

## Abstract

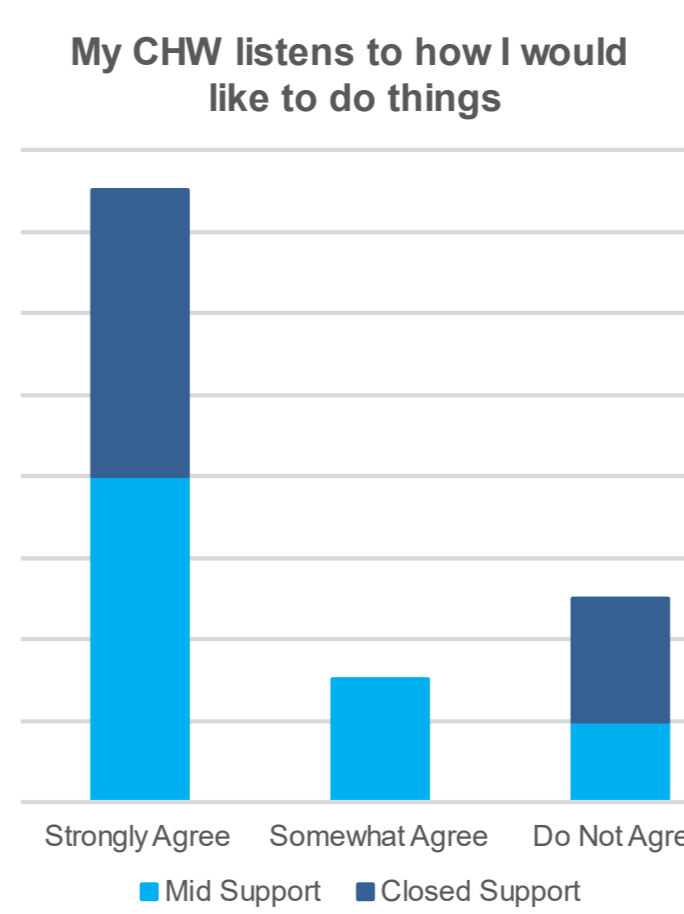
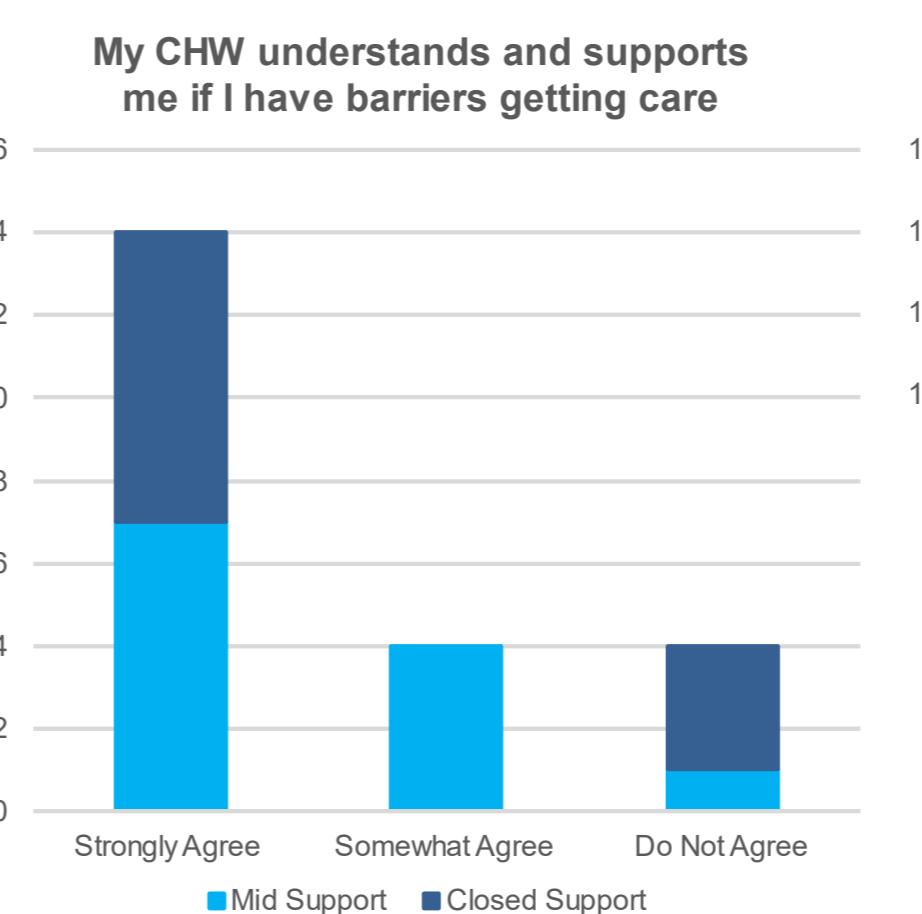
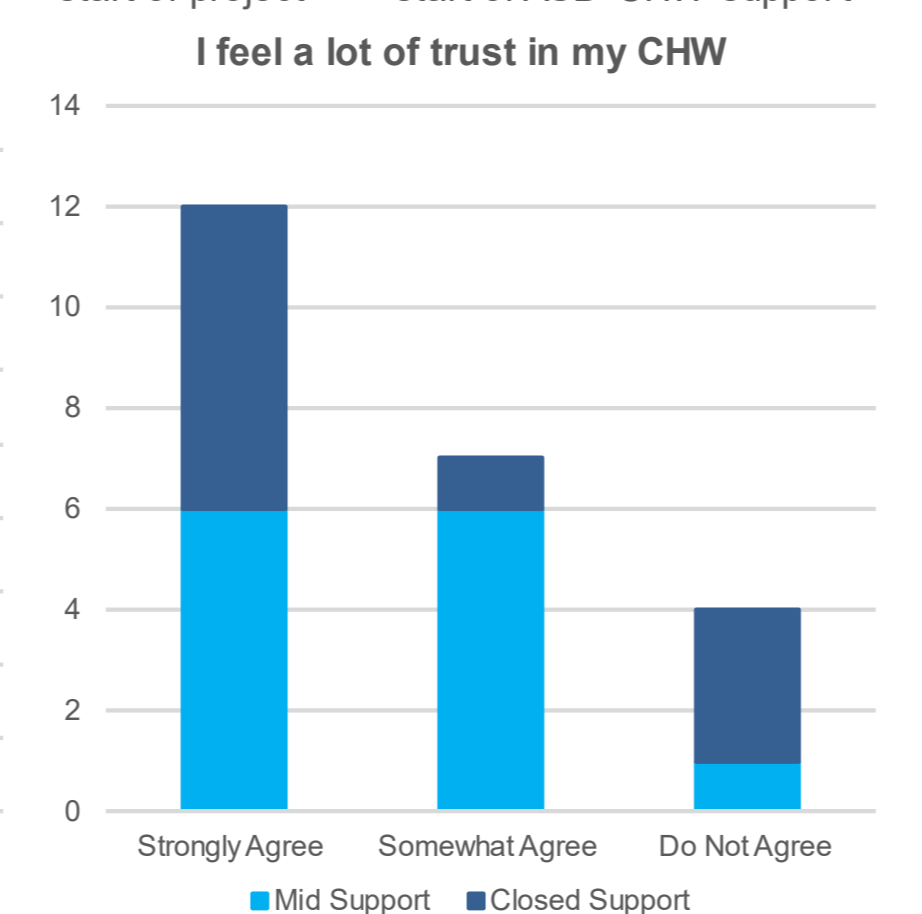
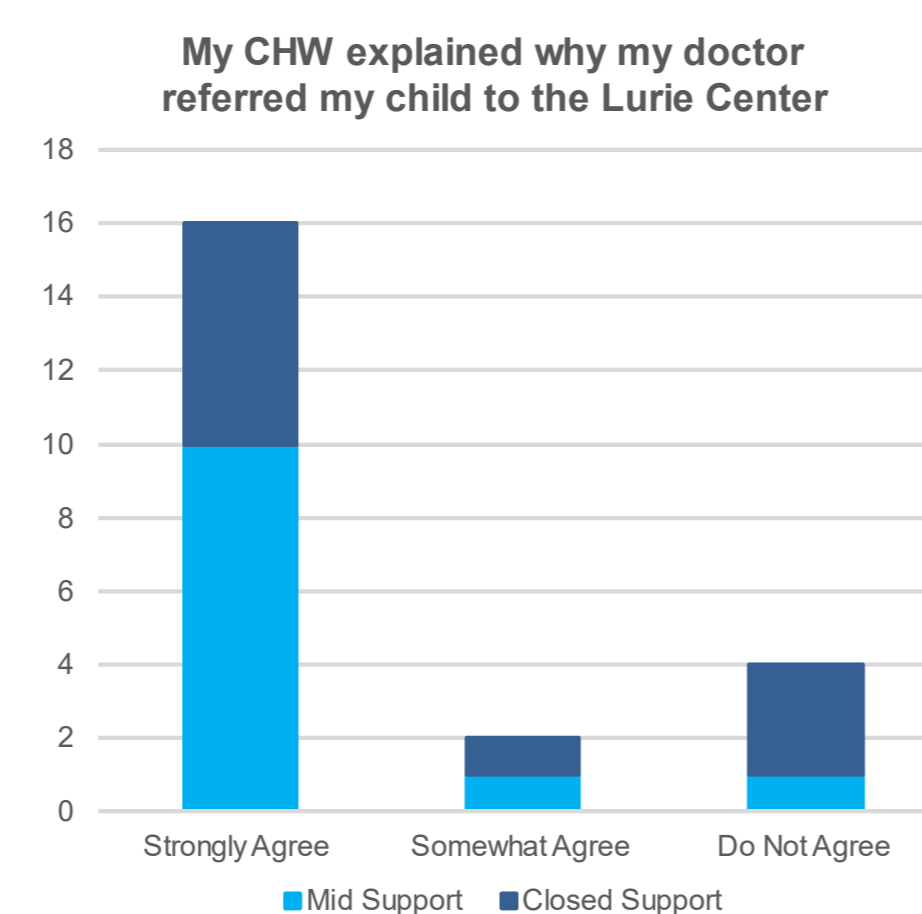
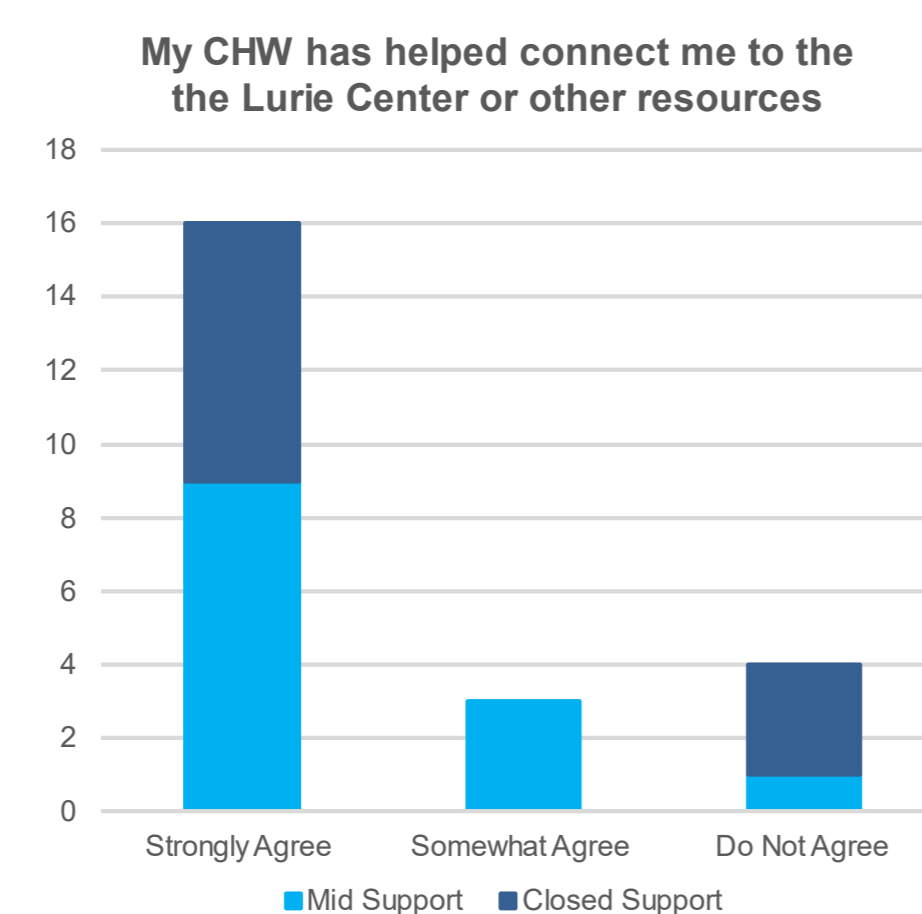
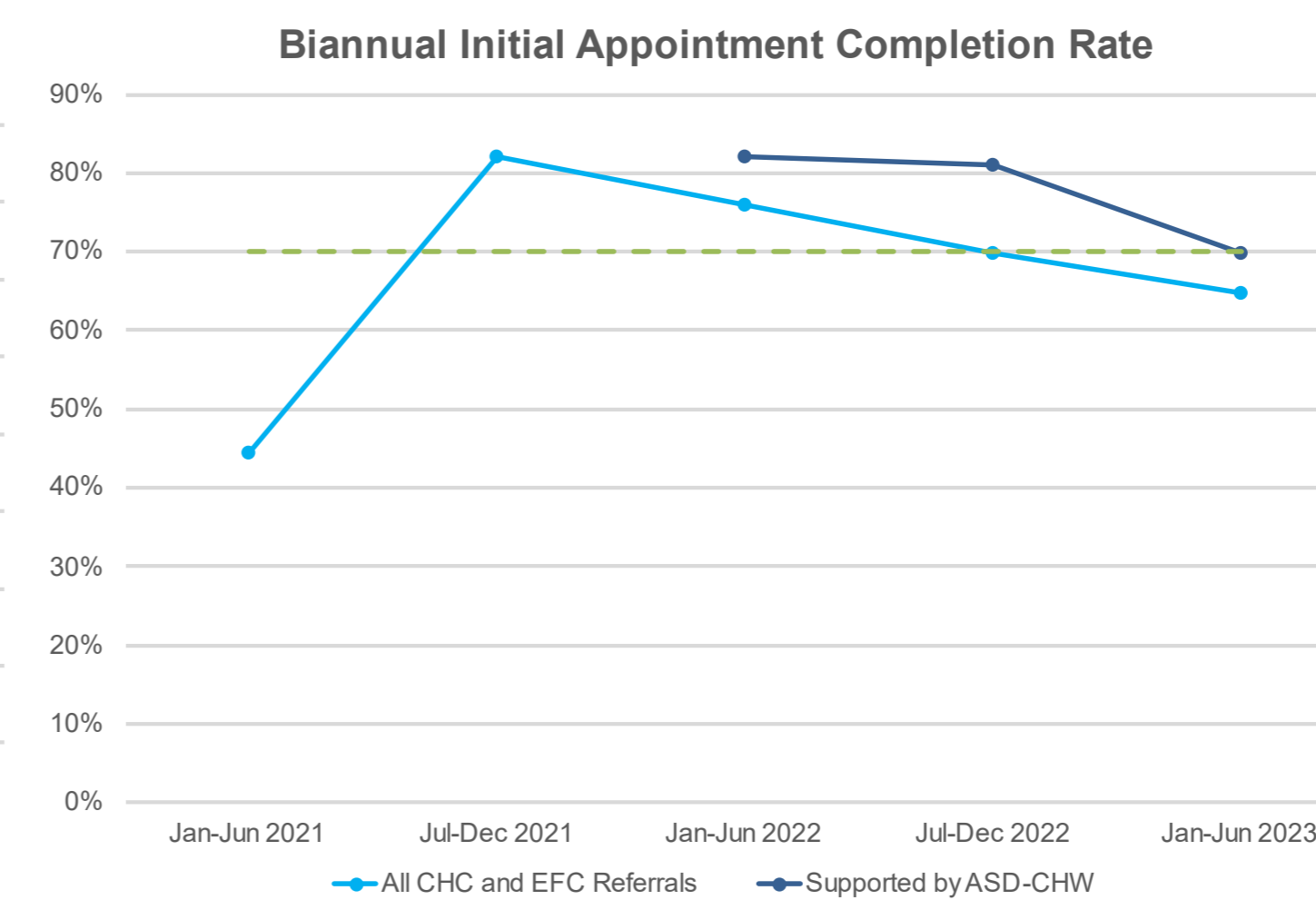
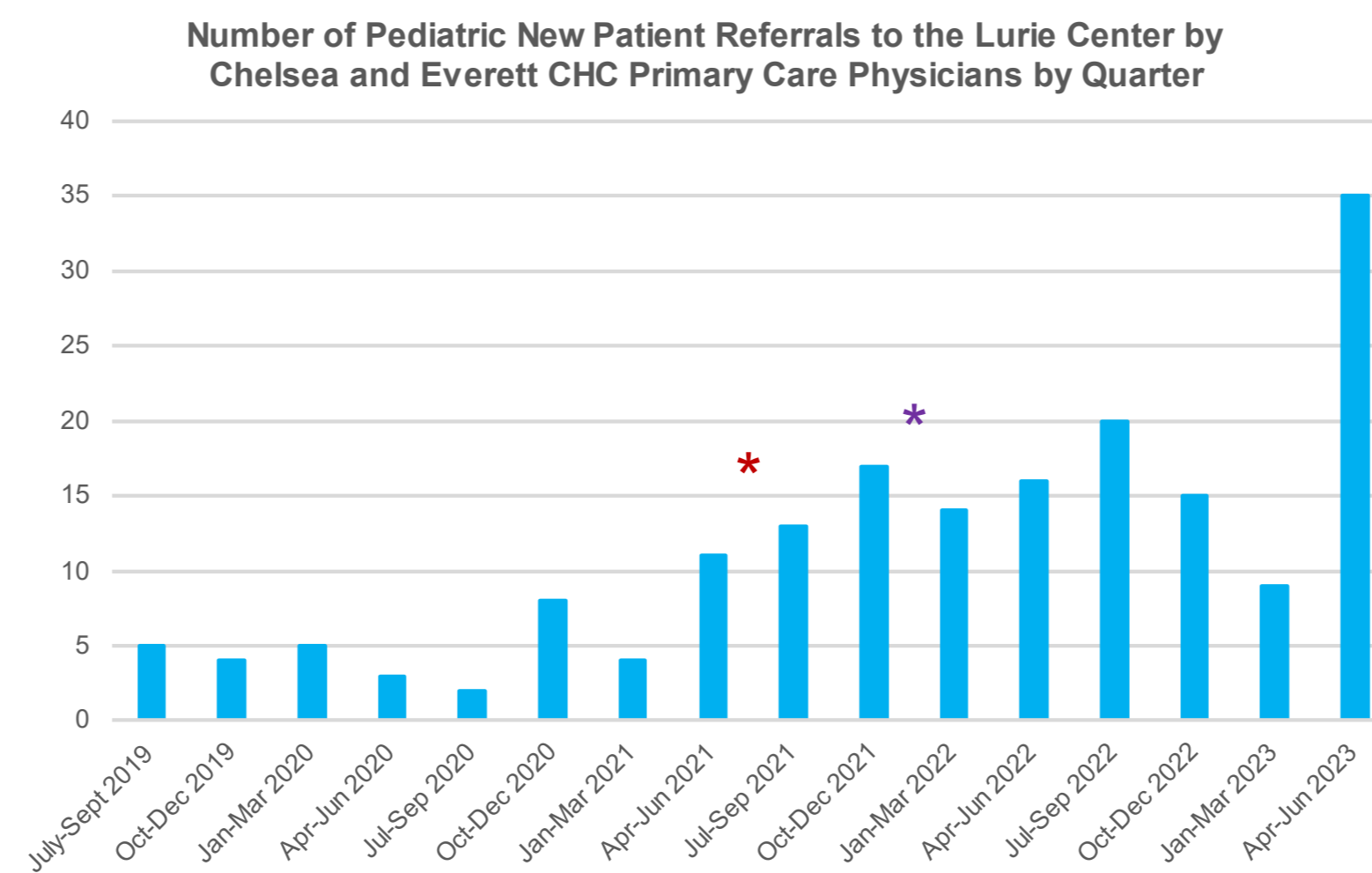
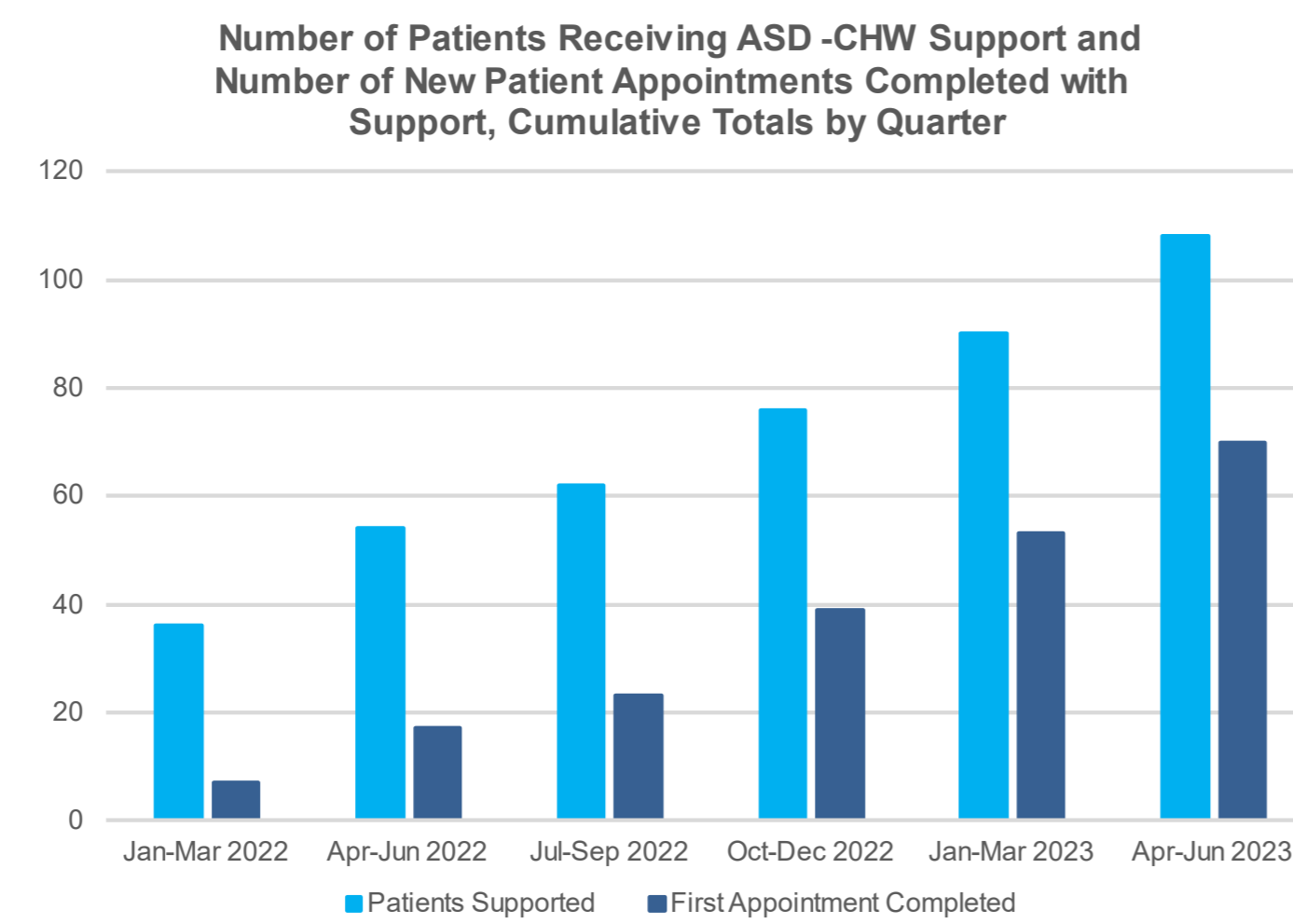
Accessing specialty care at the MGfC Lurie Center for Autism was challenging for pediatric patients of the MGH Community Health Centers (CHCs). Our project demonstrates the potential of involving a community health worker specializing in autism (ASD-CHW) improving access to specialty care.

## Background

- Access to ASD-related services (e.g. ABA) requires an ASD diagnosis, but there are not enough providers with expertise in ASD to meet demands for diagnosis and specialty care.
- Caregivers must navigate confusing health and educational systems to access services (e.g. qualifying for ABA and finding a provider, requesting an evaluation from the school).
- Black & Hispanic children experience delays in diagnosis and access to treatment.
- These barriers and inequities were reflected in a low appointment completion rate (<50%) for pediatric referrals to the world renowned MGH Lurie Center for Autism from the Chelsea HealthCare Center and Everett Family Care.
- Our team initiated a quality improvement project sponsored by MGH United Against Racism to improve access to care at the Lurie Center.

## Materials and Methods

- An ASD-CHW position was created to facilitate obtaining and completing Lurie Center appointments for pediatric CHC primary care patients.
- The intake process was streamlined, allowing direct referral by primary care physicians (PCPs) with the support of the ASD-CHW.
- CHC PCPs can refer pediatric patients for ASD-CHW support at the time of Lurie Center referral.
- The ASD-CHW communicates with the family about the referral and supports the family throughout the appointment process.
- The ASD-CHW facilitates connection to other supports and services as needed.
- Outcomes, including patients supported and appointments completed, are tracked quarterly.
- Satisfaction surveys have been administered quarterly for one year.



## Results

- As of June 2023, the ASD-CHW had provided support to more than 100 patients, of whom 70 had completed initial Lurie Center appointments (first row, first plot).
- Pediatric PCP referrals to the Lurie Center have increased since the start of the project (first row, second plot).
- The initial appointment completion rate for patients referred for ASD-CHW support has met or exceeded the 70% goal and has exceed the appointment completion rate for the Chelsea and Everett CHCs overall (first row, third plot).
- Thirty-one families have completed mid-support or end of support satisfaction surveys, with a 74% completion rate.
- Most families reported a high level of satisfaction with ASD-CHW support (second row).

## Conclusions and Future Directions

- ASD-CHW support appears to have improved access to autism specialty care at the Lurie Center for pediatric CHC patients.
- Satisfaction with ASD-CHW support is generally high among families surveyed.
- Increasing rates of ASD diagnosis and increasing demand for specialty care are resulting in increased difficulty obtaining appointments and long wait times.
- Increasing demand for specialty care is reflected in a recent jump in referral rates from the CHCs.
- ASD-CHW support is a critical resource for helping CHC patients navigate these challenges.
- Future directions include investigating the impact of ASD-CHW support on longer term outcomes.
- Our multidisciplinary team is collaborating on a number of initiatives to improve access to autism specialty care.

*This project was sponsored by a Mass General Brigham United Against Racism initiative.*