

## **Portland Time Banks • True North Collaboration**

Since 2002, Portland Time Bank (PTB)<sup>1</sup> and True North, two nonprofit organizations, have offered an innovative approach to health care for uninsured or underinsured PTB members. Our collaboration allows income-eligible PTB members (225% of the Federal Poverty Level) to pay for health care at True North with units of service (valued equally regardless of skill level) that are "banked" by members and then exchanged as credits and debits. This pioneering relationship between PTB and True North has paved the way for other health care providers to pilot similar programs.

Each of True North's 17 practitioners and True North itself are members of the Portland Time Bank. PTB members who are income-eligible are made aware of the availability of health services at True North and PTB makes appropriate referrals to practitioners (or vice versa). True North practitioners accept time dollars as payment for health care and provide medical treatment to the patient-members. True North's 17 practitioners provide a wide range of services from family practice and women's health care to psychiatric and pediatric care to complementary services such as massage and acupuncture. If a PTB member is not income-eligible, True North offers a 10% discount on services rendered as a means of supporting time banking.

As PTB members, True North practitioners and True North use their time dollars to pay for personal services (in the case of the individual practitioner members) and organizational needs like filing, painting, small repairs (in the case of True North). In order to begin assessing whether or not providing care in this manner actually helps people to get and stay healthy, we did a pilot study of Time Dollar patients over a two year period. We found the following results:

### *Total*

75% of Time Dollar patients improved their health status by 41.4% as measured by the Medical Symptoms Questionnaire (MSQ). 22.2% of Time Dollar patients worsened by 19.2% and 2.8% of Time Dollar patients had no change over this time period.

### *By Visits*

75% of Time Dollar patients in this study improved their health status regardless of their number of visits; of those that improved, those Time Dollar patients who had >3 visits improved their health status by 49.8% compared to 32.4% for <3 visits. For those who worsened with >3 visits they worsened by 14.8% compared to 23.6% for <3 visits.

### *By Number of Practitioners Seen*

77% - 81% of Time Dollar patients in this study improved their health status regardless of number of practitioner seen. However, the improvement for patients who had seen 2 practitioners was on average 43.9% compared with 39.9% for patients who had seen 1 practitioner. For those patients who had worsened, on average those who had seen 1 practitioner worsened by 28.4% compared with those patients who had seen 2 practitioners worsened by only 3.2%.

### *By Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) / Functional Medicine*

100% of Time Dollar patients in this study who saw only CAM practitioners (acupuncture, energy healer, fitness trainer) improved their health status by 31.8%. 70.4% of Time Dollar patients who saw only functional medicine practitioners improved their health status by 45.7%; while 25.9% of Time Dollar patients who saw only functional medicine practitioners worsened by 18.0%.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2008, the Portland Time Bank became the Hour Exchange. Time dollars are now called time credits. The basic program remains the same.