

2017 Rural Health Network Summit

The Role of Networks in the Changing Health Care Landscape

September 2017

Minneapolis, MN



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Rural Health Innovations (RHI), LLC, is a subsidiary of the National Rural Health Resource Center (The Center), a non-profit organization. Together, RHI and The Center are a leading technical assistance and knowledge center in rural health. In partnership with The Center, RHI enhances the health of rural communities across the nation by providing products and services with a focus on excellence and innovation. RHI is providing technical assistance (TA) to grantees of the Rural Health Network Development and the Rural Network Allied Health Training programs through a contract with the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy (FORHP), Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

BACKGROUND

In December 2009, with funding provided by FORHP, The Center and the National Cooperative of Health Networks Association (NCHN) hosted a Rural Hospital Network Summit in Minneapolis, MN, to tap the collective wisdom of experienced rural hospital network leaders and identify rural health network activities and critical success factors. The Center published the proceedings of this meeting and applied the results in designing relevant and timely services and technical assistance for rural hospital networks across the country.

Since that time, the changing health care landscape has contributed to significant shifts in the ways that rural hospitals and networks operate. Nationwide efforts focused on health care transformation and an increased emphasis on managing the health of populations has encouraged health care providers to take a more holistic approach to care delivery. To achieve many of these population health initiatives, rural hospitals and health care providers have increasingly begun to partner with a broader range of health facilities as well as nontraditional partners, such as community-based organizations addressing the social determinants of health. Early networks have matured and new types of networks have emerged in response to current trends.

PURPOSE AND APPROACH

To capture the evolving nature of rural health networks, RHI held a Rural Health Network Summit in September 2017, funded by FORHP. The 2017 Rural Health Network Summit brought together rural health network leaders to consider the question “What is the role of rural health networks in the changing health care environment?” This Summit brought together engaged and thoughtful network leaders together to identify critical solutions for network leaders and determine areas of focus for federal spending and technical assistance. The basic premise of the summit is that success of networks transfers to success of our rural health care system as it transitions toward population health.

The Summit, a one-day event, consisted of facilitated discussions and opportunities for sharing insights, particularly around network initiatives and projects that deliver value to members during this time of change and transition.

Within this report, Rural Health Innovations is presenting a combination of findings and analysis to illustrate and demonstrate the powerful role that networks actively play within their communities. Summit documentation is available upon request.

Highlights of Summit Results

- Rural health networks, although diverse in focus or activity, have common roles that are vital to their members’ success.
- Network leaders across the country can use the identified six roles to develop new services and focus their efforts on meeting the needs of their members in the transition to population health:
 1. Serving in a leadership capacity
 2. Facilitating continuous planning
 3. Convening and engaging stakeholders
 4. Identifying and providing meaningful education
 5. Connecting resources
 6. Collecting, analyzing and acting on data
- Network Development and Allied Health Programs have created opportunities for networks to act as incubators for innovative solutions.
- The Center and RHI can leverage the results of the Summit to tailor technical assistance offerings that support networks as they support their rural communities.

Diverse Network Participants

Summit attendees represented 17 networks across 13 states and included 28 engaged and articulate leaders. Network organizations reflected a diverse range of characteristics in terms of network maturity, membership size, membership composition, infrastructure and degree of formalization.

Network Participant	Network Name	State
Alicia Villa	Santa Cruz County Adolescent Wellness Network	AZ
Bernadette Hernandez	Santa Cruz County Adolescent Wellness Network	AZ
Michael Ward	Community Mental and Behavioral Health Coop.	CA
Andrea Stephenson-Royster	Lake Okeechobee Rural Health Network	FL
Kelly Carr	Healthy Henry County Communities	IA
Patti Sallee	Healthy Henry County Communities	IA
Shelley Van Dorin	Healthy Henry County Communities	IA
Leigh Faaborg	Wright Health Partners	IA
Marc Legge	Wright Health Partners	IA
David Mortimer	Illinois Telehealth Network	IL
Kathy Cook	Affiliated Service Providers of Indiana	IN

Catie Wampole	Mountain Health Alliance	MD
Susan Stewart	Mountain Health Alliance	MD
Cynthia Dean	Bootheel Health Alliance	MO
Valerie Blackmon	Bootheel Health Alliance	MO
Lorna Miles	Rural Mental Health Network	MO
Miranda Brown	Rural Mental Health Network	MO
Diana Brinson	North Baldwin Rural Health Network	MS
Tracy McDowell	North Baldwin Rural Health Network	MS
Cindra Stahl	Montana Allied Health Workforce Network	MT
Rachel Norris	Montana Allied Health Workforce Network	MT
Kailyn Mock	Montana Graduate Medical Education Network	MT
Kristin Juliar	Montana Graduate Medical Education Network	MT
Janet Bastian	Montana Health Network	MT
Nancy Frank	North Country Health Consortium	NH
Kellyna Warnke	Sanford One Connect	SD
Francee Laverty	Amherst-Nelson Behavioral Health Network	VA
Larry Beasley	Amherst-Nelson Behavioral Health Network	VA

Guest Subject Matter Experts

- Amanda Corbett, University of Minnesota Rural Health Research Center
- Terry Hill, Rural Health Innovations
- Alyssa Meller, Rural Health Innovations

Facilitators

- Becky Gourde, Rural Health Innovations
- Kiona Hermanson, Rural Health Innovations
- Debra Laine, Rural Health Innovations
- Kap Wilkes, Rural Health Innovations

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CHANGING HEALTH CARE LANDSCAPE

To kick-off the day-long conversation the Summit facilitators engaged participants in a group discussion to analyze the overall environment in which networks operate. The two-fold purpose of this discussion among a diverse and experienced group of network leaders was to 1) establish a shared understanding of the changing health care landscape and 2) identify recommendations on what network leaders can do to adapt to the changing environment.

Facilitators posed questions to explore the trends, ideas and practices in the health care arena according to four sequential ranges, listed below, in order from past or outgoing trends to future trends:

- Outgoing
- Established
- Emerging
- Horizon

Following are results of participants' key insights found through analysis of small and large group discussions.

Shared Understanding and Ideas for Adapting

Outgoing Trends, Ideas and Practices

- Dependency on fee for service models
- Traditional role of primary care physicians
- Independence and isolation of health care organizations or providers
- Silo'd care
- Stigma mindset of mental and behavioral health
- Paper record keeping and communication

What networks can do:

- Retain institutional knowledge
- Build capacity in community

Established Trends, Ideas and Practices

- Multidisciplinary approach to providing care
- Active patient role
- Triple Aim vision for the health care system
- Electronic health record (EHR)
- Affordable Care Act and insurance coverage in rural communities
- Referrals to specialists
- Networks as a success strategy for transitioning to new models of care

What networks can do:

- Increase influence and advocate for rural communities
- Engage with new models of care
- Seek out opportunities for new collaboration

Emerging Trends, Ideas and Practices

- Acknowledge social determinants of health (SDOH)
- New team-based models for coordinating care and care transitions
- New financial models based on value and quality of care
- Increasing use of health information technology (HIT) that addresses digital divide, communication and data-driven decisions
- New workforce ideas and focus on retention
- Merging of facilities and services
- Networks to build new relationships and stronger partnerships

What networks can do:

- Convene partners for exploration and understanding
- Think holistically about health and wellness
- Diversify network membership

Horizon Trends, Ideas and Practices

- Importance of addressing mental health and behavioral health needs
- Innovative technologies to deliver services
- Community engaged in health and wellness
- Insurance changes and possibility of single payer
- Using Lean practices to survive
- Responsibility for social determinants of health
- Scalable integrated care and services in small community
- Patient-driven health care
- Network of networks that link clinical and community services focused on long-term wellness and health of all community members

What networks can do:

- Act as an agent of change
- Document value of network
- Create opportunities for innovation

The results of this environmental analysis set the stage for examining how rural health networks respond to these factors in helping members and communities thrive during a period of rapid transition.

SIX COMMON ROLES OF NETWORKS

Through consensus-building discussion, Summit participants identified six key roles that rural health networks play in the changing health care landscape. The roles were further defined through small group discussion. These roles serve to focus continued development of network activities and opportunities for network leaders, technical assistance providers and Federal program planners.

Network Roles in Today's Health Care Landscape

- **Serving in a leadership capacity**
 - Responsive to member needs
 - Establish shared vision of broader landscape
 - Act as a catalyst for change

- **Facilitating continuous planning**
 - Facilitate agreement of common goals
 - Engage members in driving the network's design
 - Develop adaptable and agile infrastructure

- **Convening and engaging stakeholders**
 - Serve as neutral convener
 - Collective advocacy
 - Community and member engagement and accountability
 - Focus on collective impact

- **Identifying and providing meaningful education**
 - Relevant and effective education and training
 - Sharing knowledge and data

- **Connecting resources**
 - Share and maximize resources between members
 - Fostering creative strategies

- **Collecting, analyzing and acting on data**
 - Gather member data and help disseminate results between members
 - Analyze data and measure progress for members

DOCUMENT THE VALUE OF NETWORKS

How These Roles Benefit Network Members

A recognized struggle for network leaders in sustaining the impact and influence with network members is articulating the benefit of the network's service and roles. When discussing this struggle with participating network leaders during the 2017 Network Summit, the following benefits were identified within each of the six roles. These articulated benefits can be used by network leaders, technical assistance providers and Federal program planners to build capacity of networks to be successful within the rapidly changing health care landscape. *Rural networks provide rural relevant solutions that incorporate community knowledge and are focused on their own neighbors, family and friends.*

- **Serving in a leadership capacity**
 - Creates shared vision that includes community
 - Increases opportunity for personal and professional growth
 - Enables commitment and trust within, and across, a geographic region
 - Creates peer-learning atmosphere that supports transition into new roles
 - Provides direction and a path to success and supports member engagement
 - Enables collective impact and reduces isolation of member leaders
 - Provides vetted resources to identify top resources that members couldn't find on their own

- **Facilitating continuous planning**
 - Increases member awareness of what is on the horizon
 - Focuses everyone on what they're trying to accomplish
 - Helps members stay in front of a changing environment
 - Enables members to move forward and away from endless brainstorming
 - Clarifies contradictions together and supports challenging long held health care beliefs

- **Convening and engaging stakeholders**
 - Shares the workload of change; making it easier to achieve individual missions by working together
 - Increases stronger political voice and credibility
 - Shares issues that amplify the needs of members
 - Increases opportunity for funding through collaboration
 - Increases opportunity for innovation
 - Increases community access to care with shared resources
 - Simplifies connection with and to access subject matter expertise

- **Identifying and providing meaningful education**
 - Increases availability of training that is otherwise not affordable to individual members
 - Improves health of community with shared education resources
 - Increases knowledge of current employees that supports the ability of members to adapt to a changing health care landscape
 - Builds capacity of members' internal leadership
 - Builds leadership capacity within the community

- **Connecting resources**
 - Saves money with shared subject matter expertise and access to information, data and knowledge
 - Enhances infrastructure with shared equipment, software, and knowledge
 - Increases organizational capacity that in turn increases revenue
 - Helps members shift their thinking and adapt to changes
 - Increases knowledge of broader community

- **Collecting, analyzing and acting on data**
 - Saves time and resources for members
 - Enables future funding opportunities
 - Documents value; essential for participation in value-based payment models
 - Improves understanding of environment
 - Allows for continuous process improvement
 - Identifies and replicates best practices; saving both time and resources

IDENTIFIED INITIATIVES AND NEEDED RESOURCES

The following table includes specific initiatives and needed support that network leaders identified during the 2017 Network Summit. This study of key network roles can be used by network leaders, technical assistance providers and Federal program planners to ensure the success of networks as they strive to support their members within a rapidly changing health care landscape.

Key Network Initiatives and Actions	Resources to Support Network Leaders
Serving in a Leadership Capacity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership training: online, in person, mentors, cohorts • Support members’ human resource leaders • Proactively support members’ internal leaders and community leaders through education, technical assistance and consulting • Visioning and strategic planning efforts to act as a “Gentle prodding”; anticipating change • Business models that support transition to value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National resources and technical assistance that are available without charge or low cost; for example, Rural Health Information Hub (RHihub) • Methods and approaches for network leaders to leverage to support their own member cohorts and learning environments • Opportunities for networks to both create and transfer experiential knowledge that is rural relevant
Facilitating Continuous Planning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use reflection and learning to find underlying issues, inform planning and use results • Organizational and project planning using strategic planning cycle • Seek to align plans from broad to detail and back again • Communicate and visualize plan • Use objective facilitator and/or planner • Incorporate other stakeholders and subject matter experts; seek and invite key people who are engaged 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitation knowledge and skills • Awareness of stakeholder needs and connections with environment or circumstances, i.e., understand your stakeholders and environment • Dedicated resources for coordination and planning

Key Network Initiatives and Actions	Resources to Support Network Leaders
Convening and Engaging Stakeholders	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building trust with consistent opportunity for dialogue • Be transparent to community members and stakeholders about network mission, vision, strategic objectives and key initiatives to answer questions about what, how and why • Provide education on what network is and its benefits to members for participating in network initiatives, projects and services • Establish neutrality as a guiding principle of the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with documenting and communicating network mission, vision and planning efforts • Technology to support collaboration and communication efforts, i.e. collaboration software, website social media • Process to identify “what’s in it for me” to help get organizations and providers to table • Dashboard to identify critical measures, brag about successes to communicate value
Identifying and Providing Meaningful Education	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and deliver training content based on member needs, i.e. community health workers (CHWs) and providers on care coordination models • Being present at community events • Reach out to community stakeholders to identify needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying and selecting evidence-based models • Communication of the benefits to members in participating in network education services • Education and designing curriculum expertise • Conference planning methods
Connecting Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating partnerships with non-member agencies • Tap into the knowledge of network members • Use technology solutions to bring more community partners online and more widely disseminate resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess health and wellness needs within the community • Process to identify available resources and catalog availability • Identify benefits of sharing resources and communication methods • Elevator speech to talk with community members about resources
Collecting, Analyzing and Acting on Data	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborating between members on what data to collect • Establish data gathering and sharing infrastructure • Analyzing and reporting benchmark data or decision-making data between members’ leadership • Communicating results on behalf of members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training in data collection and data analysis • Support finding, recruiting and retaining trained information technology staff • Resource for data integrity knowledge • Expertise with data governance and security

INSIGHTS FROM THE SUMMIT

The Rural Health Network Summit produced key insights (below) that support networks in adapting to a changing health care landscape by identifying roles that are centered on the needs of their members. It also produced information to guide the provision of technical assistance in support of robust and viable networks:

- There are common roles that networks play within the changing health care environment and innovation is taking place due to the unique influences of each network community
- Health networks are playing a vital role in supporting their health care organization and community members' transition toward population health
- Although all identified roles are important and critical for effective adaptation to the changing environment, a network focuses on and develops specific roles depending on the specific circumstances and needs of network members
- Network leaders can be confident of the legitimacy of the Network Summit findings because the six roles were identified across diverse network environments, such as, size, area of focus and collaborative maturity
- The Center and RHI can draw upon the results of the Summit to continue tailoring technical assistance offerings in alignment with the primary needs of networks, expressed at the individual level and the collective level

For questions about this report, please contact Kap Wilkes, Director of Program Development, National Rural Health Resource Center and Rural Health Innovations, at kwilkes@ruralcenter.org