

The Illinois College of Optometry and the Illinois Eye Institute COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE REPORT

Organizational History and Missions

Founded in 1872 on Chicago's south side, the Illinois College Optometry (ICO) is the oldest and largest institution in the nation to offer a four-year program of study leading to a doctorate in optometry (OD). ICO's mission is to develop highly qualified clinical optometrists through excellence in optometric education. Each year, ICO prepares more than 650 students and residents from around the world who begin their studies with a broad foundation in basic sciences and end in mastering the skills necessary to provide a full scope of primary and advanced eye care.

Clinical training for the students occurs through the Illinois Eye Institute (IEI), the patient care division of the College. The IEI is nationally renowned for its large patient volume, namely serving Chicago's underserved and disadvantaged communities. The IEI is the largest provider of comprehensive, multi-specialty eye care in Illinois including: primary eye care, pediatric eye care, binocular vision, low vision rehabilitation, contact lenses, cornea external disease, vitreoretinal disorders, glaucoma, cataracts, neuro-ophthalmic disorders, orbit/oculoplastics, emergency care and treatment of eye disease using advanced technologies. With over 100,000 patient visits annually, and 61 eye examination lanes, the IEI offers its students the volume, complexity, and diversity of patient care experiences needed to be successful in their careers.

Target Populations and Community Input

Medicaid and charitable services account for more than half of the IEI's total activity, despite the fact that Illinois has one of the lowest Medicaid reimbursement rates for optometric care in the country. The IEI provides primary and advanced eye care to over 18,000 underinsured and 3,000 uninsured patients annually. The majority of IEI's patient population comes from Chicago's south and southwestern communities, is primarily low-income and medically underserved. More than 45-50% of the patient population is African American, and 30-35% Latino. It is estimated that well over half of the population has an underlying health issue (diabetes, hypertension, glaucoma) that affects the vision and eye health of the patient. Through donated services and materials, the IEI provides extensive charitable services to address the unique needs of a diverse patient population.

The Illinois College of Optometry and the Illinois Eye Institute have always had a leadership role in working with the surrounding community to identify at-risk population needs and in developing programs that ensure underserved populations have improved access to care. For instance, ICO is part of a **Community Advisory Board** made of up more than 15 individuals who are local advocates and organizational leaders that provide a broad array of social services to many of Chicago's underserved populations. Members include representatives from the Healthcare Consortium of Illinois, the Greater Chicago Neighborhoods, Inc., Illinois Institute of Technology, the GAP Community Organization, Pilgrim Baptist Church, as well as other local business and social service organizations who meet quarterly to discuss local and regional issues affecting the surrounding neighborhoods.

As it pertains to identifying the needs of the IEI's target populations, leadership at the IEI are also active members of **Chicago's Safety Net Learning Collaborative** which is made up of representatives of local and regional healthcare organizations including, Lawndale Christian, Erie Family Health, Alivio Medical Health, Chicago Family Health, Esperanza, Heartland Health and Infant Welfare Society, to name a few. This consortium allows safety-net providers to discuss the major issues related to providing care to underserved patient populations, share best practices in delivering care, as well as develop strategies to ensure underserved populations continue to have access to care. The IEI has been a part of the Collaborative since 2012, and serves on its Steering Committee.

Improving Access to Care – Community Oriented Approach

In Illinois, access to optometric care is devastatingly low. Federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) continue to be disallowed to bill for optometry services despite recent changes in federal health insurance policies that now recognize optometrists as preferred providers. Furthermore, in Chicago, it is estimated that fewer than 10% of private optometrists accept Medicaid because of low reimbursement rates. New healthcare laws are just now beginning to recognize the importance of providing optometry as one of the essential health benefits, yet provide little incentive, or structure, for providers to accept the un/underinsured.

Historically, the IEI has always been Chicago's community safety net provider for at-risk populations in getting the care they need. One of its most widely recognized charitable care programs is **the Vision of Hope Health Alliance (VOHHA)**. Established in 2003, as a pilot program of Vision of Hope, VOHHA's main mission is to improve access to optometric care for individuals with limited resources, and to implement an integrated health care approach for optimal vision and eye health. Major program services include comprehensive eye examinations that include dilation, the provision of eyeglasses and/or medically necessary contact lenses to correct refractive error, medical treatment of eye disease, and links to primary care providers for advanced care in relation to underlying health issues (diabetes, hypertension, glaucoma).

VOHHA has grown to represent a unique model of health care delivery under the provision of eye care and related health services. VOHHA helps coordinate the treatment and management of both ocular and systemic health disease and involves a network of more than 35 health and social service organizations brought together to provide a continuum of care. Coalition members assist in identifying and referring adults to participate in the program, and VOHHA's referral network includes access to IEI optometrists with a broad range of specialties, ophthalmologists (surgical care) and primary care providers for advanced care, as well as agreements with community hospitals to ensure a continuum of care.

Since its inception, more than 15,000 uninsured adults have benefited from receiving comprehensive eye exams, and more than 10,000 individuals have received eyeglasses and/or medically necessary contact lenses to correct refractive error. Furthermore, 60% (9,000) of the VOHHA population has received advanced ophthalmic care, (advanced diagnostic testing, and disease treatment and management), and upwards of 15% (2,250) has received surgical care to ensure optimal vision and eye health. It is important to note that for many it is the first time

receiving eye care, as many wait until vision is already compromised before seeking the care they need. In some instances, it has also led to the first time discovery of an underlying health issue (diabetes, glaucoma, hypertension), which the program helps to address.

Since implementation of the Affordable Care Act, VOHHA's original scope has changed to include Medicaid adults who need additional care that their insurance will not cover. At the same time, VOHHA has become an institutional initiative where many of the patients qualify for assistance through a number of programs developed through the IEI. For instance, some adults are seen at the **Alfred and Sarah Rosenbloom Center on Vision and Aging** and/or in the newly established **Diabetic Eye Center**.

It is anticipated that 750 un/underinsured adults will receive primary and advanced ophthalmic care annually through the program. VOHHA receives no insurance provider reimbursements and its annually operating budget is estimated at \$300,000 for direct patient services only. As VOHHA patients are seen throughout the entire organization, there is no personnel overhead costs associated with the program. VOHHA program budget represents .8% of ICO's overall operating budget.

In 2010, due to VOHHA's long-term success, the IEI, along with the support of its community partners, established **Chicago Vision Outreach** to improve access to care for Chicago's un/underinsured patient populations. Chicago Vision Outreach provides the same level of care as VOHHA, but expands its reach through three satellite clinics in partnership with two federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) and the Chicago Public Schools (CPS). The FQHCs (Access Community Health and Alivio Family Medical) mainly target underserved adults while the CPS clinic represents the largest school-based clinic in the nation. Now in its sixth year of program operation, Chicago Vision Outreach has grown to be the most successful charitable eye care program being offered in targeted community settings.

Patient services include comprehensive eye exams that include dilation, eyeglass dispensing, and advanced ophthalmic care in relation to underlying health issues (diabetes, glaucoma, cataract) and/or ocular abnormalities (amblyopia, strabismus, convergence insufficiency) common to childhood disorders. The program utilizes the VOHHA referral network to ensure a continuum of care for medical treatment of eye disease.

The same optometrist and optician staff the two FQHC clinics, rotating their time between the sites Monday thru Thursday, with a half-day on Friday at either clinic, depending on need. Three to five ICO students assist with patient care per quarter as part of their clinic rotations. The IEI's community partners help in identifying and referring patients to participate in the program. A vast majority of the Alivio participants (85%) are diabetic patients who require advanced ophthalmic care, which is provided in coordination with the Alivio primary care provider. The Access Clinic is a free standing clinic and does grassroots advertising to ensure adults in the community are aware of the program. Both FQHC clinics accept walk-ins. For advanced diagnostic testing and care that cannot be performed on site, referrals are made to the IEI home-base and/or other practitioners in the referral network.

Combined, the FQHCs see approximately 35-50 patients weekly or 1,500 individuals annually. Approximately 75% of the adults have a systemic health issue (diabetes, glaucoma, hypertension), and receive care that is focused on treatment and disease management to prevent vision loss. It is estimated that 60% of the population will require eyeglass prescriptions.

The IEI at Princeton Elementary (the Clinic) is located on Chicago's south side and staffed by a Medical Director, three ICO faculty optometrists who precept 30-50 ICO students performing their clinical rounds, two customer service associates, and four opticians. The Clinic is also host to two AmeriCorps - Chicago Health Corps representatives whose major responsibilities include working with parents to ensure follow-up appointments are made and kept. The Clinic also employs a School Coordinator responsible scheduling participating school site visits and acts as general liaison between the IEI and participating schools' administration. In August 2012, the Clinic hired an additional optometrist to expand clinic hours for afternoon appointments and to oversee its vision therapy, which is now offered on-site.

The Clinic is open Monday through Friday and works in tandem with the CPS school calendar. The clinic is able to see approximately 35-50 youth a day during the regular school season with an annual capacity of 6,500-7,000. It is anticipated that more than 70% of the population will require eye glass prescriptions and upwards of 30% of the population will have advanced ophthalmic care needs including return visits to the clinic after eyeglasses have been worn for some time, advanced diagnostic testing and/or vision therapy.

All care is provided to Chicago Vision Outreach participants regardless of an individual's ability to pay. Chicago Vision Outreach's annual operating budget is estimated at \$1,216,000, with Medicaid, third party provider reimbursements estimated at \$610,000 (50%). Chicago Vision Outreach is also supported by individual, corporate and foundation grants estimated at \$350,000 (28%). ICO also provides in-kind support to cover any budgetary shortfalls due to the teaching aspect for ICO second and third year students who rotate through the clinic. Chicago Vision Outreach's operating budget represents 3.4% of ICO's overall operating budget.

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