

Rewarding Healthy Behaviors and Addressing Day-to-Day Needs: AccessHealth Spartanburg's Gift-In-Kind Closet

IN BRIEF

Recognizing an unmet need for toiletries and household products among clients, AccessHealth Spartanburg (AHS) stocks a closet where eligible clients can “shop” for items. Clients can shop when they first enroll and at targeted intervals, plus they can earn coupons to shop for items by attending appointments, meeting with case managers, and/or achieving health-related milestones. This builds trusting relationships between clients and staff and meets basic client needs. AHS is a participant in the *Transforming Complex Care* initiative, a national multi-site demonstration made possible through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

AccessHealth Spartanburg (AHS) is a nonprofit organization located in Spartanburg, South Carolina that connects low-income uninsured residents to a network of volunteer health care providers. AHS also connects its clients to various social services, including Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits and nutrition programs. Because many clients find it hard to afford essential household and personal care items, AHS developed a system for providing clients with these items in exchange for attending appointments and keeping their contact information up-to-date.

Helping Clients Access Better Health and Everyday Essentials

After recognizing that many AHS clients lacked access to certain essentials, AHS created its “Gift-In-Kind Closet” (GIK Closet), which is based on a United Way of the Piedmont [program](#) that operates a warehouse of unused or returned items donated by Wal-Mart. In exchange for a fee, local charities like AHS can access the warehouse, and stock up on items to share with their clients. During shopping trips, charities are allowed to obtain as many products as they can fit into a standard shopping cart in 30 minutes.

AHS' GIK closet is filled with products from the United Way warehouse. Every new AHS client gets to shop in the GIK closet during enrollment and then once every two months as needed. Plus, clients can earn coupons to shop for products. By meeting certain requirements — such as attending a scheduled doctor's appointment, or meeting with an AHS case manager — clients earn coupons that can be redeemed for products in the GIK Closet.

AHS spends between \$1,200 and \$1,600 each year in fees to United Way to operate the closet, which distributes more than \$70,000 worth of products to clients annually. United Way supports similar centers across the nation. AHS'



approach is intended to create an incentive system to both improve clients' lives and encourage them to manage their health.

Valuable Benefits for Clients and AccessHealth

The GIK Closet provides AHS clients with essential household items they might otherwise be unable to afford, allowing them to save money for other expenses like rent, utilities, and gas. One GIK Closet client, Carol, noted: "It helps me in so many ways. I do not have to buy certain items I need so much." In particular, the closet helps supplement benefits available through Supplemental Nutrition Access Program, which cannot be used to purchase non-food items, such as toilet paper, toothpaste, etc. The GIK closet also helps engage clients by encouraging them to visit AHS for health services and to shop in the GIK closet. It also provides an incentive for clients to meet certain health milestones or achieve goals (such as giving up smoking). Lastly, the GIK closet helps AHS staff maintain up-to-date client information since each time clients shop for products, they are asked to complete a form requesting information about new medications, diagnoses, or address changes.

ABOUT THE CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES

The Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS) is a nonprofit policy center dedicated to improving the health of low-income Americans. It works with state and federal agencies, health plans, providers, and community-based organizations to develop innovative programs that better serve people with complex and high-cost health care needs. For more information, visit www.chcs.org.

ABOUT TRANSFORMING COMPLEX CARE

AccessHealth is part of [Transforming Complex Care](#), a multi-site demonstration aimed at refining and spreading effective care models that address the complex medical and social needs of high-need, high-cost patients. This national initiative is made possible with support from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) and led by CHCS. For more information, visit www.chcs.org/transforming-complex-care.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [AccessHealth Spartanburg: Wrap-Around Community Support for South Carolina's Most Vulnerable Patients](#) – This profile focuses on AccessHealth's community case managers, who connect Spartanburg County's uninsured, adult population to primary care providers and community services.
- [Promoting Weekly Reflection to Support Outreach Workers: VCU Health's Reflection Logs](#) – This technical assistance tool highlights how Virginia Commonwealth University Health System in Richmond, Virginia is using simple weekly voice recordings as a management tool to support outreach workers in its TakeCCARE program.