BACKGROUND:
The New Orleans Children’s Health Project (NOCHP) is a mobile clinics program developed as a partnership between the Children’s Health Fund and Tulane School of Medicine. It operates out of two state-of-the-art mobile medical units, according to the enhanced medical home model. One unit offers pediatric primary care and the second unit assists children with mental health services. This integration of pediatric and mental health services allows NOCHP to provide comprehensive preventative and treatment services and facilitates the detection and treatment of mental health disorders, particularly depression. Depression is a severe condition that has been increasingly recognized among adolescents. Previous studies show prevalence of depression among adolescents as high as 20%. Early detection and treatment of major depression at the pediatric level is essential in potentially reduce the occurrence of the chronic illness in adulthood. We discuss how our clinic was successful in implementing an effective depression screening process and we report our results.

METHOD
NOCHP implemented a depression screening protocol in teenagers ages 11-18 years. The protocol was designed to systematically and consistently screen all patients 11-18 years old for symptoms of depression using the Patient Health Questionnaire-2 (PHQ-2), a two question initial screening for possible depression. For patients with a positive PHQ-2 screening, a Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) was also administered. All patients who screened positive on the PHQ-9 questionnaire were referred to the mental health unit for depression evaluation and treatment.

RESULTS
Over a period of 12 months, 107 patients ages 11-18 years were screened for depression. A total of 30 patients (28%) screened positive on the PHQ-9, indicating they were experiencing symptoms consistent with a diagnosis of depression at the time of screening. More than half of the patients were either African-Americans or Hispanics.

CONCLUSION:
Our patients may be experiencing symptoms of depression at a higher rate than the general population. The close collaboration between the mental health and medical team on two mobile units allowed us to implement this depression screening initiative in four underserved communities in the Greater New Orleans area.