

Hospital/Health Department Collaboratives Results of a Study and Implications

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Purpose Of Our Recently Completed Study Of Hospital-Public Health Partnerships

Purpose:

The overall purpose of the study was to identify and examine successful partnerships involving hospitals, public health departments, and other stakeholders who share commitment to improving the health of communities they jointly serve and ascertain key lessons learned from their collective experience.

The study is intended to accelerate change, encourage collaboration, and contribute toward improving a “culture of health” in American communities.

Phases of the Study

1. Identify the core characteristics of successful partnerships
2. Invite partnerships in operation for two years or more and demonstrate “core characteristics of successful partnerships” to participate in the study
3. Select highly successful partnerships from the pool of 157 nominees in 44 states through a four-step process involving members of our National Advisory Committee
4. Plan and conduct site visits to a selected set of twelve partnerships that appear to be exceptionally successful

5. Review, verify, and tabulate data obtained through the nomination process, official documents, individual interviews with partnership leaders, and small-group discussions during site visits.

6. Through qualitative analysis, determine findings, discern patterns and conclusions, and formulate recommendations for local leaders and public policy makers.

Study Population: 12 Partnerships Located in 11 States

- National Community Health Initiative
Kaiser Foundation Hospitals and Health Plan
Oakland, California
- California Healthier Living Coalition
Sacramento, California
- St. Johns County Health Leadership Council
St. Augustine, Florida
- Quad City Health Initiative
Quad Cities, Iowa-Illinois
- Fit NOLA Partnership
New Orleans, Louisiana
- HOMEtowns Partnership
Portland, Maine
- Healthy Montgomery
Rockville, Maryland
- Detroit Regional Infant Mortality Reduction
Task Force, Detroit, Michigan
- Hearts Beat Back: The Heart of New Ulm Project
New Ulm, Minnesota
- Healthy Monadnock 2020
Keene, New Hampshire
- Healthy Cabarrus
Kannapolis, North Carolina
- Transforming Health in King County, Washington
Seattle, Washington

Core Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

- **Vision, Mission, and Values** – The partnership’s vision, mission, and values are clearly stated, reflect a strong focus on improving community health, and are firmly supported by the partners
- **Culture** – The partners demonstrate a culture of collaboration with other parties, understand the challenges in forming and operating partnerships, and enjoy mutual respect and trust
- **Goals and objectives** – The goals and objectives of the partnership are clearly stated, widely communicated, and strongly supported by the partners and the partnership staff
- **Organizational structure** – A durable structure is in place to carry out the mission and goals of the collaborative arrangement. This can take the form of a corporate entity, an affiliation agreement, or other less formal arrangements such as community coalitions.

- **Leadership** – The partners jointly have designated well-qualified and dedicated persons to manage the partnership and its programs
- **Partnership Operations** - The partnership institutes or facilitates programs and services that operate effectively
- **Program Success and Sustainability** – The collaborative partnership has been operational for at least two (2) years, has demonstrated operational success, and is having positive impact on the health of the population served
- **Performance Evaluation and Improvement** – The partnership monitors and measures its performance periodically against agreed upon goals, objectives, and metrics

Recommendations

We believe the findings demonstrate that formal partnerships involving hospitals and/or health systems, public health departments, and other stakeholders who share commitment to improving community health have an important social role and can serve as effective vehicles for collective action. However, this is difficult work, and there are substantial challenges involved in organizing and operating partnerships. To advance the development of effective and durable partnerships, the team formulated eleven recommendations for community leaders and policy makers:

1. To have enduring impact, partnerships focused on improving community health should include hospitals and public health departments as core partners but, over time, **engage a broad range of parties** from the private and public sectors.
2. Whenever possible, partnerships should be built on a foundation of pre-existing, trust-based relationships among some, if not all, of the principal founding partners. Other partners can and should be added as the organization becomes operational, but **building and maintaining trust** among all members is essential.
3. In the context of their particular community's health needs, the capabilities of existing organizations, and resource constraints, those who decide to establish a new partnership devoted to improving community health should adopt a **statement of mission and goals** that focuses on clearly-defined, high priority needs and will inspire community-wide interest, engagement, and support.
4. For long-term success, partnerships need to have one or more **“anchor institutions”** with deep dedication to the partnership's mission and commitment to provide on-going financial support.
5. Partnerships focused on improving community health should have a **designated body with a clearly-defined charter** that is empowered by the principal partners to set policy and provide strategic leadership for the partnership.

6. Partnership leaders should strive to build a **clear, mutual understanding of “population health”** concepts, definitions, and principles among the partners, participants, and, in so far as possible, the community at large.
7. To enable evidence-based evaluation of a partnership’s progress in achieving its mission and goals and fulfill its accountability to key stakeholders, the partnership’s leadership must specify the **community health measures** they want to address, the particular **targets** they intent to achieve, and the **metrics** they will use to track and monitor progress. (<https://www.nap.edu/catalog/19402/vital-signs-core-metrics-for-health-and-health-care-progress>)
8. All partnerships focused on improving community health should place priority on developing and disseminating **“impact statements”** that present an evidence-based picture of the effects the partnership’s efforts are having in relation to the direct and indirect costs the partnership is incurring.
9. To enhance sustainability, all partnerships focused on community health improvement should develop a deliberate strategy for **broadening and diversifying their sources of funding support.**

10. If they have not already done so, the governing boards of nonprofit hospitals and health systems and the boards of local health departments should establish **standing committees with oversight responsibility** for their organization's engagement in examining community health needs, establishing priorities, and developing strategies for addressing them including multi-sector collaboration focused on community health improvement.
11. If they have not already done so, local, state, and federal agencies with responsibilities related to population health improvement and hospital and public health associations should adopt **policy positions that promote the development of collaborative partnerships** involving hospitals, public health departments, and other stakeholders focused on assessing and improving the health of communities they serve.

Other Current Initiatives

- SCALE Initiative. Cambridge (MA): started in May 2015
<http://www.ihl.org/engage/initiatives/100millionhealthierlives/pages/scalinitiative.aspx>
- The BUILD Health Challenge www.buildhealthchallenge.org
- AHEAD: Alignment for Health Equity and Development.
<http://www.aligntheequitydevelop.org>
- Moving Health Care Upstream. Nemours and the UCLA Center for Healthier Children, Families & Communities; 2015.
<http://movinghealthcareupstream.org/>
- Build Healthy Places Network. Sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; 2015. <http://www.buildhealthyplaces.org/>
- Invest Health: Strategies for Healthier Cities. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Reinvestment Fund; 2015.
<http://www.investhealth.org/>

Closing Remarks and Discussion

We believe a paradigm shift is occurring in America: there is growing realization that controlling the increase in health expenditures and improving the health of our nation's population will require major changes in traditional policies, practices, and organizational models. We view these partnerships as pioneers and, we hope, as harbingers of a new era of innovation and multi-sector collaboration focused on building a robust culture of health in communities throughout America.

The PDF version of our full study report is available at:
<http://www.uky.edu/publichealth/hospital/collaboration>