

CASE STUDY

Transforming Challenges into Opportunities for Innovation and Impact: The Success Story of **CONNECT**

Learn more about why the CONNECT network has been recognized with a 2022 Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties (NACo). The NACo awards honor innovative, effective county government programs that strengthen services for residents.



The Need

A car battery, a few months of rent, or utility bill payment can change the trajectory of someone's life.

CONNECT is a network of navigators at clinics, community service organizations, and governmental programs launched by Santa Fe County in 2017 and in partnership with the City of Santa Fe since 2019.

CONNECT provides residents in need with **timely access** to a range of services including housing, food, transportation, utilities, and other social determinants of health.

To achieve this goal, the two key priorities were identified: facilitating **collaboration** between health and social service providers; and establishing a **technology infrastructure** to monitor emerging needs in real time, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

History

2017

- ▶ CONNECT was established by Santa Fe County.

2018

- ▶ Unite Us was selected as CONNECT's electronic referral management platform, allowing for real-time outcome tracking.

2019

- ▶ Santa Fe County and City of Santa Fe partnership began.

2020

- ▶ Start of the COVID-19 pandemic. CONNECT was used to disperse \$8.4 million in COVID-19 relief funds.



The Solution

CONNECT network participating organizations are securely connected through Unite Us’ shared technology platform enabling navigators to send and receive electronic referrals, address residents’ social needs, and improve individual and community health.

Using an any-door philosophy, organizations screen individuals from multiple entry points in the community—from food pantries to local shelters—facilitating **engagement and access** to services.

Based on the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Accountable Health Community model, navigators use screening tools to identify and address unmet needs. Navigation is defined as an activity that links individuals to needed resources via evidence-based practices facilitated by culturally competent staff. In addition to navigation, CONNECT incorporates flexible funding to respond to a person’s emerging or immediate crisis.

“The CONNECT program was incredibly valuable to us as we entered the pandemic because we already had a strong framework in place to quickly and efficiently connect our constituents with services,” said County Commissioner Anna Hansen (D-2). “Since the pandemic, the CONNECT navigators have helped constituents find food, housing, medical [care], transportation, and other important services that they have desperately needed during such a trying time.”

Key Strengths

- CONNECT is community driven. This approach is essential to leverage resources and expertise on the ground and to ensure interventions are relevant and impactful.
- CONNECT utilizes shared data and alignment of data to inform practice decisions.

Impact

- Over 200 navigators from 60 programs
- 6,816 individuals linked to resources
- 79.6 percent of cases resolved
- Over 50 percent decrease in time to referral acceptance:
 - More than 2,000 people connected to income support programs.
 - 83 percent of income support cases resolved.

(Unite Us Data, April 2019–October 2022)

Lessons Learned

Factors that contributed to the success of this model include:

- Funding community-based organizations and building capacity to securely and effectively connect individuals to necessary wraparound services
- Creating a low-barrier model gives community-based organizations the ability to use funds at their discretion to meet an individual’s unique needs
- Providing a safety-net funding stream to address many of the barriers to self-sustainability for community members



To learn more about CONNECT and the broader Unite New Mexico network, reach out to UniteUs.com/contact.