

BROADCAST SCRIPT-'We have seen so much need': OSF Pandemic Health Navigators support those with COVID-19

Food, housing and income insecurity remain a concern for millions of Americans, especially those who have been infected with the COVID-19 virus.

The ongoing concerns prompted Illinois Governor J.B. to extend a Pandemic Health Navigator (PHN) program through June of next year. Kara Roat, digital healthcare worker program manager for OSF OnCall explains the effort uses community health workers to connect individuals and families isolating at home with COVID-19 to community resources such as food, income assistance and household items.

Roat says the pandemic has hit people hard and there is so much need for help right now.

“A lot of times these individuals are not allowed to work during that 10 day, two week period (of isolation) which leaves them with financial instability. So, we align them with several community-based organizations that can help meet their needs during that gap time when they were unable to work.” (:14)

Since the start of the program in March, OSF OnCall PHNs have been designated through a state contract to help a nine-county area in northern Illinois, including the cities of Rockford and DeKalb. They've helped nearly 7,000 individuals and families. Roat says food is a top need among those isolating at home with COVID-19.

“There are so many requests for food. We probably deliver food to 10 people every day all across Region 1 which is nine counties. So when you think about our Tri-County area (around Peoria) but have to do nine counties, you're going pretty far to deliver food to somebody. The same with those COVID care kits. We deliver a ton of those each and every day but there's a lot of value in it.” (:22)

COVID-19 Care Kits have been delivered to 3,000 households. They include household supplies and hygiene products.

“They have things like hygiene supplies, different kinds of laundry soap, hand soap, hand sanitizer, anything that somebody may leave their home during that period, we try to provide them to prevent them from going anywhere.” (:10)

Shania Brown is working on her social work degree and she's learning a lot as a pandemic health navigator.

“I was really wanting to get some of that experience in social work – connecting with people on a more personal level and just being able to help them. I've found that it's beyond rewarding.” (:12)

Brown says people she's helping are very grateful.

“They have told us how big of a help providing those organization to them was because they can reach out to those organizations long after their isolation period and they're able to get the help they need.” (:14)

Every household is given a list of community resources for future use, beyond the pandemic.