



## Best Practices Increase Blood Pressure Control for All

Health disparities have been a vexing challenge for health care providers with diverse patient populations, and they impose a large toll on the health of patients, families and communities. This is particularly true for chronic illnesses, of which poor management can be catastrophic.

### The Challenge

One in three Americans has high blood pressure, which increases the risk for heart disease and stroke—two leading causes of death in the United States. Over half of Americans with diagnosed high blood pressure do not have it under good control, with minorities and patients with fewer resources historically and disproportionately among them.

Better Health Partnership has documented disparities in blood pressure control in Northeast Ohio since 2009. In our public reports on care and outcomes for tens of thousands of primary care patients with high blood pressure, the differences have persisted across race, regionally and within practices. In fact, rates of good blood pressure control in African-American patients lagged behind those of Caucasian patients.

Every six months, more than 700 primary care providers in 54 primary care practices measure and publicly report to the Better Health Partnership their achievements on national quality standards for care and outcomes on patients with high blood pressure and other chronic illnesses. These reports highlight differences in outcomes among groups of patients with different characteristics, shining a light on opportunities to improve. Sometimes, they uncover pockets of success that point the way to successful interventions, which Better Health shares across our growing network of primary care providers, accelerating regional improvement.

In 2012, Better Health's routine data analyses found a dramatic rise in blood pressure control in primary care practices of HealthSpan, then Kaiser Permanente Ohio. Up to 90 percent of patients with high blood pressure had it under control, including African Americans. Better Health learned that the health system had adopted a deliberate strategy that drove the results.

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## The Solution

After learning how HealthSpan achieved its dramatic climb in blood pressure control, Better Health worked with HealthSpan to develop a curriculum that other primary practices could follow to replicate the success. Better Health practice consultants currently are working with several practices that serve vulnerable populations to help them build the methodology into their everyday care of their high blood pressure patients, no matter their staffing model.

The Blood Pressure Management program is made up of six, one-hour monthly sessions that help practices improve five key elements known to increase blood pressure control:

1. Accurate measurement of blood pressure, using evidence-based position to ensure reliable reading.
2. A set of procedures to guide treatment using effective, low-cost medication taken once daily, to make it easier for patients to manage.
3. Monthly nurse- or medical assistant-led visits to monitor progress until a patient's blood pressure is controlled.
4. Cultural sensitivity training for health care providers to build trust and an open line of communication with patients.
5. Proactive outreach to patients with elevated blood pressure.

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## Lessons Learned

Measurement—and collaboration—matter. The Blood Pressure Management program was “discovered” in the course of Better Health’s routine analyses and data mining of data submitted by diverse health systems with common goals of improving health in the region. By discovering HealthSpan’s “replicable best practice” and sharing its methods, Better Health partner practices now count more patients with well-controlled blood pressure—28,771 more patients, in fact, than in 2009. It follows that Better Health’s regional performance tops the national Health Effectiveness Data and Information Set (HEDIS) scores for high blood pressure control reported by the National Committee for Quality Assurance (NCQA).

Better Health can play a key role in the collaboration, development and data analysis of programs that help organizations work together to transform today’s health care system. Please contact us to learn more: [info@betterhealthpartnership.org](mailto:info@betterhealthpartnership.org).



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