

Develop a cultural understanding of each other's systems

Overview of this strategy

Developing a cultural understanding of each other's systems means learning about the different goals, processes, and challenges that each sector faces in addressing the needs of people experiencing homelessness. This is required to build an effective, trusting partnership, as sectors need to find common ground and shared language to understand where they could collaborate more effectively or efficiently. Both sectors benefit from awareness of how the partnership can advance goals within either system. Early trust-building, developing a shared understanding of the problem and commitment to working together are crucial to the initial stages of collaborative initiatives and lack of these factors are common reasons that some initiatives fail to gain traction (Hisch, Isaacs and Wageman, 2022).

While cross-sector understanding does naturally develop over time, intentional practices can help accelerate the process:

- Picking a **specific project or initiative** that involves team members from both healthcare and homeless response services and use it as a chance to begin to work together.
- Center around individuals experiencing homelessness rather than system-level barriers through **cross-sector case conferencing**, and use it as a platform for sharing information with the other sector.
- Embed “system integrators” such as **liaisons or navigators**.
- Build relationships and trust among key stakeholders through **1:1 meetings** before convening a **group or regular standing meetings**.
 - Consider intentionally fostering relationships at two levels, both for director-level leadership and for direct service providers including case managers.
- **Host or attend cross-sector events** with the goal to learn about the current versus ideal roles of the CoC and the healthcare organization.
- Develop **easily digestible handouts and resources** that help demystify available programs in the CoC or what's covered under your state's medicaid program. Dedicate time to creating a shared language/glossary of terms between systems.
- Establish programs or events that allow for cross-sector shadowing or “**going to the gemba**” (physically touring or going to the “actual place”) where homeless response or healthcare services are performed (ex, shelters, respite facilities, emergency rooms).
- Create or update a **community asset map** together and walk through each program and resources to increase joint understanding.

For any of the above strategies, express openness, curiosity, and genuine appreciation of the other organization's work. Inquire about their strategic priorities and what they

worry about in regards to the population. To grow and sustain this organizational knowledge over time, formalize agreements and standard work that defines the roles and expectations for each sector. Develop a process for expanding the cultural understanding beyond the original small group of staff to lessen the impact of competing priorities or turnover, such as through standard training and onboarding plans for staff whose roles may cross sectors.

Resources and tools for implementing this strategy

- HC2: [System of Care for Homeless Populations](#) template
- This Healthcare X Homelessness Theory of Change and Resource Pack, especially:
 - [System diagram](#): Healthcare's participation in a Holistic System of Care (figure X)
 - [Common acronyms & terms](#) (appendix X)
- California Healthcare Foundation: [Homelessness Response 101: For Health Care Providers and Stakeholders](#)
- [Examples and Template for "Fast Facts"](#) for quickly sharing information across sectors, including:
 - Certified (Insurance Paid) Home Care
 - Durable Medical Equipment
 - Aliases/False Identities

Practical advice from the field

- For health systems interested in engaging more deeply in this work, it is essential to come into the partnership with a learning frame of mind and seeking to understand before acting or deciding where to focus.
- **Involving leaders:** Be intentional about including your system's leadership in the learning about the other sector, as leaders also need to develop their own understanding in order to fully buy-in to and support cross-sector work.
- **Building relationships with health plans and understanding Medicaid** was expressed as advice from homeless response system representatives. One homeless system representative commented that their relationship with the hospital helped with building data to demonstrate a need, but "If you're aiming for anything where it's going to take a funding commitment, the health plans are generally who to coordinate with."

Some enabling conditions for developing a cultural understanding:

- Participating in an external collaborative or conference where representatives from both sectors are expected to meaningfully engage and learn from each other
- Having champion(s) from the health system community benefits department to push for some of the deeper work and bridge why the work was important for their leadership and operational staff

Tactics & Change Ideas:

- Share data and stories to build the business and humanitarian case for the health system in terms of population health, cost, experience of care, and staff wellbeing
- Use existing platforms for communication such as case conferencing to identify and begin to fill gaps in the knowledge about the other sector
- Build understanding that health systems will need to create and maintain enduring partnerships and efforts that go beyond the traditional boundaries of healthcare
- Incorporate & share the use of specific, readily-achievable short term strategies and aims to focus attention and efforts in the near term alongside overarching, inspiring goals that motivate a long-term commitment, such as achieving functional zero for a defined population
- Partner with those with lived experience to create person centered, jargon-free language
- Ensure there is regular communication to other community stakeholders you don't have an active relationship or project with about what is being accomplished, what's next, and what is needed to get there. Even if they aren't involved in the effort now, it will help them stay aware that the effort is happening if they do decide to get involved.
- Explore together the current and potential spectrum of levers and roles the health system might use to address homelessness.

Bright spots & examples from the field:

- Early on in the pilot work, the Sacramento team worked on a [short document](#) they could use to communicate the goals, partnership opportunities and key learnings with partners who were not as closely involved with the pilot.
- Providence Medical Center in Washington County, Oregon prepared and presented an [overview](#) of the state's Medicaid redetermination (annual renewal) process for housing providers. The presentation addressed basic facts like what is covered, how it works, and how someone would know that they have Medicaid.
- This [case study](#) from Adventist Health Clear Lake describes the approach project leadership took to kickstart a pilot project among cross-sector stakeholders, including individual meetings with stakeholders and agency representatives to do deep listening and generate buy-in (Hardin, Trumbo, & Wiest, 2020).

References:

Hardin, L., Trumbo, S. & Wiest, D. (2020). Cross-sector collaboration for vulnerable populations reduces utilization and strengthens community partnerships. *Journal of Interprofessional Education and Practice*. 18(3), 5 – 10

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