IMPROVING POPULATION HEALTH THROUGH MULTI-SECTOR COLLABORATION

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Lawrence Prybil, PhD, LFACHE
Norton Professor in Healthcare Leadership (Ret.)
College of Public Health
University of Kentucky
I. Overview

• The concept of collaboration

• The case for multi-sector partnerships focused on community health improvement

• Obstacles to effective multi-sector partnerships

• Some steps governing boards can take to foster and advance multi-sector collaboration

• Discussion about expanding and improving multi-sector collaboration
II. The Concept of Collaboration

“Collaboration” refers to relationships in which two or more independent parties intentionally and voluntarily work together to accomplish a common purpose.

Collaboration can take many forms, from highly informal, non-binding arrangements to formal partnerships that can involve the establishment of organizational entities, substantial financial investments, and legal agreements that involve long-term commitments.
III. The Case for Multi-Sector Partnerships Focused on Improving Community Health

1. The focus on the medical needs and treatment of individual patients that has characterized our nation’s health enterprise for decades, while worthy, has proven to be inadequate by itself to improve the health of population groups.

2. Making long-term impact on restraining our nation’s health expenditures and improving the health status of families, communities, and society at large will demand concerted attention to the full range of factors --- behavioral, educational, environmental, genetic, and socioeconomic --- that affect them.
3. There is growing support in the public and private sectors for the “Triple Aim” as an expression of the overall direction for improving health and health care in America.

4. Finally, it seems clear that in order to effectively design, implement, and sustain approaches that recognize the multiple determinants of health outcomes and address the “Triple Aim” — better communications and coordination among health delivery organizations, the public health community, and key stakeholders in business, education, government, and other sectors than has existed in past years will be necessary.
IV. Obstacles to Effective Multi-Sector Partnerships

- Conceptual and communications barriers
- Financial and public policy constraints
- Building and maintaining collaborative partnerships is challenging and certain characteristics have been found to be critical to their success; i.e.:

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.
IV. Obstacles to Effective Multi-Sector Partnerships continued

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 partnership’s mission and goals. 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.

Performance Evaluation and Improvement. The partnership regularly monitors and measures its performance using established goals, objectives, and metrics and employs the findings to make continuous improvements.
IV. Obstacles to Effective Multi-Sector Partnerships continued

- Among existing multi-sector partnerships focused on improving the health of communities they exist to serve, there are substantial limitations in the existence of clear objectives, metrics, and processes for evaluating the performance and effectiveness of collaborative arrangements at the local, state, and multi-state levels.

Although collaborative arrangements focused on improving community health are numerous and growing, the amount of solid, objective evidence of their impact is still thin.
V. Some Steps Governing Boards Can Take to Foster and Advance Multi-Sector Collaboration Focused on Community Health Improvement

1. Place priority on board education and strategy development regarding community health measurement, assessment, and improvement.

2. Appoint a standing board committee with oversight responsibility for the organization’s goals, programs, and progress in providing community benefit and improving community health.

3. Work actively with other local organizations in an on-going process of assessing community health needs, setting community-wide priorities, and determining which lend themselves to multi-sector collaboration as compared to organization-specific approaches.
V. Some Steps Governing Boards Can Take to Foster and Advance Multi-Sector Collaboration Focused on Community Health Improvement continued

4. Using the well-established characteristics of successful partnerships as a foundation, reach out to other key stakeholders who share a deep interest in addressing an important community health issue(s) and forge a collaborative partnership with a clear mission and well-defined goals, strategies, and metrics.

5. The strategic plan and “dashboard” for every multi-sector partnership focused on community improvement and each of their principal partners should include their targets, metrics, and progress in relation to them. Hard-hitting evaluation of progress and commitment to make organizational, strategic, and/or leadership charges when indicated is essential to success.

6. To enhance sustainability, all multi-factor partnerships focused on community health improvement should develop a deliberate and realistic strategy in broadening and diversifying their sources of funding support.
VI. Questions and Discussion About Expanding and Improving Multi-Sector Collaboration

The PDF version of our November 2014 report on “Improving Community Health Through Hospital – Public Health Collaboration” can be accessed and downloaded without cost at: http://www.uky.edu/publichealth/hospital/collaboration