

Promoting Better Health Beyond Health Care: Considerations for States

Authored by the Center for Health Care Strategies with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

IN BRIEF

- The Center for Health Care Strategies, with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, conducted a national analysis of state-level strategies to promote health beyond the traditional health care levers.
- This national exploration identified: (1) state-level programs or policies outside the health care sector that drive meaningful improvements in population health; (2) critical success factors for effective cross-sector collaboration; and (3) the external supports that would help states push cross-sector partnerships further.
- Opportunities to further state multi-sector collaboration to achieve population health goals include:
 - » Assisting state efforts to empower local communities;
 - » Facilitating multi-state, cross-sector best practice and information-sharing;
 - » Supporting data-sharing across sectors to inform decision-making and comprehensive actions; and
 - » Cultivating cross-sector leadership at the state-level.

FULL DISCUSSION

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National experts and state policymakers increasingly recognize that health outcomes are influenced not only by providing access to health care coverage and services, but also by state-level policies in other sectors, such as agriculture, education, transportation, among others. Cross-sector collaborations and partnerships are essential when considering state programs and policies outside the health care domain to drive improvements in population health.

Key factors for supporting cross-sector collaboration identified by the national study, include: (1) *precursors*, or foundational factors that help to prime the environment for state action; (2) *catalysts* that facilitate coordination among diverse state agencies; and (3) *success factors* for effective implementation and ongoing collaboration. Following is a summary:

Precursors are factors that prime the environment, or lay the groundwork for state action, including, for example, long-running commitment by state or community-level advocacy groups. Knowledge and activism around pressing community-level needs create an environment that is receptive to state-level action. Persistent grassroots efforts can position advocacy groups to be prime partners.

Catalysts are key factors and actions that can advance state-level, cross-agency strategies. For example, major events or crises require support from multiple sectors to ensure a coordinated and effective response. In addition, legislative mandates often galvanize cross-agency action around an issue and create a framework, e.g., through task forces and commissions, through which agencies can work together. Data analyses also often serve as a catalyst for action by illustrating the magnitude or severity of a problem.

Success factors for mobilizing cross-agency action almost always point to existing state infrastructure that supports collaboration and shared accountability. This includes established arrangements for data sharing, decision-making, resource allocation, and project management. In addition, having clear and aligned priorities and policies that allow for win-wins across sectors and agencies—and a commitment to understanding cross-sector/agency culture and language differences —

are critical to success. Additional factors include: (a) committed and engaged leadership; (b) sustainable funding mechanisms that support cross-sector collaboration; (c) access to pertinent cross-sector data for design, monitoring, and evaluation and the capacity to use data to inform action, and; (d) empowered local community implementation efforts.

Opportunities to Support State Cross-Agency Collaborative Efforts

Following are ways to support cross-agency collaboration, as distilled from successful state partnerships across the country:

- **Support states to empower local communities.** Effective engagement and inclusion of local communities' voices and needs are critical elements for effective population health improvement strategies. Cross-sector collaboration must go beyond state cross-agency work to support aligned visions across diverse state *and* community partners.
- **Facilitate multi-state cross-sector learning and collaboration.** The health care sector cannot address social determinants of health alone. Given the cultural differences across sectors as well as the persistent interest of state officials in learning from other states' experiences, opportunities to learn together could galvanize cross-sector action to improve population health.
- **Build cross-sector, data-sharing capacity.** States can benefit from assistance in breaking down data silos, sharing data across sectors, and understanding how to use diverse data sets to inform program decisions. There are opportunities to increase state capacity to effectively share and meaningfully interpret cross-sector data to inform planning, communication, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation.
- **Cultivate cross-sector leadership at the state-level.** State leadership plays a critical role in promoting cross-sector partnerships. State-based leadership representing diverse sectors need to be identified and supported to increase the likelihood that collaboration can expand within and across states. Professional development and capacity building can support staff in leading day-to-day implementation efforts.

The lessons outlined here can contribute to state-level programs or policy actions that go beyond health care to drive meaningful improvements in population health.

See also a [companion set of case studies](#) featuring unique multi-sector efforts in five states that shed light on how diverse state-level collaborations can positively impact population health.

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