



Impacting and Improving Health Equity of Health Plan Members through Education Benefits

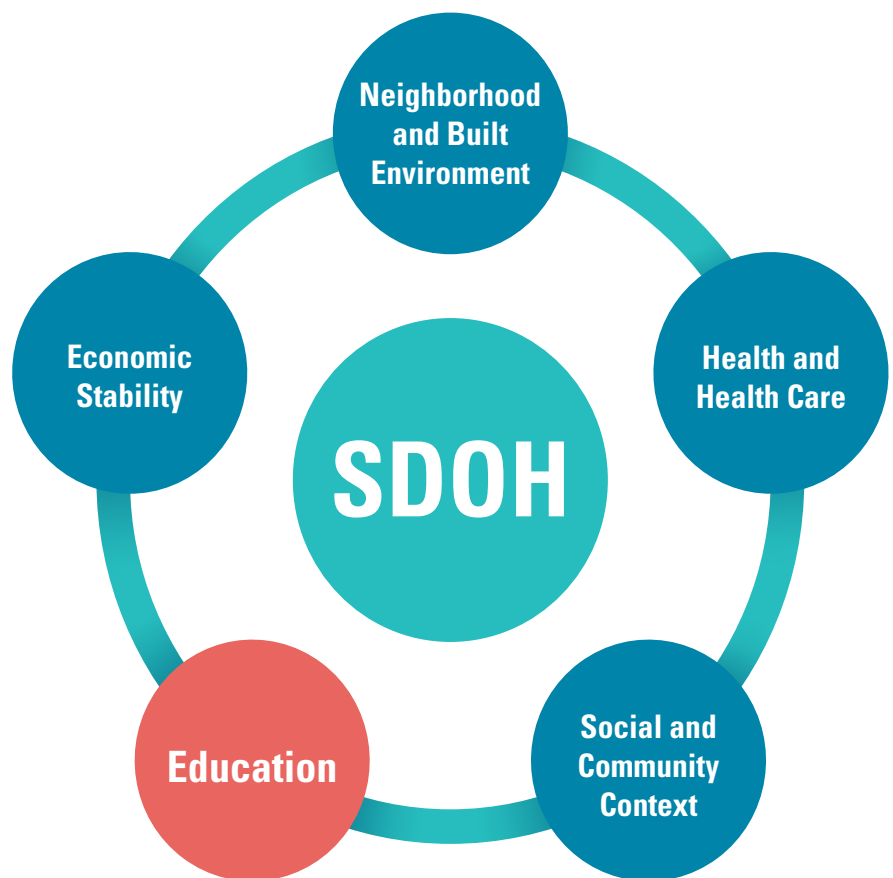
Background Situation

UCare, an independent, nonprofit health plan providing health care coverage and services to more than 260,000 Medicaid members in Minnesota, is interested in innovative solutions to address social determinants of health impacting members and the community. They are recognized nationally as a leader in piloting and implementing breakthrough methods to impact quality, cost and satisfaction with health care delivery.

As such, they recognized education as one key social determinant of health that, when increased, has a direct impact on the job market, economy, health care, and positive mental well-being. They searched for a partner to implement an educational benefit pilot program for their members. The result: a partnership with GEDWorks™.

Objective


GEDWorks successfully offers all-inclusive GED programs to employers and health plans. These programs help employees and health



plan members earn a high school equivalency credential at no cost to participants. GED Testing Service created a custom version of this education benefit for some of UCare's Minnesota Health Care Program members.

UCare initially offered the GEDWorks program as a pilot to just 10 counties (out of 87) across

Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-of-health>



Minnesota. Within six months, the program expanded to 18 counties.

Action

GEDWorks staff developed a customized UCare portal with access to GED Manager. This portal helps UCare program managers easily review and approve their member applicants for the GED program. The GEDWorks account management team held a kick-off meeting in May of 2019 to introduce UCare management to the program and the portal. Features of every GEDWorks program include:

- Customizable marketing materials to introduce the program to members
- Assessments
- Study materials based on the assessment results
- Practice tests
- Unlimited test pass guarantee
- Advisors who work with each student weekly by coaching, offering study tips, and study material guidance every step of the way
- Monthly check-in calls with UCare and GEDWorks account management to assess progress and share updates

GEDWorks is the official GED program offering health plan members and employees of

participating organizations the opportunity to earn their high school credential at no cost to the participant. This turn-key, online program includes trained, bilingual (English and Spanish) advisors. The advisor plays a critical role in the success of the student—coaching each participant through the journey while also providing support and accountability along the way. When students enroll in the program, they choose their preferred method of communication with the advisor including weekly text messages, emails, or phone calls. Each advisor connects with the student to encourage progress and studying, while continuing engagement to the end of the testing journey.

Key Highlights

The personal and professional goals of participating students provide some of the most compelling stories related to the impact of this program. These student goals include wanting to create a better life for themselves and their families, securing a better paying job, going to college and setting an example for their children. UCare members cited this benefit, offered by their health plan provider, as a pathway to improve their lives. Members also stated multiple reasons for not completing high school, such as mental health concerns, family financial obligations, bullying, medical

“Education can create a path to better health and improve access to care,” says Jennifer Garber, Associate Vice President of Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services at UCare. “Knowing this, we are excited to partner with GEDWorks to support our members’ successful completion of their GEDs. Our UCare GED grads now have the achievements, tools and confidence to go to college, elevate their careers and achieve their best health and quality of life.”

“I was impressed with how simple the [GEDWorks] program was. I also loved that there was an advisor to answer questions; that was really helpful and made everything a lot easier.”

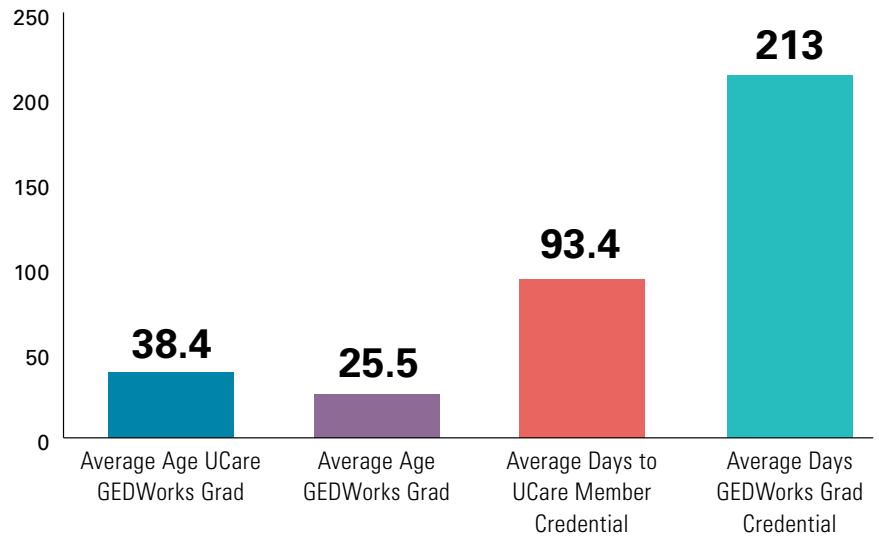
— Lydia, GEDWorks graduate and UCare member



conditions, and taking care of other family members. Many of these challenges impact the individuals' social determinants of health, and the education benefits offered through this program provide a pathway to earn a high school credential at any stage of life. Access to a high school equivalency credential offers members the opportunity to improve their lives in multiple ways and positively impacts their confidence and self-esteem.

Health plan members are, on average, older and completing their GED at a faster pace than other GEDWorks students. UCare member Irene, 45-year-old mother of four and native of Mexico, immigrated to Texas at age 12 and dropped out of school after eighth grade. Irene has been working for her current employer for nearly 20 years after joining a relative in Minnesota. A GED practice test meant to help her focus her studies showed Irene her life experiences had taught her all she needed to pass the GED tests. She passed the first two tests in mid-February and the last two tests nine days later. Irene said earning her GED has removed the main barrier for employment opportunities. She is happy at her current job and is now considering applying for new positions within the company for which she was not previously eligible.

Age and Credential Data Comparison UCare & GEDWorks



Results

- Six months into the pilot, UCare expanded the program from 10 counties to 18
- Nine months into the pilot, the "seats" for students increased by 50%
- 11 months into the program, 145 UCare members were enrolled and ten members have graduated

"Education being covered by my health plan, that was a life changer! I wanted to get my GED for a long time; I finally did it without any financial barriers."



— Christopher, GEDWorks graduate and UCare member

Overall, the GEDWorks pilot has proved to be a valuable benefit for UCare members. As UCare continues to expand the program, it looks forward to celebrating more graduates and expanding their opportunities through education.