



Health care disparities refer to differences or inequities in access to and outcomes of health services. In the United States, these disparities for many chronic health conditions, including diabetes, are a growing national concern. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that nearly 24 million people — almost 8 percent of the U.S. population — are living with diabetes. Type 2 diabetes accounts for 90 to 95 percent of all diagnosed cases of diabetes.

To address the growing problem of health care disparities in the context of type 2 diabetes in the United States among low-income and underserved adult populations, The Merck Company Foundation — the philanthropic arm of Merck & Co., Inc. — launched the Alliance to Reduce Disparities in Diabetes (Alliance) with a commitment of \$15 million through 2013.

#### **GOALS OF THE ALLIANCE:**

The Alliance aims to help decrease diabetes disparities and enhance the quality of health care by improving prevention and management services. The Alliance will work with national, regional and community partners to develop and implement comprehensive, evidence-based diabetes programs that will:

- **Apply proven, community-based and collaborative approaches to address health care disparities related to type 2 diabetes among low-income and underserved adult populations**
- **Enhance patient and health care provider communication, mobilize community partners and assist health care organizations to decrease disparities in diabetes care**
- **Disseminate important findings to aid in the development of comprehensive prevention and management programs to help improve the quality of health care for adults who have or are at risk for diabetes**
- **Increase public awareness of health care disparities and diabetes**

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## GOALS OF THE ALLIANCE: *continued...*

- **Promote collaboration and information exchange to strengthen the efforts of interested stakeholders and organizations around the country that share the vision and goals of the Alliance**

## THE APPROACH:

- The Alliance's approach is comprehensive and unique among initiatives to address disparities in diabetes care. Guided by the Chronic Disease Management model,<sup>1</sup> this approach emphasizes patient-centered care and communication and recognizes that people with diabetes receive care within a system that may include other allied health professionals and extends outside the boundaries of the clinical setting into the community. Through grants to five organizations, The Merck Company Foundation will support comprehensive, multi-faceted, community-based programs that address the key factors to improve health outcomes for people living with diabetes.
- The Alliance will work to improve communication between patients and health care providers. Effective communication among providers, patients and their family members is a critical component of efforts to promote optimal care outcomes, enhance prevention and management of diabetes and reduce disparities in care.
- The Alliance efforts go beyond the clinical setting and will reach people where they spend most of their time and make most of the decisions that affect their health, such as community settings and homes.
- Alliance programs will focus on three core components:
  - **Patients** — Patients who are better educated and empowered may become more engaged in their health care overall; they may become better at managing their conditions themselves, adopting behaviors that help prevent health problems and communicating effectively with physicians and other clinicians.
  - **Clinicians** — Clinicians who are more skilled in communicating with diverse patient groups and aware of cultural beliefs are more effective in providing care and educating their patients, and they become more patient-centered in their communication.
  - **System** — Health care organizations that implement and support clinical systems, policies or practices related to disease management can reduce disparities in diabetes care.

## Alliance Grantees:

- The five grantee communities are Camden, New Jersey; Chicago, Illinois; Dallas, Texas; Fort Washakie, Wyoming; and Memphis, Tennessee.
- Each grantee community serves low-income and underserved populations with a high prevalence of type 2 diabetes.
- The Merck Company Foundation has selected the University of Michigan's Center for Managing Chronic Disease to serve as the Alliance Program Office, supporting the program efforts of the grantee communities over the next five years and providing leadership in building the Alliance as a national public/private partnership.

<sup>1</sup> Wagner, E.H. "Chronic Disease Management: What Will It Take to Improve Care for Chronic Illness?" *Effective Clinical Practice*. 1998; Vol. 1: pp. 2-4.