

What is the community challenge?

Adults with severe mental illness are at risk for a variety of health conditions such as hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Important barriers to treatment for individuals living in rural areas include a lack of transportation and a lack of integrated behavioral health services.

What is the promising solution?

TRIP for Salud y Vida attempts to assist adults with severe mental illness living in the Coastal Bend area, improve their health status by providing transportation, community health workers, and community health classes. These services are directed at improving consumers' disease self-management, health literacy skills (navigation of community and health resources), and quality of life.

What was the purpose of evaluation?

The evaluation of REAL Inc. TRIP for Salud y Vida by the internal evaluator consultant team headed by Dr. Melissa A. Valerio began in 2016 and completed reporting in 2019. This evaluation, through a non-randomized quasi-experimental study, attempted to measure the effects on adults with severe mental illness of adding transportation and integrated behavioral health services to the existing Salud y Vida program offered by the behavioral health partner. The main research question was whether the added intervention reduced hypertension (systolic and diastolic blood pressure). Additional, exploratory questions included whether the added intervention also affected (a) diabetes, (b) BMI, (c) quality of life (e.g., depression, anxiety, pain), (d) health literacy, and (e) appointment keeping. The data were analyzed with mixed effects linear models with covariates to control for selection effects. Treatment group assignment was done at the clinic level, with 302 individuals initially receiving the added treatment and 250 comparison individuals initially receiving just the Salud y Vida program.

What did the evaluation find?

As a subgrantee of SIF, REAL Inc. engaged an independent evaluation team (headed by Dr. Melissa A. Valerio) to evaluate TRIP for Salud y Vida. A longitudinal quasi-experimental design was run to study the impact of adding transportation and integrated services (evidence-based interventions) to the already existing Salud y Vida program. Some of the results included:

- The evaluation indicated the TRIP for Salud y Vida program was implemented with a moderate degree of fidelity, and consumers who participated in focus groups were overwhelmingly satisfied with the TRIP program, citing improvements in accessing resources, health literacy, relationships and ultimately health outcomes, as factors that contributed to their satisfaction.

Program At-a-Glance

CNCS Program: Social Innovation Fund

Intervention: TRIP for Salud y Vida

Subgrantee: REAL Inc.

Grantee: Methodist Healthcare Ministries of South Texas Inc.

Focus Area: Healthy Futures

Focus Population: Adults with severe mental illness residing in rural communities

Community Served: The Coastal Bend area, South Texas rural counties

- The impact evaluation found non-significant changes on patient blood pressure, the study’s primary outcome, when comparing 12-month data for the treatment and comparison groups. Treatment group participants did experience a significant decrease in blood pressure over the course of the study period, while comparison group members did not; however, this may be due to the treatment group’s higher baseline blood pressure (non-clinically significant difference), rather than an effect of the treatment.
- Intervention group participants experienced a significant improvement in quality of life over the study period (based on the Duke Health Profile’s Depression, Anxiety/Depression, and Pain scales) compared to comparison group participants. Again, however, baseline equivalence was not achieved for the Duke Health Profile measures; however baseline differences were not significant across all domains.

Notes on the evaluation

Initially, a more robust design (QED with propensity score matching) was planned for the evaluation. However, this was not conducted, and baseline equivalence was not achieved between treatment and comparison groups on several demographic and outcome variables. Therefore, the results detailed in the evaluation report may be due to pre-existing differences between the groups at baseline, rather than true indicators of program effect. In addition, there was a site-confound between treatment and comparison subjects, with all treatment individuals drawn from three clinics and all comparison individuals drawn from a different two clinics (a clinic variable was included as a control variable in all analysis).

How is REAL Inc. using the evaluation findings to improve?

Future research will explore the effects of the treatment on individuals with diabetes, those with a diagnosis of hypertension, and individuals who are obese. REAL Inc. hopes to continue providing transportation and integrated services to consumers within rural communities, with the goal of improving disease management and building a sense of community and decreasing the social isolation of individuals with severe mental illness, ultimately leading to improved behavioral and health outcomes over time.

Evaluation At-a-Glance

Evaluation Design: Quasi-experimental design (non-experimental) with mixed effects linear models.

Study Population: Adults with severe mental illness

Independent Evaluator: Team headed by Dr. Melissa A. Valerio

This Evaluation’s Level of Evidence*: Preliminary

*SIF and AmeriCorps currently use different definitions of levels of evidence.

The content of this brief was drawn from the full evaluation report submitted to CNCS by the grantee/subgrantee. The section of the brief that discusses evaluation use includes contribution of the grantee/subgrantee. All original content from the report is attributable to its authors.

To access the full evaluation report and learn more about CNCS, please visit <http://www.nationalservice.gov/research>.

The Social Innovation Fund (SIF), a program of the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), combines public and private resources to grow the impact of innovative, community-based solutions that have compelling evidence of improving the lives of people in low-income communities throughout the U.S. The SIF invests in three priority areas: economic opportunity, healthy futures, and youth development.