Five California Public Health Care Systems Recognized for Excellence
Awards Highlight Pioneering Efforts to Enhance Quality, Equity, and Access in Health Care

(Oakland, CA)– The California Association of Public Hospitals and Health Systems (CAPH), in partnership with the California Health Care Safety Net Institute (SNI), proudly recognized five exceptional public health care systems with the 2024 Quality Leaders Awards (QLA). These awards celebrate innovative efforts to advance quality, equity, and access to care for California's most underserved populations. Each awardee has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to improving patient experience and health outcomes through efforts to address pressing health challenges.
 The theme of this year's CAPH/SNI Annual Conference, Prioritizing Patients, highlights the connection between the Quality Leaders Awards and the mission of public health care systems to improve care and patient outcomes. The awards and the conference showcase initiatives that make a meaningful impact in patients' lives and focus on putting patients first.

Established over 20 years ago by CAPH and SNI, the QLAs are presented annually to honor public health care systems that embody excellence in delivering high-quality, equitable care. Each year, awardees are selected based on rigorous criteria, including innovation, equity, population health improvements, and care redesign. This year, the QLA program received 30 competitive entries, from which five exceptional initiatives were selected for recognition.

"Having worked closely with these outstanding public health care systems, I am continually inspired by their dedication to advancing quality and equity," said **Giovanna Giuliani**, executive director of SNI. "Each awardee has found creative and impactful solutions that we can all learn from. It's an inspiring reminder that a dedicated team can make a difference in patients' lives."

Top Honors: Riverside University Health System
Award: Transforming our Partnership for Student Success
To address behavioral health needs among students, Riverside University Health System (RUHS) partnered with a local school district to implement the *Transforming our Partnerships for Student Success* (TOPSS) program. This initiative features tiered behavioral health services, universal holistic health screenings, and onsite support.

Key Outcomes (2020–2024):
- 7,626 students assessed across seven schools, with 23.9% identified as having serious health needs.
- 4,510 students received behavioral health services from January 2022 to June 2023.
- 93,544 units of social services (e.g., food, clothing, housing assistance) provided from August 2022 to May 2024.
- Students with concerning behavioral health needs decreased from 15% in 2020 to 7% in 2023.

Top Honor: RUHS

Innovation Award: Contra Costa Regional Medical Center
Award: A3 Crisis Response: Anywhere, Anyone, Anytime

In response to community demands for compassionate and comprehensive behavioral health services, Contra Costa Regional Medical Center (CCRMC) collaborated with advocates for mental health and the unhoused, providers, and individuals with lived experiences to reimagine crisis care. This effort led to the creation of the A3 Community Crisis Response Program, ensuring access to professional help anytime, anywhere in the county.

Key Features and Impact:
- 24/7 dedicated crisis phone line providing immediate support.
- In-person crisis response for individuals in need.
- Since 2023, the program has supported over 14,400 people via the phone line and provided in-person crisis support to 2,237 individuals.

[Innovation: CCRMC](#)

Population Health Award: Ventura County Health Care Agency
Award: Public Health Care System and Local Health Plan Collaboration Improves Population Health for Medi-Cal Patients
The Ventura County Health Care Agency (VCHCA) partnered with Gold Coast Health Plan (GCHP) to improve shared quality metrics for Medi-Cal members. This collaboration combined VCHCA's outreach and clinical services with GCHP's financial support to maximize impact. VCHCA and GCHP worked together to share more complete quality data, expand clinic services, and enhance access to preventive care.

Key Initiatives and Results:
- Provided gift cards to incentivize patients to complete preventive services.
- Extended clinic hours to weekends and evenings to reduce barriers to care.
- Secured GCHP funding for point-of-care machines (HbA1c, lead, hemoglobin) to streamline diabetes care.
- Achieved a 21% increase in well-child visits and closed care gaps for over 5,000 Medi-Cal members in 2023.

[Population Health: Ventura](#)

Equity Award: San Francisco Health Network/Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital
Award: Heart Failure Readmission Rate Reduction
San Francisco Health Network (SFHN) and Zuckerberg San Francisco General (ZSFG) launched a heart failure population health initiative leveraging machine learning and artificial intelligence within their electronic health record (EHR). The program aimed to reduce heart failure hospitalization and readmission rates, close equity gaps, and retain at-risk pay-for-performance funding.

Key Strategies:
- Standardized care with EHR decision support addressing medical and social determinants of health.
- Deployed machine learning tools for collaborative heart failure care teams.
- Developed a specialized clinic addressing concurrent heart failure and substance use.

Outcomes:
- 13% reduction in 30-day all-cause readmission rates.
- 6% decrease in one-year heart failure mortality.
- Equity gaps eliminated for Black/African American patients compared to the general heart failure population.

Equity: ZSFG/SFHN

Care Redesign Award: Alameda Health System
Award: Providing Quality Pediatric Primary Care in the Safety Net
The Alameda Health System (AHS) Department of Pediatrics and Quality Improvement implemented a comprehensive strategy to enhance pediatric care across its four federally qualified health centers, focusing on addressing healthcare disparities and barriers to well-child visits (WCV) and immunizations. Key interventions included implementing gap alert systems in the electronic medical record (EMR), restructuring scheduling templates and rules, sending text reminders for checkups, and educating patients about free transportation options.
- **Impact (2021–2023):**
- Improved all 10 pediatric quality metrics, most exceeding the 90th percentile benchmark.
- Doubled WCV completion rates for Black patients to 42%.
- Reduced disparities between Black and Hispanic patients:
  - WCV rates gap decreased from 11% to 4%.
  - Adolescent immunization gap reduced from 35% to 10%.

Care Redesign: Alameda

"Our Quality Leaders Award winners exemplify the dedication and forward-thinking needed to advance health care across California," said **Erica Murray**, President and CEO of CAPH. "Programs like these are essential for driving progress, especially in our underserved communities. Public health systems consistently step forward to find solutions that improve health outcomes for all Californians, making these programs truly impactful."

About the California Association of Public Health Systems (CAPH):
California's 21 public health care systems, which include county-operated and affiliated facilities and the five University of California health systems, are the core of the state's health care safety net. County public health care systems have a mission and mandate to deliver high-quality care to all, regardless of ability to pay or insurance status, across a comprehensive range of services. Despite representing only 6% of all hospitals statewide, public health care systems provide 35% of all Medi-Cal and uninsured hospital care. They contribute over $4 billion annually to the Medi-Cal program, in place of the state's share, with many of their payments uniquely tied to quality and performance improvements. Additionally, these systems train a diverse and inclusive workforce, including nearly half of all new doctors in hospitals across the state.

About the California Health Care Safety Net Institute (SNI)
The California Health Care Safety Net Institute (SNI) is the 501(c)(3) affiliate of CAPH, dedicated to supporting California's public health care systems in improving care delivery. Since 1999, SNI has

partnered closely with CAPH to provide expert-led program offerings, hands-on technical assistance, and peer-learning opportunities, enabling public health care systems to enhance quality, equity, and accessibility of care. Through its support, SNI empowers these systems to implement sustainable, impactful solutions that drive health care innovation across California.