



Co-RIG Project

Equitable Health Can't Wait: Insights and recommendations for calming the COVID-19 storm at meat-packing plants

Project leads: Annalee Coakley, MD, CCFP, DTM&H, Medical Director of Mosaic Refugee Health Clinic
Saugata Chakraborty, MBA, MS, MSc, CORIGQI [COVID-19 pandemic Response and Impact Group for Quality Improvement]

Project location: High River and Calgary, Alberta

Summary

The Enhanced COVID Primary Care Pathway was developed to support employees and their families following a COVID-19 outbreak in an Alberta meat-packing plant.¹ Evaluation of the pathway demonstrated how a collaborative response that addresses social determinants of health and clinical indications can curb the spread of infection. It was adopted broadly across the provincial meat-packing industry and other similar settings in Alberta.

Faces of COVID-19

Caring for the whole person

Asha, age 34, works at a meat-packing plant in High River, Alberta, and does not have sick leave or vacation pay. She is a Somali refugee and sends most of her income to Kenya where her children live.

At the time of the outbreak, Asha tested positive for COVID-19 while looking for new housing. The public health nurses explained mandated isolation requirements. However, Asha was overwhelmed and did not know how to comply as she was unable to move into her new room while contagious.

Asha was referred to the Mosaic Primary Care Network. Using the Enhanced COVID Primary Care Pathway protocols, the team helped Asha find temporary housing at a hotel and delivered medicine to help her manage symptoms. She was referred to a community agency that provided emotional support, delivered culturally appropriate food to break her fast during the Holy month of Ramadan, helped her apply for income support, and arranged for her to move to her new home following her release from the isolation hotel. Asha was able to return to work and has a better understanding of how to access community support in Alberta.

Project detail

With Co-RIG funding Dr. Annalee Coakley and her team from the Calgary Rural and Mosaic Primary Care Network—together with Alberta Health Services, University of Calgary, Habitus Collective, Action Dignity, and the Alberta International Medical Graduate Association—evaluated the impact of the Enhanced COVID Primary Care Pathway. Developed in response to an outbreak in a meat-packing plant in Alberta, the pathway helps identify and respond to the social determinants of health that contributed to the outbreak.

Many workers in meat-packing plants are recent immigrants or temporary foreign workers, have limited English language skills, and have low socio-ethno-economic status. Many do not understand or are unable to adhere to public health directives to self-isolate due to crowded housing or income insecurity. Many do not have a primary care provider.

Recognizing that these conditions directly fueled the severity of the meat-packing plant outbreak, and to safeguard the vulnerable populations who work in similar settings, primary care leadership adapted an existing care pathway that standardized clinical assessments for patients testing positive for COVID-19.

Developed in collaboration with Dr. Rick Ward and the Calgary Zone Primary Care Network (PCN), the Enhanced COVID Primary Care Pathway enabled primary care teams to identify vulnerable individuals, explain public health measures, and then connect those individuals to medical supports and community resources that will support recovery and reduce the risk of transmission.

Impact

- **Enhancing family medicine:** Dr. Coakley's team evaluated the positive impact on patients when partners from social, primary care, and public health sectors intentionally collaborate. This resulted in high-risk patients receiving safe, timely, effective, equitable and person-centred care. At the same time, it guided community resources to help address inequities linked to low socio-ethno-economic status.
- **Person-centred approach:** When the outbreak occurred at the meat-packing plant in High River the public health response did not contain the spread of COVID-19. The Enhanced COVID Primary Care Pathway implemented by primary care providers not only helped curb the spread of the virus, it helped workers get access to the financial, housing, and social supports that are critical to addressing social inequities.
- **Quality improvement:** The team's evaluation showed marked improvement both to the patient experiences and outcomes, as well as improved well-being of the health care team. The pathway is being adopted broadly across the provincial meat-packing industry and other similar settings.

Results to date

- Patients (2,300—936 workers plus family members and close contacts) were provided medical and/or psychosocial care from either South Calgary PCN, Mosaic PCN, or Calgary Rural PCN.
- To evaluate the Pathway, interviews took place with 40 meat-packing plant employees, 16 clinical providers, and 10 social support providers. Results identified high impact opportunities for improvement:
 - » Design culturally safe access to mental health resources in collaboration with community support agencies to empower individuals with low socio-ethno-economic status to take care of their health outcomes.
 - » Improve rural clinical provider knowledge of social support to better address social inequities and improve clinical care.
 - » Streamline data flow between public health, the community and primary care networks through a unified information database with cross-sectoral access that can lead to scalable, standardized primary care service models.
- As a result of early success at the meat-packing plant in High River, this rapid intervention was similarly incorporated in two other meat-packing plants in the Calgary Zone and rolled out across Alberta in November 2020.²

Methodology

- Design data collection tools to evaluate the impact of the intervention.
- Collect quantitative and qualitative data via chart reviews, community agency data, and interviews with patients, staff, and community partners.
- Complete the data analysis and identify areas for quality improvement and/or expansion.
- Develop mitigation strategies to strengthen the model for further waves of COVID-19.
- Use the evaluation to inform the development of a scalable approach to implementing the Enhanced COVID-19 Primary Care Pathway elsewhere in Alberta and Canada.

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“People will not self-isolate if they do not have money to buy food or pay bills. This innovative approach to collaborative care supported Cargill workers with necessary resources to protect their families and mitigate community impacts of the outbreak.”

– Dr. Annalee Coakley, Physician Lead, Mosaic Refugee Health Clinic

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¹ CORIGQI. CORIGQI History website. 2021. <https://www.corigqi.org/history>. Accessed October 12, 2021.

² CORIGQI. Publications & Media website. 2021. <https://www.corigqi.org/publications-media>. Accessed October 12, 2021.

Project team

Project lead: Annalee Coakley, MD, CCFP, DTM&H, Mosaic Refugee Health Clinic

Project co-lead: Saugata Chakraborty, MBA, MS, MSc, CORIGQI

Minella Antonio, Action Dignity

Krishna Anupindi, MPH, CORIGQI

Turin Chowdhury, University of Calgary

Jia Hu, MD, CCFP, MSc, FRCPC, Alberta Health Services

Dega Jama, Somali Community Association

Jake Jennings, Calgary and Area Primary Care Networks

Ajak Kuchkon, Sudanese Community Member

Mary Rose Manzano Leal, AIMGA

Jennifer Lee, OT, Alberta Health Services

Kristin Pon, MD, FM-PPHM, Department of Family Medicine, University of Calgary

Edna Ramirez, AIMGA

Adanech Sahilie, Action Dignity

Jason Shenher, MBA, Highland Primary Care Network

Adam Vyse, MD, CCFP, Calgary Rural Primary Care Network

Mussie Yemane, Eritrean Community Association

Michael Youssef, AIMGA, CORIGQI

Partners

Action Dignity

Alberta Health Services (AHS)

Alberta International Medical Graduate Association (AIMGA)

Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS)

Calgary Zone Primary Care Networks (South Calgary, Calgary Rural, and Mosaic)

Foothills Catholic Immigrant Services (FCIS)