

SouthEastern Arizona Governments Organization



BRIDGING MEDICAL & HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS WITH TRANSPORTATION

FINAL REPORT

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The grant recipient, SouthEastern Arizona Governments Organization (SEAGO) is a regional planning agency which performs and coordinates a variety of functions. Established in 1972, SEAGO is a 501(c)3, nonprofit organization whose core function is to assist local governments in seeking cooperative solutions to area wide problems; to provide a forum for regional policy development; and to serve as a coordinating link between municipal, county, tribal, state, and federal agencies. Originally a planning entity, SEAGO's operational scope has expanded considerably since its inception to include project implementation activities in the areas of aging, housing, economic development, social services, transportation, the environment, and public transit.

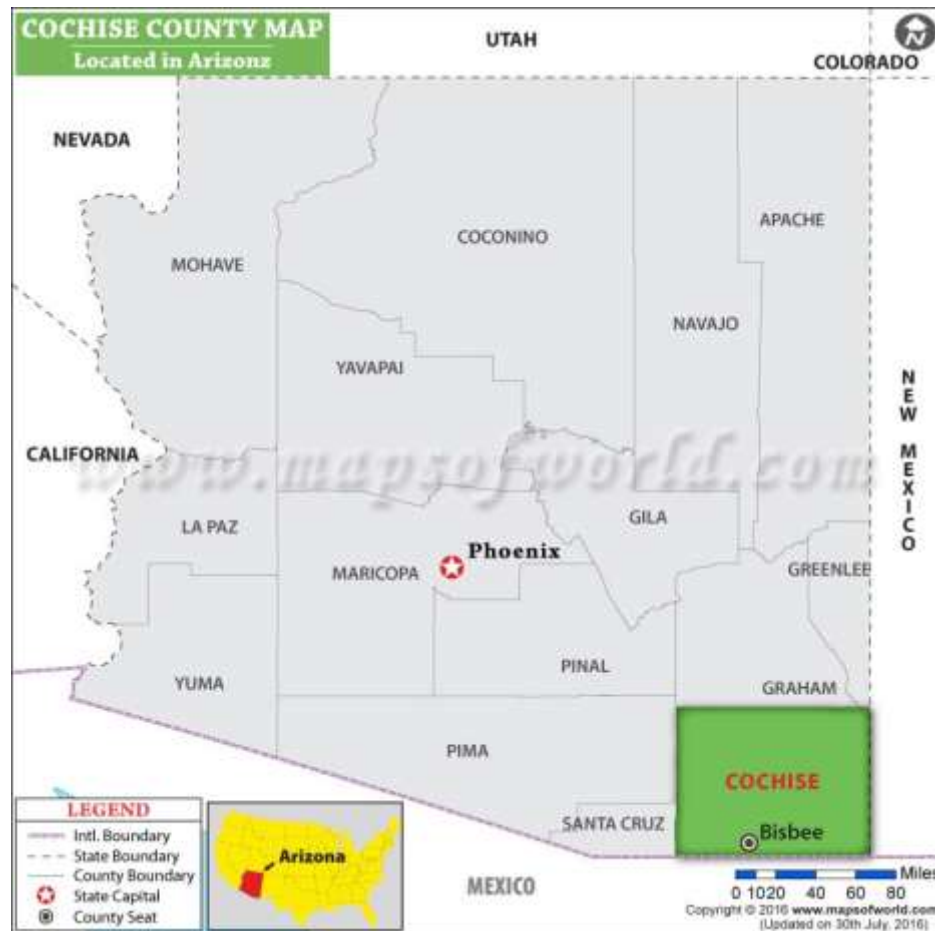
The project was piloted in Cochise Count, Arizona. The area is very rural, very poor, and has a quickly aging population. The population of the County is approximately 130,000. There is an estimated 34,422 (26.9%) people 62 years and over. There is an estimated 22,184 (19%) living below poverty level and 36,339 (31%) living below 150% poverty level.

The County is designated a Health Professional Shortage Area for both medical and dental services by the Health Resources and Services Administration. The ratio of population to health provider in Cochise County is 642 to 1. According to data from the United States Department of Agriculture Food Access Research Atlas, 39% of the population lives in areas identified as having low access to healthy food (food deserts). According to data available through Feeding America, 14.5% of the County is food insecure.

To address these issues, the SouthEastern Arizona Governments Organization (SEAGO) applied for and received funding to create medical services hub in which medical, food and transportation services would be offered simultaneously at strategic locations throughout Cochise County.

The project centered on a partnership with Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc. (CCHCI). CCHCI is Federally Qualified Health Center whose services are offered to all County residents regardless of a person's ability to pay. They have 4 clinics at fixed rural locations and 6 mobile medical and dental units. The goal of the project was to use these sites as a hub for medical, food, and transportation access.

PROJECT LOCATION



PROJECT PARTNERS

In addition to CCHCI, SEAGO recruited multiple partners to support the project. The following table reflects our partnerships and role in the project:

<i>Partner</i>	<i>Services</i>
Women's Transition Program	Voucher Distribution/Limited Transportation
House of Hope	Voucher Distribution/Limited Transportation
Bisbee Homeless Shelter	Voucher Distribution
Good Neighbor Alliance	Voucher Distribution
Veterans Affairs (Sierra Vista)	Voucher Distribution/Transportation Coordination

Copper Queen Medical Centers	Voucher Distribution/Limited Transportation
Chiricahua Community Health Centers (Bisbee, Sierra Vista, Willcox, Douglas)	Medical, Dental, and Transportation Services
Benson Hospital	Voucher Distribution/Medical Services
Willcox Senior Center	Voucher Distribution/Food Access
Northern Cochise Community Hospital	Voucher Distribution/Medical Services
Arizona at Work - Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Transportation Coordination
Douglas Public Library	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
St. Vincent de Paul - Douglas and Benson	Voucher Distribution/Food Access
SEABHS	Voucher Distribution/Transportation Coordination
Haven Health	Voucher Distribution/Transportation Coordination
U of A Cooperative Extensions of Douglas, Bisbee, Sierra Vista	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
Cochise College	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
Step Up with Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
Banner Health - Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
Willcox Food Pantry	Voucher Distribution/Food Access
Willcox Food Bank	Voucher Distribution/Food Access
American Legion - Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
VICAP	Voucher Distribution/Transportation Services
Produce on Wheels - Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Food Access
Child and Family Resource Centers - Douglas, Bisbee, Sierra Vista	Voucher Distribution/Limited Transportation
DES - Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Transportation Coordination
2nd Time Around Thrift Store - Douglas	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
Winchester Heights Community Center	Voucher Distribution/Program Outreach
City of Douglas	Transportation Services
City of Benson	Transportation Services
City of Bisbee	Transportation Services
City of Willcox	Transportation Services

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

The following table reflects the performance measures established prior to project kickoff

Activity	Performance Measure
Patients Seen at Medical Clinics	450
Patients Seen at Dental Clinics	450
Pediatric Patients Seen at Medical Clinics	180
Food Units Provided	450
Prescription Services Provided*	1,000
Unduplicated Individuals that Received Medical Or Dental Services	1,000

* Upon implementation of the project, SEAGO and our partners quickly found that prescription delivery was a major need (especially during the COVID emergency) of this project. An additional outcome of 2,000 prescriptions delivered was established.

PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

The following table reflects the performance outcomes in comparison to performance measures:

Activity	Performance Measure	Outcome	Percentage Of Goal
Patients Seen at Medical Clinics	450	1,233	274%
Patients Seen at Dental Clinics	450	651	145%
Pediatric Patients Seen at Medical Clinics	180	146	81%
Food Units Provided	450	604	134%
Prescription Services Provided*	2,000	4,892	245%
Unduplicated Individuals that Received Medical Or Dental Services	1,000	1,099	109%

PERFORMANCE CHALLENGES/LESSONS LEARNED

Several factors impacted program outcomes:

- **Lack of Experience with Direct FTA Grants:** This was SEAGO's first direct FTA grant award. SEAGO lacked internal knowledge of FTA grant implementation processes. FTA Region 9 provided a great deal of support to

implement the project. However, lack of awareness of the process delayed project kick-off approximately 13 months.

- **COVID 19 Pandemic:** The COVID 19 pandemic impacted the project in multiple ways. During the emergency, several of our medical partner's limited clinic appointments to ensure social distancing/safety requirements were met. In addition, many medical providers transitioned to telemedicine. Telemedicine became the primary medical services delivery method for rural Cochise County. This greatly impacted the project start-up and delivery.
- **Partner Service Reductions:** Due to the delay in implementing the project and COVID 19 challenges, SEAGO saw some of our original partners reduce capacity and areas of service. Much of this was driven by the lack of driver's or significant reductions in program income. This forced SEAGO to adjust on the fly and expand partnerships to meet project demands.
- **Pediatric Appointments:** Transportation to pediatric appointments was a priority of the project. However, parent's use of public transportation was greatly diminished as parent's limited public transportation of their children due to safety concerns. This resulted in SEAGO not meeting its performance target.
- **Demand for Prescription Deliveries:** This was not identified as a need in our initial grant proposal. The COVID 19 pandemic and transition to telemedicine greatly increased the demand for prescription deliveries. It quickly became the primary need of our partners and required SEAGO to slightly adjust our project model to meet this need.
- **Increased Food Access Demand:** The impact to this project was two-fold. First, the pandemic and inflation pressures greatly increased demand on food banks and congregate meal sites. This left the project with fewer products to support the food access needs of project participants. Second, wait times in food bank/pantry lines increased substantially. This made transportation coordination very difficult and resulted in less food units distributed.

SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

SEAGO is strongly focused on sustaining the project's progress through the following initiatives:

- **Technology Investment:** SEAGO has joined a partnership with the Maricopa Association of Governments to expand technology options to deliver medical services to rural Arizona. Technology can provide solutions, but these become less viable when older adults do not have access to good internet connectivity and/or they do not feel comfortable using technology. Nonprofit, public, and private partners throughout the state have rallied together to create **People-Oriented Transportation Linkages for Underserved Communities (POTLUCK)**, a new statewide initiative to connect older adults with rides and telemedicine options in underserved areas. The goal of POTLUCK is to connect older adults who have low incomes to medical care through in-person or virtual appointments. Transportation will be provided by nonprofit agencies. When a virtual appointment is the better option, this will be addressed through a systems level solution to provide telemedicine through centralized hubs and mobile vans. Pilot communities will test this approach and refinements will be made. POTLUCK will be shared as a national replicable model.
- **New Transportation Partnerships:** SEAGO is partnering with Synergy HomeCare of Sierra Vista to purchase a fleet of 8 accessible vehicles to use in Cochise County, specifically in the area known as the 191 Corridor from Safford and south to Douglas. Our goal is to assist members in getting to doctors' appointments, social events, community-based services, and any other events for which our clients do not have reliable transportation. A major focus of the transportation plan is to assist people who live in these areas (upwards of 30,000 people) in getting to medical and life-sustaining appointments in Tucson and Sierra Vista. The first component of this plan would place vehicles in the outlying areas (Douglas, Willcox, Naco) and other strategic locations to connect people from these areas to the services in Sierra Vista and Tucson. Time schedules will be established based on the needs of members. Another component is focused

on transportation within local areas and will work to improve the quality of life for members by providing transportation to community events, food banks and pantries, local senior citizens' centers for enrichment activities such as arts and crafts, exercise classes, libraries, special events, volunteer opportunities, and employment opportunities.

- **Expand Existing Partnerships:** SEAGO is working closely with Chiricahua Community Health Centers, Inc. (CCHCI) and our public transportation partners to maintain our voucher program to medical, dental and food that is the cornerstone of this project. Our Area Agency on Aging will provide financial support to help maintain the voucher project and our transportation providers have expressed willingness to offer vouchers at a greatly reduced rate.