

## Spotlight Series

# The Texas Managed Care Organization Social Determinant of Health Learning Collaborative



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**The NORC Medicaid Managed Care Organization (MCO) Learning Hub shares timely and relevant resources to support Medicaid MCOs and other stakeholders in improving the health of their members and increasing advancements in health equity and health care transformation. We encourage you to share your experiences and feedback on future Medicaid MCO Learning Hub work so we can better serve your needs. To start the conversation or join our distribution list, please email us at [MCOLearningHub@norc.org](mailto:MCOLearningHub@norc.org).**

The Medicaid MCO Learning Hub “Spotlight Series” highlights key initiatives addressing social determinants of health (SDOH) and health equity that are driven by, or in partnership with, MCOs to inform the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and its grantees. In addition, the series provides MCOs, community based organizations, states, and other key stakeholders with examples of successful models of organizations working together to advance health equity.

This “Spotlight” explores how one state developed a cross-sector learning collaborative, comprised of foundations, two state health plans associations, a state Medicaid agency and a research organization, to drive the development of social needs interventions for Medicaid beneficiaries. The goals, activities, challenges, successes and lessons learned explored in this Spotlight may serve as an example for other organizations interested in developing their own state-focused cross-sector learning collaborative to identify Medicaid policy solutions.

We recently communicated via email with members of the Texas MCO SDOH Learning Collaborative about their initiative and this exchange is included below.

### Program Background

Q: What is the Texas MCO SDOH Learning Collaborative? What is the timeline and goals of this initiative?

The Texas MCO SDOH Learning Collaborative is a partnership between the Episcopal Health Foundation (EHF), Texas Association of Health Plans (TAHP), Texas Association of Community Health Plans (TACHP), Center for Health Care Strategies (CHCS), and Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to support a 12-month Learning Collaborative around health plan-led strategies for addressing social needs among Medicaid beneficiaries.

The goal of the Learning Collaborative is to create a forum for shared learning among Texas' Medicaid managed care plans to enable Texas health plans to learn from one another and from leading edge health plan and provider innovators about promising practices for designing and implementing effective social needs interventions. Facilitated by CHCS, the Learning Collaborative consists of in-person and/or virtual meetings designed to share and learn about promising MCO SDOH practices within and outside of Texas. Originally co-funded by EHF and RWJF as a one-year project from October 2019 to September 2020, EHF is funding the Learning Collaborative for its second year, from October 2020 to September 2021.

## Q: Can you describe the genesis for this Learning Collaborative – where did the idea originate?

In late 2018, EHF partnered with TAHP and TACHP to conduct the first ever survey of Texas MCO SDOH strategies. The survey highlighted that while Texas plans are committed to addressing SDOH among members, challenges remain in financing and incentivizing SDOH interventions, understanding Medicaid policies and regulations that apply to SDOH activities, and demonstrating return on investment (ROI) for specific SDOH interventions.

In presenting and discussing the survey findings, MCO leaders expressed enthusiasm and interest to learn about promising MCO SDOH approaches and practices. The idea of an MCO learning collaborative originated in a discussion between EHF, TAHP, TACHP, and HHSC in the summer of 2019. At the meeting, we had agreed to create a peer learning forum to have discussion about successes and challenges for MCOs to develop and implement SDOH strategies.

When EHF shared this Learning Collaborative idea with RWJF, RWJF became interested and connected EHF with CHCS. Building upon EHF and RWJF's previous partnerships on a Texas FQHC payment reform learning collaborative and a "right-sizing" rural healthcare project, RWJF was an important co-funder and thought partner during the inaugural year of the MCO SDOH learning collaborative. CHCS has since become the backbone organization in planning and facilitating the learning collaborative in Texas over the past two years.

## Q: What stakeholder engagement work with partner organizations was needed or helpful for forming this Learning Collaborative?

Both associations, TAHP and TACHP, are reputable organizations that represent the interests of all the health plans in the state. Additionally, HHSC's active engagement in the steering committee for the learning collaborative brought credibility to the collaboration.

**"The learning collaborative has always been a win-win for all key partners involved. Rather than focusing on the needs of one single Medicaid managed care plan, we take a sector-wide approach in planning and developing learning sessions."**

CHCS convened and facilitated regular meetings with staff from EHF, TAHP, TACHP and HHSC to review Learning Collaborative activities. The steering committee met four times over the course of the year, providing input on in-person and webinar topics, subject matter experts, and learning collaborative programming.

## Barriers & Achievements

### Q: Were there barriers or challenges to forming or implementing this Learning Collaborative that you needed to overcome, what were these and how did you overcome them?

While all four key partners are committed to advance the goal of the learning collaborative, the logistics of scheduling in-person or virtual learning session for 16 MCO staff as well as colleagues from HHSC has always been a challenge. With CHCS' assistance, we remain flexible and supportive in accommodating fluid scheduling needs and competing priorities of various parties involved.

For interested participants who could not attend the learning session, we posted a summary of the session as well as a "YouTube" recording of the session on [EHF's website](#). We encourage MCO and HHSC staff to access that information online.

## Q: What are the Learning Collaborative's findings and achievements to date?

Key achievements to date include:

**In-person meeting.** CHCS facilitated a successful in-person meeting bringing together over 50 participants with representation from 16 MCOs, HHSC, and key provider partners. Representatives from Parkland Community Health Plan, United HealthCare, Superior HealthPlan, and Community Health Choice discussed their efforts to address SDOH, operational challenges, and opportunities for alignment moving forward. CHCS led five breakout sessions - engaging non-traditional providers; leveraging financial incentives; care coordination/care management approaches; supporting formal/informal relationships with CBOs; and maternal and child health (MCH) initiatives - to better understand the challenges MCOs are facing.

**Webinar events.** CHCS organized two webinar events - one centered on MCO strategies to address social needs among high-risk mothers to improve MCH outcomes while the second focused on MCO strategies for addressing their members' social needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the first webinar, HHSC summarized recent state legislation focused on improving MCH and shared priority areas for Texas Medicaid; and CareSource Ohio provided an overview of a pilot program addressing health-related social needs among at-risk pregnant mothers. During the second webinar, Superior HealthPlan, Parkland Community Health Plan, and El Paso Health shared their strategies to meet Medicaid members' social needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Synthesizing Investment Strategies and Launching a Second MCO Survey.** EHF, TAHP and TACHP collaborated with colleagues from JSI and the Blue Shield of California Foundation to write a Health Affairs blog article comparing MCO SDOH investment strategies between Texas and California. More recently, EHF worked with TAHP and TACHP to launch a second statewide MCO survey to better understand the challenges and opportunities in addressing their members' social needs during the pandemic, which was used to inform the content of the learning session. The issue brief also pinpoints technical assistance needs of MCOs and identify potential alignment areas in policies and regulations to strengthen MCO SDOH investment.

**DSRIP Transition Plan Development and SDOH Expert Panel.** An important spinoff project from the Learning Collaborative is the current collaboration between EHF, CHCS and HHSC to convene a panel of national and state

experts to provide input on the Assessment of Social Factors deliverable, due to Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as part of Texas' DSRIP Transition Plan. As part of this effort, EHF contracted CHCS to synthesize literature in the four topic areas of (1) SDOH screening and referral practices; (2) value-based payment arrangements involving SDOH; (3) Medicaid managed care contracting requirements and incentives involving SDOH; and (4) SDOH-specific interventions related to non-emergency medical transportation, housing instability, and food insecurity. On behalf of EHF and HHSC, CHCS convened a series of virtual meetings with a panel of SDOH subject matter experts to provide inputs and recommendations. A learning session on the SDOH expert panel project occurred in October 2020.

## Lessons Learned

### Q: What are lessons learned for other state foundations or other cross-sector (foundation, state Medicaid and plan association) partnerships who may wish to partner to help meet Medicaid member needs?

**Data Matters.** The Learning Collaborative did not start in a vacuum. It was largely driven by the inaugural MCO SDOH survey findings that showed MCOs were interested in this topic but not have the know how to develop SDOH strategies. We also did not end our discussion after we completed the survey. The Learning Collaborative was conceived because of important discussions we had with HHSC leaders as well as MCO colleagues. Currently, we continue to use the second round of MCO SDOH survey to inform the content of the Learning Collaborative.

**Relationships Matter.** EHF did not know TAHP or TACHP well prior to the survey effort. We were interested in advancing the SDOH agenda with public and private payors in Texas but realized that it does not happen overnight. The survey project offers us a "win-win" opportunity to get to know each other. EHF provided survey research support while TAHP and TACHP were the unsung heroes in getting their health plans to complete the survey. We understand the importance of offering a neutral forum for health plans to learn and share their work.

**Patience Is Required.** We recognize that this a long game to strengthen the knowledge and capacity of MCOs in developing SDOH strategies. The road ahead is filled with

many unknowns and uncertainties. This work is complicated and messy. It is important to identify small wins along the way as well as to show patience, flexibility, and commitment to advance the effort.

## Next Steps & Future Opportunities

### Q: What does the future of this partnership in Texas look like?

We remain optimistic in what the Learning Collaborative could do to advance the SDOH agenda of both HHSC and MCOs. In year two of the Learning Collaborative, CHCS is partnering with us to do a deeper dive on important issues like quality improvement cost methodology, MCO-provider relationships, leveraging technology, ROI of SDOH strategies, and SDOH work improving maternal and child health outcomes. We are committed to advancing the SDOH agenda in Texas and beyond.

#### ABOUT NORC MEDICAID MCO LEARNING HUB

The key goal of the NORC Medicaid MCO Learning Hub is to serve as a source of information, expertise, and best practices to support managed care organizations in moving forward with system reform. NORC and its partner organizations identify, develop, and disseminate promising approaches and emerging opportunities for MCOs to improve the physical health, behavioral health, and social needs of their members.

Your ideas and opinions are important to us. We welcome your feedback on future Medicaid MCO Learning Hub work or programs you are working on to better serve your needs.

We want to hear from you. Please contact us at [MCOLearningHub@norc.org](mailto:MCOLearningHub@norc.org) to start the conversation or join our distribution list.

[www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/medicaid-managed-care-organization-learning-hub.aspx](http://www.norc.org/Research/Projects/Pages/medicaid-managed-care-organization-learning-hub.aspx)

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