

Evaluation Brief

EMPATHETIC PATIENT CARE COORDINATION:

A CASE STUDY OF THE CARE NAVIGATOR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

APRIL 2020



BRIEF BACKGROUND

This case study is part of SPR's evaluation of the California Apprenticeship Initiative.

The evaluation includes an additional three case studies, an apprenticeship brief, and a pre-apprenticeship brief, which can be found at :

<https://caihub.foundationccc.org/Research-and-Reports>

Recent data show that approximately 70 percent of registered apprenticeships in California are in the construction trades, even though the construction industry employs just 5 percent of the state's workforce. By contrast, fewer than 1 percent are in manufacturing, transportation, and healthcare occupations combined, even though approximately 18 percent of the state's workers are employed in these industries.¹ In 2015, to help address these types of imbalances and establish apprenticeships in industries where they are uncommon—particularly industries deemed by the state as a priority for economic growth—California's governor and state legislature created the ongoing California Apprenticeship Initiative (CAI) grant program.

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office administers CAI and, between 2016 and 2018, awarded 40 grants (totaling \$27.5 million) to community colleges, school districts, and their partners. One of the grants was awarded to the Worker Education and Resource Center (WERC) and Los Angeles Trade-Technical College (LATTC) to support the creation of the Care Navigator apprenticeship program. This brief describes the program, including how it was developed and structured, what apprentices and employers report about their experiences in the program, and the program's sustainability.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- **Employer Engagement:** WERC identified its primary employer partner by inviting its extensive network of industry contacts to several employer convenings where they engaged them in conversations about the apprenticeship model.
- **Program Structure:** The yearlong Care Navigator apprenticeship program has concurrent classroom training and on-the-job training. Mentors participate in a half-day training to prepare them for the mentoring role.
- **Apprentice Recruitment and Selection:** The program's multistage recruiting process has helped WERC identify apprentices who are a good match for participating clinics.
- **Apprentice Perspectives:** Apprentices appreciate the combination of classroom training, on-the-job training, and mentoring.
- **Employer Perspectives:** Participating clinics appreciate the program because it has helped them serve more patients with knowledgeable staff.
- **Sustainability:** The Care Navigator apprenticeship program has continued beyond the grant period with continued support from the Los Angeles Health Care Plan and other grant funds.

Implementation Findings and Lessons Learned

Feedback from college staff, employers, and apprentices indicates several key findings and lessons that may help others who are developing apprenticeship programs.

Employer Engagement

WERC found employer convenings to be an effective way of engaging local health care employers to hear their perspectives about their skill needs and on apprenticeship more broadly. WERC identified its primary employer partner through one of these convenings. The employer partners chose an apprenticeship model to train workers for the Care Navigator role for three primary reasons:

- **It combines classroom training with on-the-job training (OJT).** The classroom training prepares apprentices with the knowledge they need for the job, and the OJT component allows them to adapt that learning to healthcare employers' organizational cultures and patient populations.
- **It enables employers to have a significant role in designing the program,** from designing the OJT component to providing feedback about the classroom curriculum.
- **It allows employers to concurrently recruit and train workers for this newly emerging role.**

Program Design

The Care Navigator apprenticeship program includes two phases: apprentice recruitment and the yearlong apprenticeship program. The classroom instruction spans the whole program, while the OJT component begins in the third week. Program staff identified several lessons learned during program development:

- **Sharing of training resources across employers is beneficial to employers.** WERC created an apprenticeship program that has allowed five clinics to share a training curriculum. There was a lot of interest in the apprenticeship program from clinics because of their need for Care Navigators to provide support for complex care patients.

- **The program’s multistage recruiting process helps WERC identify apprentices who are a good match with participating clinics.** Each stage narrows the applicant pool down to a more qualified group of candidates. The stages include a written application, a phone interview, an orientation, and a final interview with the clinic. The orientation includes screening tests, group discussions, and an in-person interview.
- **Feedback from employers about the competencies needed by Care Navigators makes the curriculum more responsive to employers’ skills needs.** Additionally, WERC engages clinic mentors on a regular basis to learn about successes and challenges with the training.

Apprentice Perspectives

The majority of Care Navigator apprentices think that the apprenticeship program is very helpful in preparing them to work in community healthcare. Apprentices explained that this combination of classroom training and work experience enhances their skills in several ways:

- **It prepares them to work with patients.** Apprentices value their OJT because it teaches them how to work empathetically with patients, manage their patient load, and become more resourceful when working with patients.
- **It increases their knowledge of the healthcare industry.** Apprentices learn about software systems used in the healthcare field and how the role of the community healthcare worker has changed over time.
- **It improves their communication skills.** Apprentices indicated that participation in the program improves their communication skills by increasing their confidence in their public speaking abilities and giving them experience communicating with physicians.
- **Apprentices learn skills and industry insights from their mentors.** Several apprentices said that their OJT mentors had been very helpful in preparing them to work in this field, providing guidance about work tasks and sharing wisdom from years of experience. They described the mentoring aspect as innovative because it makes the transition from training to work seamless.

“[The] classroom setting definitely helped [me] prepare for the job. Alongside that, having first-hand experience on the site plays a crucial role to put into practice all of which we have learned.”

—Program apprentice

Employer Perspectives

The five clinics have continued to participate in the apprenticeship program for a second year because it helps them serve more patients. They noted several benefits and successes:

- **The combination of OJT and classroom instruction is valuable.** Employers appreciate that apprentices are prepared to apply what they have learned in class to a work setting.
- **The program gives clinics a way to recruit new Care Navigators.** Additionally, these apprentices are better prepared than interns they have had.
- **The program has built sustainability into the recruitment process.** Apprentices have been promoted to more senior positions since completing their apprenticeships.

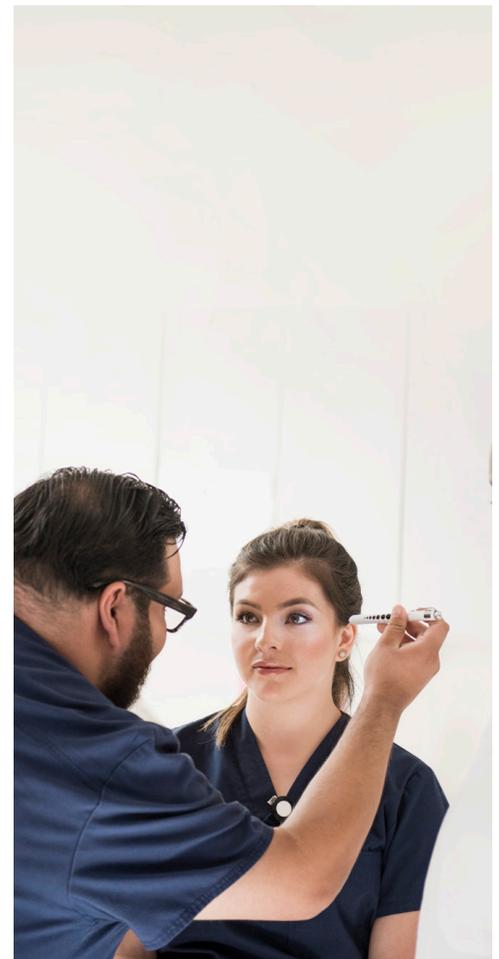
“The apprentices were very well prepared, and more so than interns we’ve had, because the apprentices knew so much from the classroom training, such as medical terminology and the importance of continued care. Part of someone’s success is what you invest in them to begin with.”

—Apprenticeship coordinator

Program Sustainability

The Care Navigator apprenticeship has continued beyond the completion of the CAI grant with continued support from LA HCP and the California Endowment. WERC has also expanded to other apprenticeship areas. A new Emergency Medical Technician apprenticeship program is registered with the U.S. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship and had enrolled 25 apprentices as of May 2018.

1. Apprentice statistics come from California Department of Industrial Relations (2016), State of California Department of Industrial Relations Division of Apprenticeship Standards: 2016 Legislative Report (<https://www.dir.ca.gov/DAS/reports/2016LegReport.pdf>) and from internal DAS statistics. Construction, manufacturing, transportation, and utilities statistics come from California's Employment Development Department ([https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/file/indhist/cal\\$shws.xls](https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/file/indhist/cal$shws.xls)), as does the health care statistic (https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/SpecialReports/Health_Care_in_CA.pdf).



About This Series

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Other briefs in this series can be found [HERE](#) and include:

- CAI Apprenticeship Evaluation Brief
- CAI Pre-App-Evaluation Brief
- Columbia College Case Study
- Mission College Case Study
- SCCCD Pre-Apprenticeship Case Study
- WERC Case Study Brief

