

Goal of grant: access to care

By [Keith Darcé](#), UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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CONFERENCE

What: Innovation in Healthcare San Diego, a gathering of leaders from the technology, medical and social-services sectors to discuss better ways to deliver health care to San Diego's underserved communities

When: 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. today

Where: 5060 Shoreham Place, Suite 350, San Diego

Who: Open to the public

Cost: \$25 for people affiliated with nonprofits; \$50 for all others

Online: alliancehf.org

The Alliance Healthcare Foundation has \$1 million to give away to a group.

To get the funds, the winning organization must come up with a more effective way to deliver health services to people in San Diego County who lack adequate access to medical care.

The grant is part of a program being launched today by the San Diego-based nonprofit foundation during its first Innovation in Healthcare San Diego Conference. The gathering, in the University City area, is open to the public, but there is a registration fee.

Alliance Healthcare is looking for a group that perhaps will use computer and wireless systems, collaborate with an unlikely partner or take other out-of-the-box approaches to improve a community struggling with health problems because of poverty or a lack of medical facilities.

“It could be anything from a technological approach to providing people with better self-management tools for a chronic condition,” said Karma Bass, the foundation's president and chief executive.

The winning idea must be usable in other places and expandable to help larger numbers of people.

There is much debate over whether the federal government's recently passed health-reform legislation will boost or stifle innovation. But everyone seems to agree that technology, new

treatments and changes in the way people receive health care are essential to slowing the nation's skyrocketing medical costs and boosting the outcomes for patients.

John Ohanian, CEO of 211 San Diego, hopes to team his free telephone information service with an organization that can capitalize on the service's access to thousands of people in need of help.

"We're a gateway," he said.

Each year, 211 San Diego handles 200,000 calls seeking information on a wide range of questions, Ohanian said. "About 48 percent of our calls have a financial need, and most of those are from people who have no insurance or they are on Medi-Cal," he said.

The uninsured are directed to community clinics in their neighborhoods. People experiencing trouble with their health coverage are referred to state insurance regulators.

Ohanian will be among the expected crowd of 150 at the conference today, Bass said. Participants will come from the health industry, social services, nonprofit groups, biotech companies and wireless communications firms.

"We want to create a forum where they can have a conversation that is a little more free of the typical boundaries," Bass said.

Ohanian said the conference will help aspiring grant competitors jump-start the process.

"I'm planning to use Monday as a brainstorming session to try to flesh out what kind of idea might make the most sense," he said.

Competitors must submit letters of intent to the foundation by June 28, and a winner will be announced before the end of the year.

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