





The Community Health Worker

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*A cancer program's
role in population
health efforts*

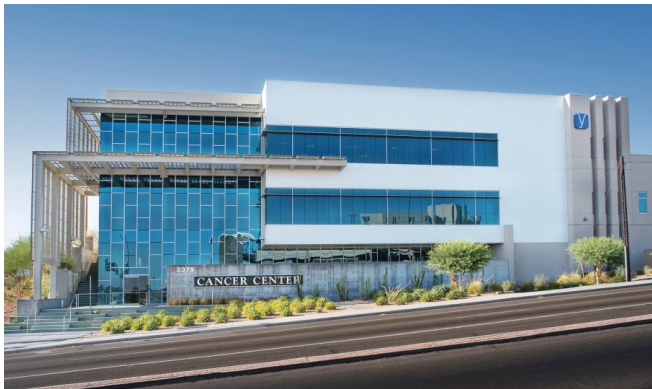
Yuma, Ariz., sits in a unique geographical location. Directly on the border of Arizona, California, and Mexico, Yuma stands out as the largest city between Phoenix, Ariz., and San Diego, Calif. Yuma County boasts a population of approximately 205,000 people, 60 percent of whom are Hispanic.¹ The proximity to Mexico, low cost of living, warm winter weather, and booming agribusiness industry attract thousands of migrant workers and winter visitors, doubling the population of Yuma during the winter months. Several major industries, including agriculture, military, and tourism, contribute to a large transient population. This complex demographic brings many cultural and diverse challenges to the healthcare providers within the community.

Yuma Regional Medical Center, a not-for-profit, sole community provider, is responsible for caring for the rural, migrant, and multicultural population in the region.

Completion of the new Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer

Center in 2014 ushered in a new era of cancer care for the Yuma community and its surrounding region. For the first time, many comprehensive services, including outpatient medical oncology, radiation oncology, and supportive care, were concentrated in one location, creating a more convenient, less stressful environment for patients.

While the cancer center offered active education, screening, and prevention outreach activities, leadership believed that there was a rural portion of the population that was not being reached. This population was considered high-risk due to missed screening and treatment opportunities, as well as the challenges these patients face as undocumented individuals seeking care. To reach this high-risk and underserved population, cancer center staff, including the administrative director and nurse navigator, met in 2014 to brainstorm ideas, eventually landing on the solution leveraging the trusted role of the traditional Hispanic *promotora*, or community health worker, in a non-traditional way: in an oncology program.



Exterior of Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center.

Community Health Workers

Promotoras have been used in Yuma's Hispanic community for decades. Traditionally, *promotoras* were often females and trusted family or friends of a patient. Although *promotoras* were not trained in healthcare, they understood how to maneuver through the healthcare system, and they could speak Spanish. Often *promotoras* attended hospital appointments in an advocate capacity:

- Assisting patients who were uncomfortable asking questions
- Helping patients fill out forms and paperwork
- Translating information so that patients understood hospital processes and/or medical information, such as a diagnosis or treatment recommendations
- Visiting patients at home to ensure they were taking the steps necessary to recovery.

As time progressed, the *promotora* role increasingly aligned to the commonly understood role of a community health worker. The American Public Health Association defines a community health worker as:²

A frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of and/or has an unusually close understanding of the community served. This trusting relationship enables the worker to serve as a liaison/link/intermediary between health/social services and the community to facilitate access to services and improve the quality and cultural competence of service delivery.

Community health workers also build individual and community capacity by increasing health knowledge and self-sufficiency through a range of activities such as outreach, community education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy.

Many local health agencies in Yuma now employ community health workers, empowering them to be health advocates and

educators. In 2012 Arizona Western College, Yuma's community college, recognized the importance of this role and created a Community Health Worker Certificate Program.³ In this program, students gain basic health knowledge and learn the skills necessary for outreach, education, informal counseling, social support, and advocacy. The certificate program includes an internship, with students interning through Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center, and other community organizations, to receive credit.

Creative Funding Solutions

The first step toward successfully expanding outreach to underserved patients involved Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center hiring a community health worker. To do so, hospital leadership challenged staff to identify financial resources to fund this position and to show viable outcomes prior to the organization financially committing to a sustained role. To meet this challenge, in 2015 the cancer center secured grant funding from Susan G. Komen to pilot a community health worker (or *promotora*) program exclusively for breast cancer. Like many cancer programs, breast cancer is the second leading tumor site in Yuma county.

As a bilingual Hispanic woman, the cancer center's community health worker understands cultural sensitivities within the community.

In addition to covering the salary of a community health worker to lead the outreach program, the Susan G. Komen grant provided funding for mammograms for patients who otherwise could not afford the service.

Hiring an experienced, certified community health worker was not without its challenges. Although *promotoras* and community health workers have been used in the Yuma community for a long time, identifying a formally trained individual willing to take a position with a pilot program for an undetermined amount of time was not an easy task. In addition to developing and leading the outreach program, this community health worker would also be responsible for mentoring interns from Arizona Western College's Community Health Worker Certificate Program.

Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center was fortunate to find an experienced community health worker to take on the full time-position.

In 2016 the cancer center applied for a second Susan G. Komen grant to help provide additional screening, to help pay for

treatment for women with breast cancer—regardless of their ability to pay—and to continue funding of the pilot community health worker position.

These two grants allowed Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center to test its outreach program, learning from the challenges and successes experienced along the way. The Komen grants also allowed the cancer center to collect data, which validated the need for the community health worker role and justified the continuance of that position.

Partnering to Expand Resources & Reach

Understanding that the Susan G. Komen screening and treatment funds would be depleted quickly, Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center reached out to other organizations for additional funds and resources, expanding on already strong partnerships within the community and state. One of the first organizations to collaborate with the cancer center on this project was Campesinos Sin Fronteras, an early adopter of a formal *promotora* (community health worker) position.⁴ Campesinos Sin Fronteras partners with low-income migrant workers, the agriculture community, and other vulnerable patient populations in Yuma County to prevent chronic disease and other illnesses. The organization shared its expertise on how to implement and support a community health worker and allowed the cancer center’s community health worker access to its resources.

Another early adopter of the community health worker concept was the Regional Center for Border Health (rcfbh.org). With its focus on increasing access to quality training and affordable healthcare on the United States–Mexico border, this partner organization provided invaluable insight to the cancer center. One of the organization’s most important contributions came through its Well Woman Program, which receives federal and state funding to provide breast and cervical cancer screenings to the community. Through this partnership, the cancer center referred patients who met Well Women Program requirements to the Regional Center for Border Health and reserved the Susan G. Komen grant funds for women who otherwise could not receive screening or treatment.

Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center furthered its partnership with Bridget’s Gift, a local non-profit started in memory of a Yuma native who passed away from breast cancer. Bridget’s wish was for the entire Yuma community to have access to breast cancer education, resources, mammograms, and treatment. The organization agreed to partner with the cancer center to help promote screening mammograms, as well as provide educational resources and financial assistance on a case-by-case basis for women who did not qualify for other programs.

Each of these partnerships allowed Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center to improve access to screenings and care without using scarce cancer center resources.

Implementation & Reach

Before the community health worker could go out in the field, the cancer center needed to complete a great deal of administrative work to establish the outreach program. For example, the process required:

- Creating easy-to-understand referral and tracking forms
- Putting processes in place to ensure a seamless continuum of care
- Developing culturally relevant marketing resources in two languages
- Holding conversations between cancer program leadership and diagnostic imaging leadership to ensure an identification and billing process was in place to handle the needs of underserved patients.

The community health worker also had to determine the best way to navigate the healthcare system to ensure appropriate screening and funding, and minimize confusion and barriers for patients. Finally, the cancer center developed and implemented
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Cuida
Tu Salud
como cuidas la de tu familia

La detección temprana salva vidas Envejecer y ser mujer son los dos principales factores de riesgo para desarrollar cáncer de seno. Las mamografías de rutina son recomendadas para las mujeres con antecedentes familiares de cáncer de seno o que han cumplido los 40 años de edad. La detección temprana del cáncer de seno incrementa las probabilidades de sobrevivir- para que puedas cuidar a tus seres queridos.

Yuma Regional Medical Center and Susan G. Komen Foundation se han unido para ofrecer
Mamografías GRATUITAS y asistencia para transporte.

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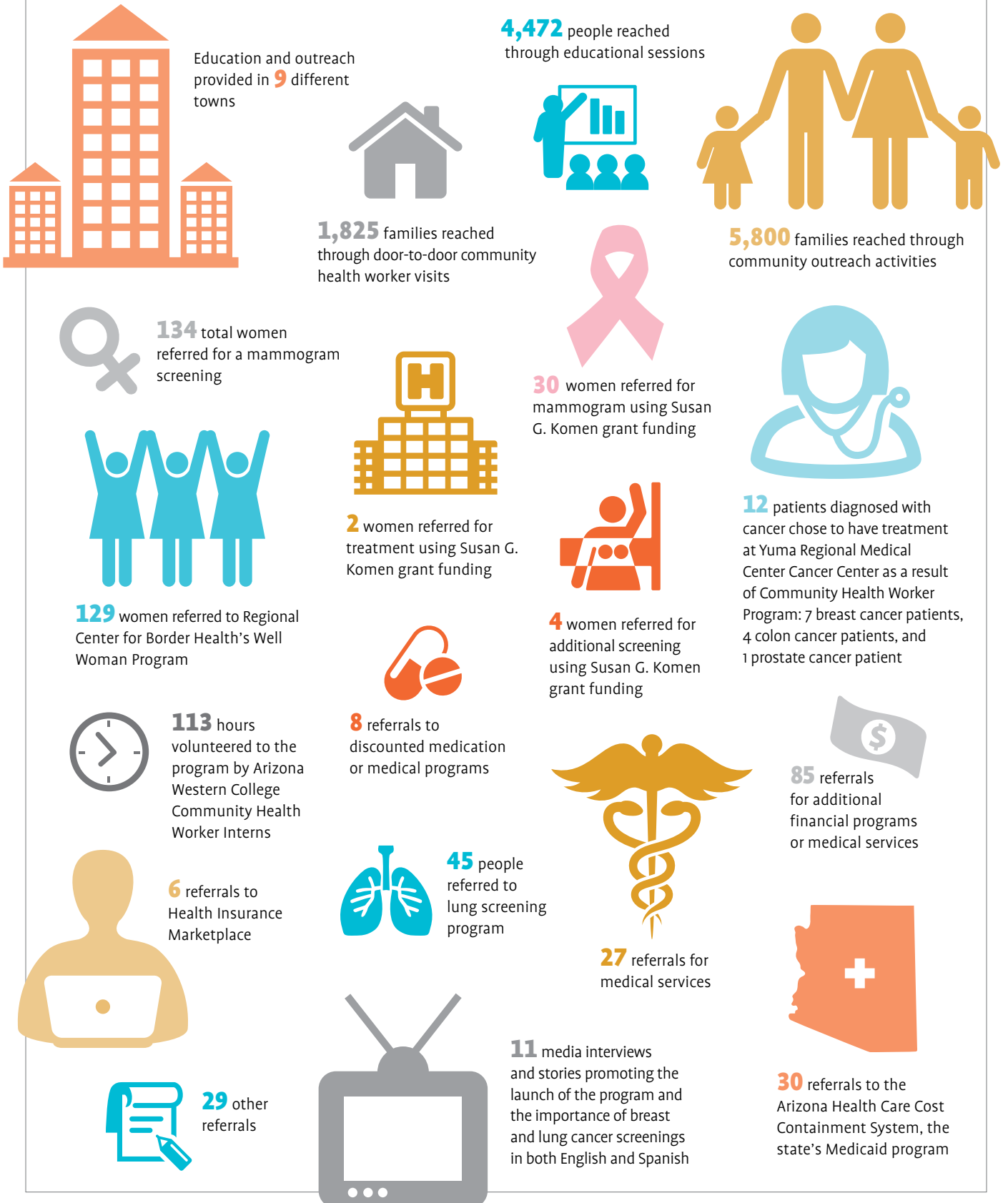
- Tienes 40 o más años de edad
- No tienes seguro médico
- Tienes un ingreso limitado

YUMA REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER
CANCER CENTER

susan g. komen.

Para más información o solicitar el servicio por favor llamar al (928) 336-1967
o mandar un correo electrónico a cancerscreening@yumaregional.org

Figure 1. Community Health Worker Impact by the Numbers, Aug. 2016 – Sept. 30, 2017





From left: Interns from Arizona Western College, education booth at community outreach event.

(continued from page 39)

formal training sessions to ensure that best practices for breast cancer screenings were followed and to set expectations for both the community health worker and the student interns.

Key to the success of Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center's outreach program was the previously mentioned partnership with Arizona Western College's Community Health Worker Certification Program. Each student signed an internship agreement, committing to volunteer 10 hours during the semester. During the first semester 10 students took advantage of the internship; 6 students interned in the second semester. These internships benefited both the students, who received valuable work experience and the support of the community health worker, and the cancer center by expanding the reach of this full-time staff member.

As a bilingual Hispanic woman, the cancer center's community health worker understands cultural sensitivities within the community. With this knowledge and the assistance of a well-known and respected state representative and a teacher from the community, she developed relevant campaign messaging.

While the cancer center's partnering organizations offer generous media support and promotion of outreach services, it is the relationships the community health worker has cultivated through meeting with women's groups, making school presentations, and conducting home visits that have provided the greatest impact on grassroots outreach efforts.

Figure 1, left, highlights the impact that Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center's community health worker has had on the community.

Road Bumps & Lessons Learned

Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center experienced several delays in the implementation of its outreach program. Although the pilot program was initially funded by a Susan G. Komen grant, additional support and justification were needed to ensure the longevity and sustainability of the program. Further, as a

Susan G. Komen grant-funded program, the community health worker and interns were limited to talking to women about breast cancer. Although this education helped women realize the importance of mammograms and preventive screenings for breast cancer, it did not allow for a comprehensive discussion of other female healthcare needs and screenings that might be beneficial to them or to male members of the family.

Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center also experienced staffing changes at the grant writer, nurse navigator, director, medical director, and executive levels during program implementation. While the new leaders were supportive of the outreach program, they needed to review and align goals before the outreach program could officially launch. These administrative staffing and policy changes caused a domino effect that necessitated an extension on the original Susan G. Komen grant.

An unexpected challenge related to the state's proximity to the international border arose once the community health worker went out into the community to meet with women. Several times, the community health worker identified women who needed screening and who were not U.S. citizens. These women were unwilling to come into Yuma for screenings, as they did not want to go through U.S. Border Patrol checkpoints to return home. There were also concerns of how these women would coordinate treatment if a cancer were to be found. One major step toward resolving this issue was the development of a partnership with the Mexican consulate, which provided an avenue for Mexican citizens who needed treatment but did not qualify for programs within Arizona. The consulate implemented a mechanism for these citizens to be referred for treatment in Mexico through the country's own healthcare system.

Future Directions

Due to the success of its outreach program, Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center received additional funding to



From left: Breast cancer education training at Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center, attendees of breast cancer education training at Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center.

continue and expand the program through the Foundation of Yuma Regional Medical Center’s McDaniel Endowment Fund. Once the two Susan G. Komen grant funding cycles were completed in spring 2017, the McDaniel Endowment Fund allowed for continued employment of the community health worker and expansion of cancer screening services beyond mammography. Accordingly, the community health worker and the student interns received educational training on best practices for cancer prevention on a range of cancer screenings, including lung cancer, colon cancer, and skin cancer, as well as partnerships and resources available to help screen members of the community.

Within the migrant farming community, it is often hard for individuals to schedule and travel to screenings. Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center is continuing discussions on the importance of accessibility to screenings. One goal of the discussions is to look at the feasibility of mobile mammography and other screening units, as well as potential partnerships to help fund these needed resources. 📺

Marla Moore, RN, BSN, MA, was the director of Clinical Operations at Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center who retired in June 2017; Rebecca Larson, BS, is a marketing strategist; and Abhinav Chandra, MD, is the medical director of Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center, Yuma, Ariz.

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Acknowledgements

Yuma Regional Medical Center Cancer Center would like to acknowledge and thank the partners that assisted in spreading the impact of cancer education and screenings in our community:

- Arizona Western College
- Bridget’s Gift
- Campesinos Sin Fronteras
- McDaniel Endowment Fund of the Foundation of Yuma Regional Medical Center
- Mexican Consulate
- Regional Center for Border Health
- Susan G. Komen.

This outreach program is evidence that strong communication and partnerships lead to successful outcomes for underserved patients in our community. Our team was continually adding value to the lives of our patients and community members by partnering, referring, assisting, and working together. Never give up if the goal is worth attaining.

Marla Moore, 2017