

CREATING CHANGE THROUGH Partnerships

Transforming the health system is not a task for one institution or even one sector. Working towards a health system that is more equitable, efficient, effective, and that values the unique needs of all will require collaboration and partnership, between funders and grantees; health funders and philanthropies working in economic development, education, and civic engagement; as well as among health professionals, administrators, policymakers, and consumers.

Why collaborate? First and foremost, working with others often accomplishes more than going it alone. Partnerships can help grantmakers and those on the front lines increase or better use their resources. It enables funders to spread the risk associated with supporting controversial or cutting-edge programs. Collaboration can reinforce the commitment of different parties to remain involved over the long term, even when the going gets rough. And it can be a tangible expression of a foundation's mission and values.

Partnerships encompass many forms of collaboration that bring people and organizations together to improve health (Weiss et al. 2002). No single definition, however, can convey the range and texture of the relationships involved in partnerships. They fall along a continuum that encompasses the exchange of information for mutual benefit, sharing risks and responsibilities, and ultimately ceding individual control to achieve a common purpose – partnership in its most complete and fundamental sense (Isaacs and Rodgers 2001).

The particulars of any successful partnership differ, but there are some prerequisites. The most fundamental of these is trust, built upon mutual respect and honest communication. A successful partnership also requires shared vision, goals, and a commitment to make it work. While the structure and governance of the partnership needs to be clearly defined, the partners must also be open to new relationships and ideas. It is also essential to have clear processes to resolve conflicts. Additionally, collaborators must share risks, responsibilities, rewards, and resources – financial or otherwise.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR GRANTMAKERS

► **Collaboration to Influence Policy and Inform Decisionmakers** – System transformation demands work to understand how policies affect the financing and delivery of care and the distribution of resources, and to ensure that providers, advocates, regulators, and others understand them too. Through partnerships, foundations can support policy

analysis, as well as educate policymakers on the effects of their decisions. In Colorado, the Rose Community Foundation, The Colorado Trust, and Caring for Colorado Foundation collaborated to plan and fund the Colorado Health Institute. Together, the foundations engaged in 19 months of planning after receiving the results of a feasibility study in 2000. They also provided core support for a start-up phase and have committed to supporting at least five years of operations. As a resource for policymakers, health providers, consumers, businesses, the media, and others, the institute seeks to advance the health of Coloradans by providing independent and impartial health-related information to policymakers and others involved in health care throughout the state. The institute has three core functions: to serve as a centralized source for national, state, and local data and related resources; to analyze health and health-related policy issues of importance to the state and local communities; and to communicate to key users the information synthesized and analyses conducted at the institute.

Through a simpler form of partnership, the Washington Health Foundation annually convenes the Washington Health Leadership Summit. The summit brings together more than 350 public and private leaders, including elected officials, business owners, labor organizations, citizen action groups, state agencies, health plans, and concerned individuals. This venue provides stakeholders with an opportunity to share information, develop the knowledge base, and build the relationships needed to effectively tackle health system issues.

► **Partnering to Improve Access to Needed Services** – Partnerships can be used to improve access and expand enrollment in public insurance coverage. To get seniors immunized, the Health Foundation of South Florida engaged numerous collaborators including the Miami-Dade County Health Department, the City of Miami Fire Rescue, and other community-based organizations serving seniors. The foundation also engaged a for-profit company, Maxim Health System, a national provider of immunization services, to help identify locations where flu vaccine could be provided to groups of seniors, such as local pharmacies and senior centers. The foundation worked with local policymakers to allow emergency medical technicians and other first responders to administer immunizations. Previously, such medical personnel could not administer shots because of

liability concerns. The result? In 2003, 3,000 flu shots were provided. Given the vaccine shortage during the fall of 2004, the program focused its efforts on immunizing high-risk seniors and educating the public about other ways to prevent the spread of the flu virus.

➤ **Partnering to Educate and Empower the Public** –

Building an efficient and effective health care system also means empowering and educating consumers to make informed decisions about their health. The Paso del Norte Health Foundation has included a wide array of partners in its *Walk Doña Ana*, *Walk El Paso*, and *Walk Otero* initiatives. These bilingual programs promote walking to improve the public's health by providing information, inspiration, and opportunities for people to adopt walking as a fun and safe form of exercise. Through collaborations with local media outlets, TV and radio campaigns inform the public of the importance of increasing physical activity and the effects on health. The campaigns invite area residents to call a hot-line number to receive a free walking kit. The low-literacy, fully bilingual kit contains information on how to get started walking, considerations for special populations, walking group referrals, and the best walking areas. Other partners include community-based organizations such as the YMCA, businesses, civic groups, and locally organized walking groups.

Involving the media in partnerships can convey health messages to a wide audience. Whether educating the public about disease prevention or informing them of what to do in the event of an emergency, television, radio, print, and Web-based messages can help assure the public's health and safety. The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation has a long-standing tradition of working collaboratively with media on health messages. In 1996, it established the Program for the Study of Entertainment Media & Health to work with writers, producers, and media executives to help them convey health messages to the public. Health messages crafted by the initiative have appeared in many prime-time shows including NBC's *ER* and UPN's *Girl Friends* addressing issues such as HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The foundation has also successfully collaborated with national television networks. Through a partnership with Black Entertainment Television, the foundation produced a sexual health public education campaign aimed at young people. The campaign consisted of full-length news specials on sexual health, public service announcements, a toll-free telephone number for viewers to call for additional information, and a free booklet on sexual health. A similar partnership with Univision Network, the nation's premier Spanish-language network, resulted in a campaign to raise awareness of sexual health issues, including HIV and other STDs.

➤ **Partnering to Improve Community Health** – Successful partnerships can generate lasting system change by strengthening community-based health care. The Horizon

Foundation, for example, initiated a partnership to help implement the Howard County (MD) Comprehensive Health Improvement Plan. The plan identified health improvement priorities for the county: cancer, injury and violence prevention, mental health, older adult issues, substance abuse, and tobacco use and smoking. Working collaboratively, county residents, health institutions, non-profit organizations, and others are supporting the county health department's efforts to conduct community health assessments, set health priorities, and determine effective action steps to meet identified needs. The partnerships also augment the ability of community groups and other partners to coordinate their work with the county health department. It includes a grant program jointly administered by The Horizon Foundation and the county to support community coalitions addressing the priority health issues. The foundation has committed \$200,000 to the public health partnership.

Improving the health of communities throughout California is the goal of *Partnership for the Public's Health*. The program, a major initiative of The California Endowment, is working to develop partnerships among the state's communities and their local health departments. Since 1999, the initiative has fostered partnerships between 14 county and city public health departments in 39 communities. In Stanislaus County, for example, the local health services agency has collaborated with community groups, including Airport Neighbors United, the West Modesto/King Kennedy Neighborhood Collaborative, and the Ceres Partnership for Healthy Children, to conduct a countywide health assessment. Volunteers from each of the groups involved surveyed more than 5,400 residents. Neighborhood-specific data on demographics, health conditions, perceptions of community conditions, and awareness of health resources were also collected. The results revealed that residents were concerned about asthma, STDs, mental health, and sanitation – not necessarily issues expected by some of the partnership's participants. The baseline provided by the community assessment has allowed the partners to evaluate their individual work and to collaboratively develop targeted health education programs.

This article is part of GIH's portfolio, Agents of Change: Health Philanthropy's Role in Transforming Systems. Each article focuses on an approach grantmakers are using to promote systemic or social change. The entire portfolio is available on GIH's Web site www.gih.org.

SOURCES

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