

The Role of Philanthropy in Implementing Federal Health Reform

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In March 2010 President Obama signed both the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act into law. These two laws will dramatically affect the health insurance system and the delivery of care in America. While not perfect, many of the components of the law will benefit millions of Americans, especially the vulnerable populations served by foundations.

This article will share the activities and plans of the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) related to effectively implementing health reform. It demonstrates positive steps that a foundation can take when it elects to contribute to the implementation process for the benefit of its target population.

In 2003 the MFH board of directors created a health policy area within the organization. They understood that while it is vital to provide grants for services, it is through the policy change process that the health care system can more effectively serve the most vulnerable. For almost eight years, the MFH health policy team has been working to inform Missouri policymakers and give voice to the uninsured, underinsured, and underserved in the state. In late 2007 MFH's health policy area launched a new effort related to health reform called Cover Missouri.

Cover Missouri is a project to promote quality, affordable coverage for every Missourian. In 2008 the health policy team held meetings in communities around the state to discuss state-level policy solutions for reducing the number of uninsured. As it became apparent that federal health reform was a real possibility, Cover Missouri shifted its focus to the federal level and the potential impact of national reform on the state.

Since March, Cover Missouri efforts have focused on the implementation of the laws and correspond to:

- research,
- public education,
- building health advocacy capacity,
- technical assistance for grant opportunities, and
- assisting state government through contracted expertise.

RESEARCH

During the congressional debate on health reform, the MFH health policy area released the brochure "Frequently Asked Questions About U.S. Health System Reform," which was distributed to over 26,000 Missourians. After health reform was signed into law, this brochure was revised to "Frequently Asked Questions About Federal Health Care Reform." Additional publications include a plain language version of the federal health reform laws, a brief summary of the laws, and fact sheets on funding opportunities in health reform that correspond to the MFH programmatic funding areas. Future plans for this fall include fact sheets that examine the impact of reform on each of the MFH programmatic funding initiatives.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Since May, the health policy area has devoted significant efforts to education. The team presented on the "Why, What, When, and Who of Health Reform" at approximately 55 community meetings and has reached over 2,100 individuals thus far. The presentations provide an unbiased, neutral analysis of what health reform contains and its potential impact on a variety of populations in Missouri. These meetings partner with a local host to target a spectrum of audiences, from local chambers of commerce and small businesses, to hospital social workers, to MFH grantees, to the general public.

Cover Missouri also offers a variety of educational tools used to inform Missourians on federal health reform. The Web site, www.covermissouri.org, offers research, details on community meetings, and news stories related to reform. Visitors may also sign up to receive further information through a semimonthly e-bulletin, the Cover Missouri Facebook page, or the project's Twitter account (@CoverMissouri).

In presenting information to the community, challenges arose due to a lack of understanding and misinformation regarding health reform. MFH engaged Lake Research Group and Herndon Alliance to help focus the messaging used during discussions on reform. To date, they have conducted two Missouri-specific focus groups and a statewide poll to

gauge message effectiveness and the portions of health reform that resonate with state residents. An additional poll will be conducted after the November elections.

BUILDING ADVOCACY CAPACITY

The health policy area of MFH uses contracted support to assist the health advocates of Missouri to effectively and efficiently perform their work. In June, MFH supported a convening of health advocates to discuss and coordinate their plans for implementation of health reform. MFH has also engaged Community Catalyst, Herndon Alliance, Faithful Reform in Health Care, and Families USA to offer technical assistance to support consumer and faith-based health advocacy efforts. In November, MFH will host the eighth annual Health Advocates' Retreat, which provides time for Missouri's health advocates to network, share experiences of working with policymakers, build skills and capacity to collaborate, and craft common messaging. In 2010 the retreat will include a focus on federal reform and provide opportunities to continue coordinating state-level implementation efforts. Building the capacity of advocates to work on and give voice to health reform is a vital component of successful implementation.

FEDERAL REFORM AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

In May 2010 the MFH board approved a new initiative called Missouri Capture (MoCAP) to assist nonprofits and local governmental organizations seeking to submit applications for federal funding available through health reform. Historically, Missouri organizations have been less successful than those in other states in capturing their reasonable share of available federal funds. This initiative, managed by the MFH program area, will:

- monitor federal funding opportunities appropriate to Missouri communities;
- communicate with eligible organizations about those opportunities;
- provide consulting services and technical assistance for preparing and submitting funding proposals; and
- monitor success and failure, and share lessons learned from those results.

MoCAP has held informational meetings around the state, created a Web page (www.mffh.org/content/478/mocap) to provide information and tools, and started to provide technical assistance to eligible organizations.

ASSISTING STATE GOVERNMENT

Mirroring the MoCAP initiative, the MFH health policy area is working with state government to assist with the implementation of health reform (called MoCAP II). MoCAP II provides contracted support to the state to assist with two main functions of health reform. The first is assistance with

grant opportunities available through health reform for which the state must be the applicant. Because state resources are at a minimum and the timelines for some grant applications are short, MFH has contracted with experienced grant writers to help the state prepare and submit funding proposals. For both MoCAP initiatives, the MFH board decided that an upfront investment in technical assistance could yield a significant return to Missouri in the form of millions of federal dollars dedicated to the health of state residents.

The second function of MoCAP II is the use of consultant contracts to provide the state with technical expertise concerning major components of reform. The consultants will provide expertise on activities such as:

- understanding Missouri's health insurance markets,
- determining the information technology and operational needs of Missouri to comply with the eligibility determination processes outlined in health reform, and
- building an economic model that projects enrollment and costs associated with the various populations included in health reform.

The intention of this technical expertise is to help Missouri implement health reform in a consumer friendly, efficient, and cost-effective manner. Ultimately, assisting the state in this regard means positively affecting the MFH target population.

MOVING FORWARD

The implementation of federal health reform will not occur overnight; however, the benefits for the most vulnerable of our nation are substantial. As foundations examine their potential role in implementing health reform, difficult questions arise that require contemplation and discussion.

- What is the correct balance between foundation resources invested in health reform and the benefits gained by the target populations and communities?
- Is filling the information gap and correcting misinformation the appropriate role for foundations?
- How much do foundations invest in assisting state government with implementing health reform? And what reporting requirements and evaluation are expected?

While not all foundations have the capacity to engage in a vast array of activities, all foundations do have a role to play in the successful implementation of health reform. As a community of foundations, we cannot let this historic opportunity pass without our collective voices being heard.

VIEWS FROM THE FIELD is offered by GIH as a forum for health grantmakers to share insights and experiences. If you are interested in participating, please contact Faith Mitchell at 202.452.8331 or fmitchell@gih.org.