirements), reiterate the supports available and how to access them, and build a sense of community among Pathways to Healthcare program participants.

To encourage persistence in courses, program staff created:
- Instructor-led study groups focused on basic skills and occupational content.
- A Nursing Assistant Readiness class to help students learn study skills prior to starting their program.
- A reading group to help prospective Licensed Practical Nursing students to obtain the necessary reading score on the assessment test.

To help participants develop a professional network and foster college success skills, program staff created a Student and Alumni Network that features:
- Study skills workshop.
- Employment-related workshops, such as resume development.
- LinkedIn group to encourage networking.

To aid the transition to employment, the program created three new workshops:
- A Job Offer Academy—featuring coaching for interviewing and job search.
- 123 Work—An “employment transition workshop” focused on goal setting, customizing resumes, and interviewing tips.
- New Employee Transition—An initiative encouraging employers to hire graduates by funding training to help new workers acclimate to professional workplaces.
What is PACE?
The Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) evaluation uses a random assignment methodology to assess the effectiveness of nine career pathways programs targeting low-income, low skilled individuals on credential attainment, employment, and earnings. Key features of career pathways programs include:
1. A series of well-defined training steps;
2. Promising instructional approaches targeted to adult learners;
3. Services to address academic and non-academic barriers to program enrollment and completion; and
4. Connections to employment.

This brief summarizes findings from the implementation study and impacts 18 months following study intake. The study is funded by the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Next steps in the PACE evaluation of Pathways to Healthcare
The next Pathways to Healthcare report will cover a 36-month follow-up period and will examine employment outcomes, such as average rate of employment and average earnings over successive follow-up quarters, and job characteristics, such as occupation, hourly wage, receipt of benefits, and career progress. Thus, it will begin to answer whether the occupational training gains that Pathways to Healthcare achieved after 18 months will translate into economic gains in the workplace in the longer term. It will also include a cost-benefit study. Later, an analysis at 72 months after random assignment will estimate long-term effects of the Pathways to Healthcare program.


The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) studies Administration for Children and Families (ACF) programs and the populations they serve through rigorous research and evaluation projects. These include evaluations of existing programs, evaluations of innovative approaches to helping low-income children and families, research syntheses, and descriptive and exploratory studies. OPRE also works to improve the analysis of data and coordinate performance management for ACF.

Abt Associates is a mission-driven, global leader in research, evaluation, and program implementation in the fields of health, social and environmental policy, and international development.