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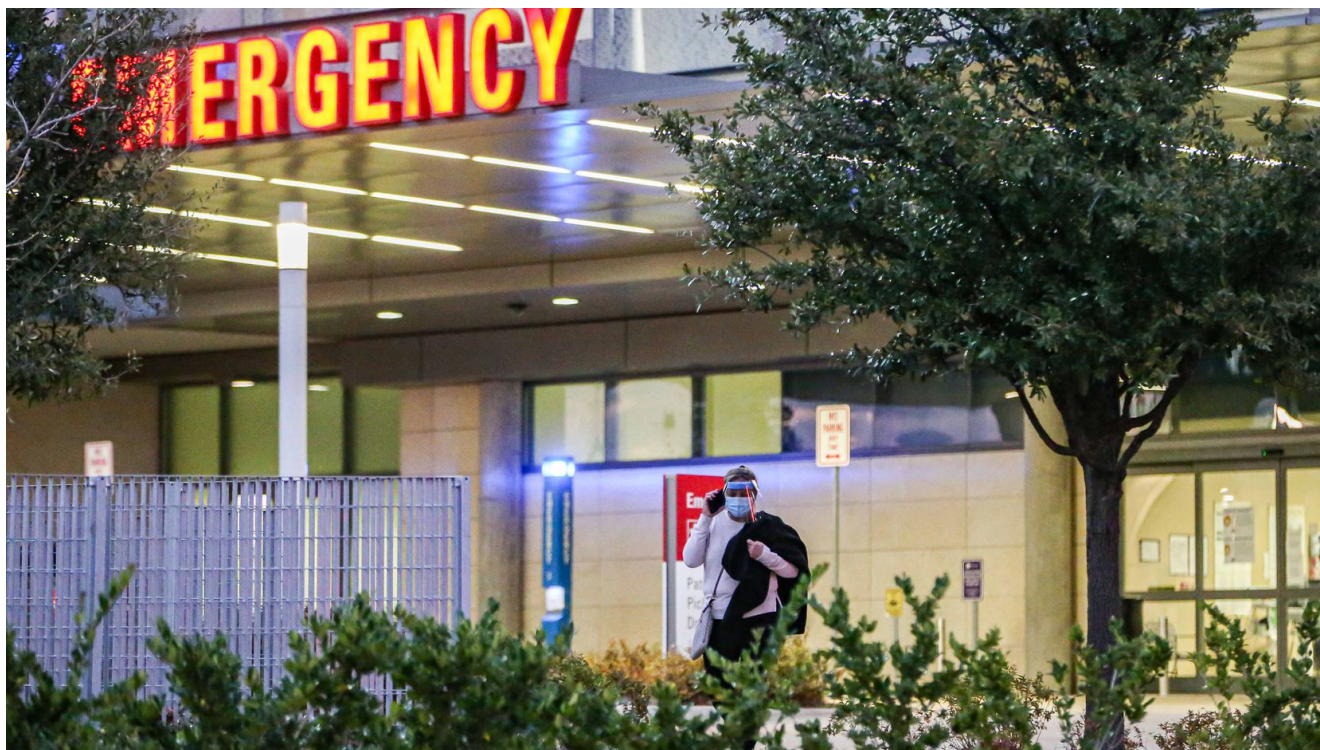
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OPINION

Health improves when basic needs are met

The Dallas-area study from the Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation showed a decrease in ER visits in a 5-year span.



There was a dramatic decrease in ER visits from participants in a PCCI study, recently published by The New England Journal of Medicine. (Lola Gomez / Staff Photographer)



By Dallas Morning News Editorial
2:00 AM on Aug 24, 2022



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It seems obvious to say that people do better in life when they have better access to health care and other services. But developing the data of just how much impact this can have is critical to understanding where and how to make public investments in providing health care.

For Parkland Hospital and other health care providers, some of that data is coming now, and it's dramatic.

A recently released scientific study from the Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation was just published in [The New England Journal of Medicine](#).

It demonstrates that emergency room visits can be steeply reduced when high-risk populations have other needs met, like food, housing, utilities and transportation. The results of this study boil down to this: If people are able to resolve their immediate economic needs — with the right personnel at the right time — they are healthier. That can lead to greater cost efficiencies for society at large.

The federally funded program known as Accountable Health Community began in 2017 with approximately 9,000 Medicaid or Medicare users who have had at least two visits to the emergency room. Through the program, community health workers screened ER visitors, selected participants and referred them to broader community services.

In that five-year period, there was a decrease in emergency room visits by more than 40%, compared to a control group with similar demographic and clinical characteristics, the study found.

The Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation served as the North Texas hub for the study with several health providers participating, including Parkland, Baylor Scott & White and Children's Medical Center, as well as dozens of community-based organizations, including the North Texas Food Bank.

A key component of this program were the community health workers in charge of recruiting patients, establishing trust with them and helping them connect with organizations that could provide basic needs resources, said Steve Miff of the Parkland center. Participating patients were tracked on a monthly basis and often reported needs not included in the original screening.

Since the Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation was able to compare each patient with another study participant with similar characteristics in the same neighborhood, the study was able to continue even with the unexpected curveballs of COVID-19 surges in the last two years.

Not surprisingly, ZIP codes in South Dallas and Pleasant Grove (75215, 75216 and 75217) were most represented in the study. The Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation does not have complete ethnic and racial data from every year, but, from the available information, 43% of the selected patients were Hispanic and 46% were Black.



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We usually think that preventive medicine just requires regular doctor visits, but the Parkland Center for Clinical Innovation demonstrates that there are more variables to this equation that play an important role in keeping a community healthy while spending fewer tax dollars on providing health care.

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