

Health Information Compliance Alert

Harvard Health Calculator Goes for a Test Drive

Determine ROI for preventative health services.

The team used the tool to measure the effectiveness of a mobile health program called the Family Van. The Family Van brings screening, testing, and education in areas such as nutrition, weight management, diabetes, heart disease, pregnancy, and STDs, to Boston's disadvantaged areas. The researchers found that for the 2008 services, the Family Van, in the long run, will return \$36 for every dollar invested.

"People talk about the value of preventive measures all the time, but no one has ever really captured the important contribution of the many non-traditional, prevention-based programs like the Family Van," says study first-author **Nancy Oriol**, HMS dean of students and an obstetric anesthesiologist at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center. Findings were published June 2 in BMC Medicine.

Based on Public Data

Using data from the National Commission on Prevention Priorities, which assigns values to a broad array of preventive practices, as well as data on the cost-savings of preventing avoidable emergency room visits, the team developed an algorithm that "calculates" a return on investment ratio.

"These data provide evidence for what we have long suspected; that is, preventive health services are perhaps the most cost-effective way to address both our ailing healthcare system and the needs of disadvantaged communities," said Paul Cote, former Massachusetts Commissioner of Public Health.

The researchers intend to make a web-based version of the calculator publicly available in less than a year. Oriol's team plans to measure the return on investment of the more than 2,000 mobile health programs across the nation.

Check out the Family Van at www.news.harvard.edu/multimedia/flash/vid_familyvan.swf.