

California Health Improvement Project (CHIP)

Paddling Upstream: Addressing Social Determinants in Community Health Centers

Kathleen Clanon, MD
Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, Alameda County, CA

Problem Statement and Underlying Causes

The 190,000 people served in Alameda County FQHCs have extremely low incomes; 52% have family incomes below the Federal Poverty Level. Very low income individuals and families are particularly stressed in our County in the past 3 years due to dramatic increases in the cost of housing, leaving even less available for food, clothing and other expenses. Our delivery system is not currently addressing income or housing as a health issue. Leaders in the FQHC network are interested in helping clients grapple with these social determinants of health, but are leery of taking on screening because of a concern that clinics would be identifying problems they could not help with.

CalFresh is California's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly called 'Food Stamps'. State data show that Alameda County residents underutilize CalFresh, with 7% of Alameda County residents enrolled vs 11% of Californians statewide and 14% nationally using SNAP. Intervening to get more of our families onto this program represents "low hanging fruit" for our system in addressing the income challenges our clients face.

Project Description

Patients being seen in our 32 FQHC clinic sites are currently assisted during visits with renewing their Medi-Cal when redetermination dates get close. Starting this year, we will simultaneously assist those clients in applying for CalFresh.

Goal and Objectives

Goal: At least 50% of eligible Alameda County FQHC clients attending a clinic visit will be assisted in enrolling in CalFresh.

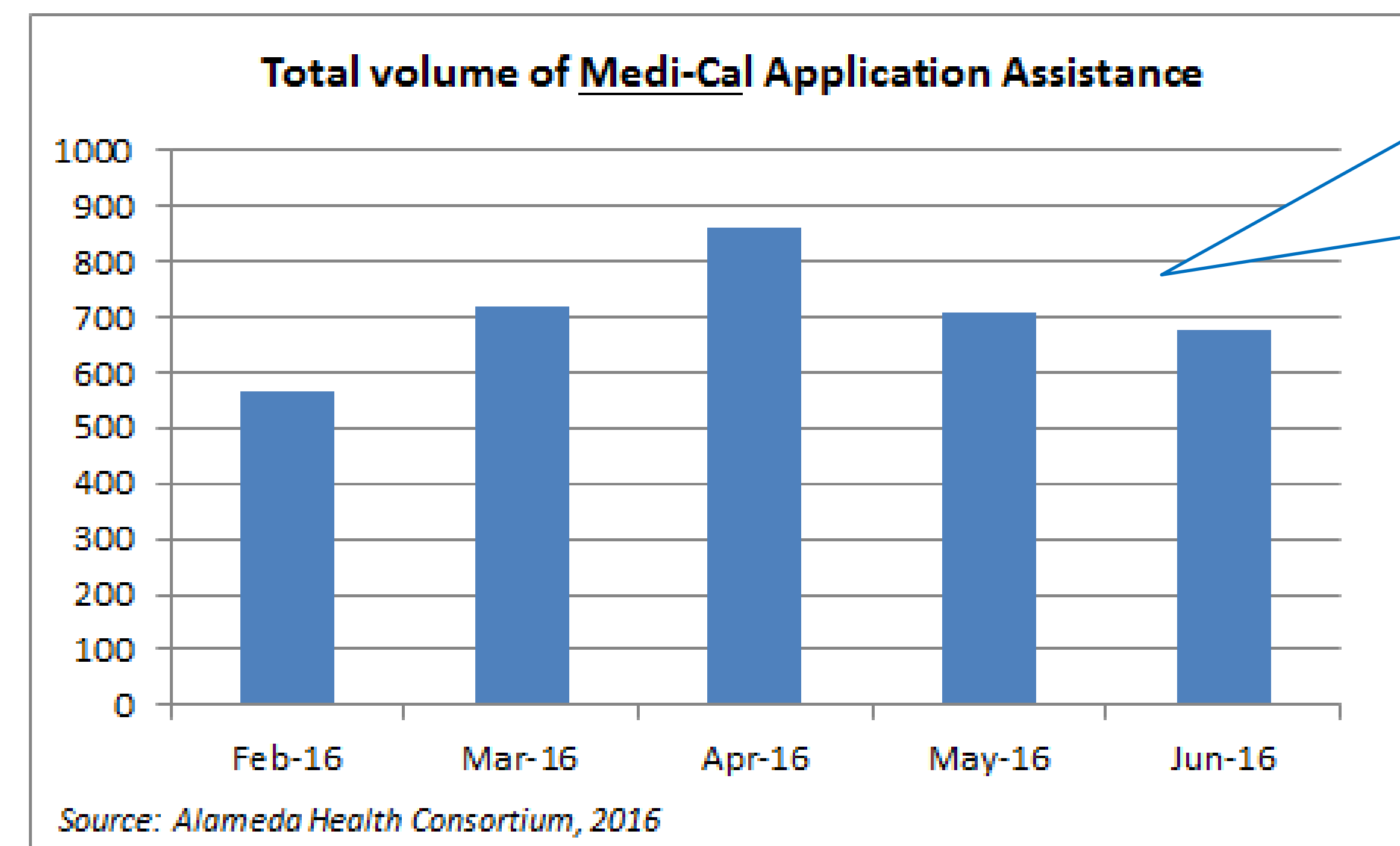
Output Objectives:

1. By June 2016, 9 clinic organizations will begin opt-out enrollment assistance for CalFresh during the Medi-Cal renewal process.
2. By July 2017, at least 50% of eligible clinic clients will have been assisted in applying for CalFresh.

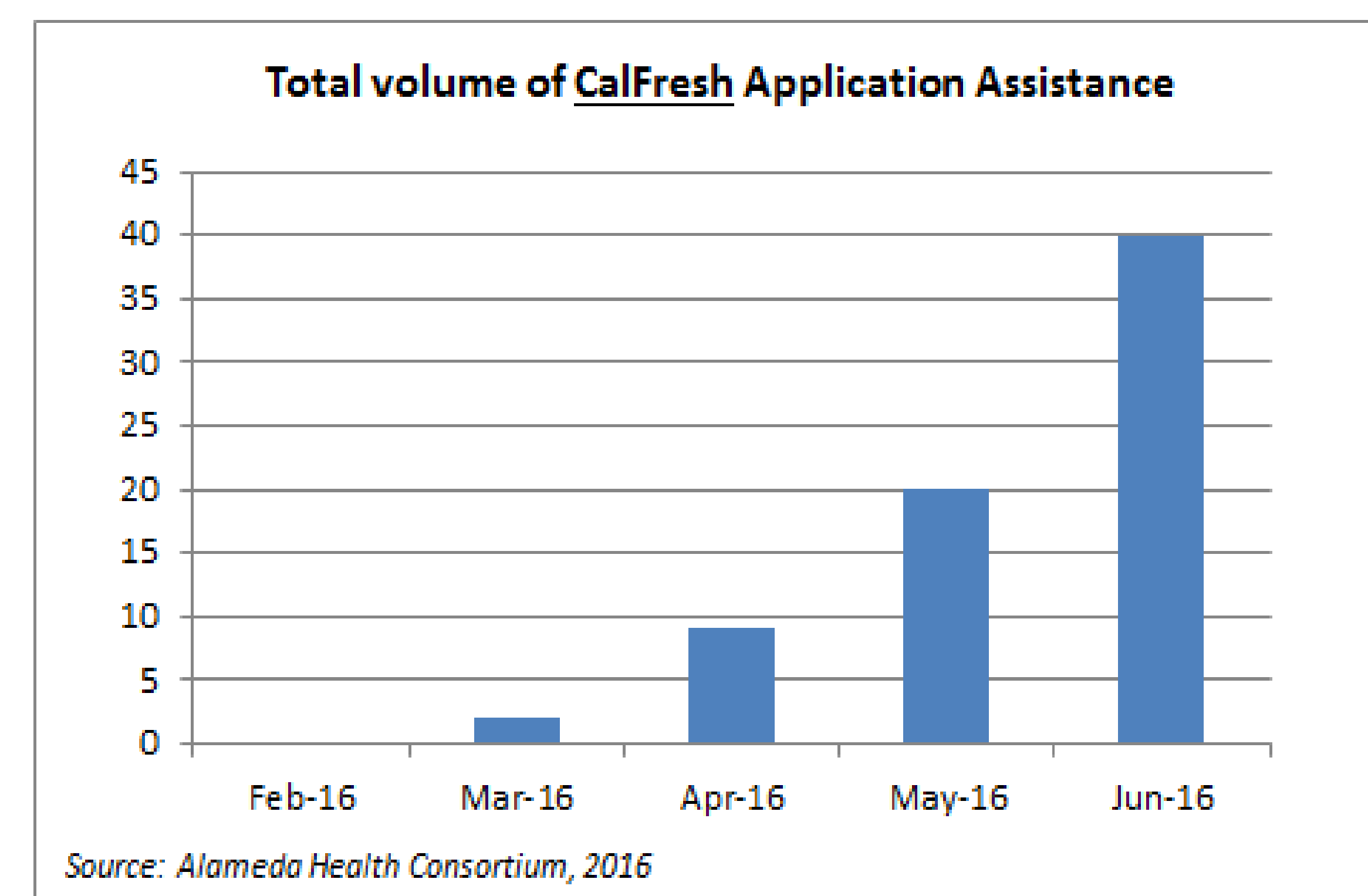
Outcome Objective: By July 2017, 50% of clients who received application assistance will be enrolled in CalFresh.

First Month Outputs

Medi-Cal Application Assistance Achieved



CalFresh Application Assistance Achieved



Discussion: In the first month since launch of the new CalFresh program there has been a definite uptick in the number of CalFresh assistance contacts. However, there is still a large number of Medi-Cal assistance contacts that did not result in a CalFresh application. One next step is to conduct interviews with clients and enrollers to determine the reasons for the gap; are clients refusing? Are the enrollers not consistently offering? Are clients already on the benefit? Initial patient interviews suggest that stigma about "food stamps" is still a major barrier to enrollment.

If **75% of Medi-Cal eligible individuals are successfully enrolled in CalFresh** and receive \$200/client/month, this would result in a total estimated average of over **\$100,000/month** in benefits to clients.

If the same assumptions are applied to the **total Medi-Cal eligible population in Alameda County** that is not currently enrolled in CalFresh, this would mean an additional **\$20M/month** in benefits to over 100,000 clients.



Lessons Learned

- ➔ Healthcare organizations **may not feel prepared** to take on addressing Social Determinants of Health.
- ➔ A **system wide effort is required** to identify and overcome challenges.
- ➔ **Stigma** associated with 'welfare' programs remains an important factor preventing people from accessing CalFresh.



About My Organization

The Healthcare Improvement and Planning unit of the Alameda County Healthcare Services Agency focusses on improving the quality and outcomes of care for low income Alameda County residents. Alameda County invested \$54.3 million in FY2015 to support care for the remaining uninsured (36,000 are enrolled in the County-supported coverage for the undocumented) and to improve care for Medi-Cal recipients. HCSA is a purchaser of healthcare services and contracts with the local public hospital system and clinics, and with a vibrant network of community based FQHCs. Each year, there is a system-wide improvement target into which 20-30% of the County's indigent and improvement dollars are invested. This CHIP will be the FY17systemwide improvement project.

Contact Me

For more information, contact me:
Kathleen A. Clanon, MD
Agency Medical Director
Kathleen.clanon@acgov.org

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