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**Weighing In: Tipping the Scales of the Stigma of Obesity Through Physician and Patient Partnerships in Education and Innovation**

**The request:** Valley’s Earl A. Wheaton, Jr. M.D. Family Care Center respectfully requests funding for the establishment of a pilot program designed to enhance the management of obesity in our underserved and underrepresented populations by providing consistent, evidence-based, stigma-free obesity care to individuals who currently have little to no resources to achieve health success. Through this initiative, residents will complete educational modules, create and utilize standardized Electronic Medical Record (EMR) templates for their colleagues, and enroll their own private patients with obesity specific education, mental health screening, nutritional counseling, and personalized support tools. The goal of the program is to foster patient education, health equality, and stigma and bias dissipation with the goal of preventing chronic illnesses – particularly diabetes and cardiovascular disease – and helping to create healthy lifestyles.

“Weighing In” will serve as a beacon for how primary care can effectively tackle one of the most pressing chronic health issues of our time, for some of the most vulnerable patients in our population.

**Funding would be used to support:**

- Direct patient care enhancements, including Weight Watchers subscriptions for enrolled patients, Fitbit trackers, resistance bands, body composition scales, food logs, blood pressure cuffs, and incentive items such as healthy grocery gift cards.
- Programming including guest speakers, chefs, dietician support via telehealth sessions, motivational coaches, and bilingual facilitators for monthly in-person and virtual support sessions.
- Educational and promotional materials and IT integration within the program’s EMR.

**Background:** Obesity remains one of the most pressing health challenges in Bergen County, with 22% of adults aged 18 and above affected, according to the New Jersey State Health Assessment. Valley’s Family Care Center serves uninsured, Medicaid-insured, and low-income populations, and for this group, obesity and its comorbidities – including diabetes, hypertension, obstructive sleep apnea, and depression – are rampant and often go inadequately addressed. Stigma, limited access to resources, and fragmented care contribute to suboptimal outcomes for patients, and this initiative addresses the disparities head-on by embedding structured, culturally sensitive obesity care into an existing clinical and educational infrastructure.

“Weighing In” is not just a short-term pilot—it is a scalable, sustainable, and replicable model for integrating comprehensive obesity care into the primary care education of our internal medicine residents and the community patients for whom they care. This will create valuable tools for our residents to incorporate into whatever fields they will enter to practice in the future. Valley’s Family Care Center is at the forefront of creating a model that is sustainable and will help prevent the progression of diabetes and cardiovascular illness, improve behavioral health concerns, and ultimately help eliminate unnecessary hospitalizations.