



Massachusetts Complex Care Convening and Learning Community

Project Summary July 2021

Background

[The Brookline Center for Community Mental Health](#) (the Center), founded over 60 years ago, is a non-profit behavioral health provider serving over 4,000 people annually, meeting the evolving mental health and social service needs of children, families, and adults of all backgrounds and cultures in greater Boston. With a focus on improving access for underserved populations, its services are affordable, high quality, comprehensive, and culturally responsive.

In 2010, the Center created the Healthy Lives program, one of the first programs in Massachusetts that addressed the complex issues facing patients with a combination of medical, behavioral, and social-environmental challenges. Healthy Lives sought to address the elevated risk of disability and death faced by individuals with serious mental illness, whose lifespan is 20 years shorter than their healthier peers. Greater Boston has many health care providers, but these patients with complex health challenges typically had fragmented and frustrating care experiences. Based on early success, Healthy Lives was one of the six national sites selected by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2012 to implement a locally-tailored super-utilizer pilot project with technical assistance from the [Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers](#). Over the ensuing decade, the program has been replicated in a variety of settings, including community health centers, ACOs, and hospital-based primary care practices. It has demonstrated scalability and durability of outcomes that include better physical and mental health, decreased ED and hospital utilization, improved relationships between consumers and providers, and cost savings of over \$20,000 per patient per year.

Overview of the initial problem statement

The past decade has witnessed the rapid growth of complex care management teams in a variety of healthcare institutions in the state, including hospitals, ACOs, primary care groups, and home care agencies. Many of these programs, started as pilots within large organizations, have grown in isolation since their inception due in part to the landscape of healthcare in Massachusetts, which is driven by competitive, political, and geographic boundaries. For patients with complex needs, navigating these siloed systems leads to a lack of coordination and a fragmentation of care. Conversations with staff from these programs revealed that programs face similar challenges but progress toward overcoming them has been slow. By coming together to create a regional learning community, we can jumpstart progress, advance the field, and improve the care of patients with complex health needs.

Regional convenings project

[The National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs](#) (National Center), an initiative of the Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers and its staff collaborate with

experts across the nation to develop best practices, inform policy, and foster an engaged and accessible community to develop this work and teach it to others. Local connectivity is essential in order to create and maintain coordinated systems of care for individuals with complex health and social needs. The National Center launched the regional convenings project to catalyze local complex care ecosystems across the country by facilitating information sharing and collaboration on a regional level. Each year, the National Center holds an open request for proposal (RFP) process to select host organizations to hold a regional convening in their community. The National Center provides financial and logistical support, as well as access to national subject matter experts, to help host organizations gather local stakeholders to address a barrier to person-centered, integrated care.

There was strong congruence between the goals of the regional convening project and the need of Massachusetts providers for a learning community. Based on this, the Brookline Center's Healthy Lives Program applied to the National Center for funding and were honored to have been selected as one of six communities across the country to hold a regional convening in 2020.

Planning Process

The Center recruited an advisory committee that represented stakeholders from different elements of the local complex care ecosystem; this included providers, policymakers, payors, and persons with lived experience. The planning committee was to serve as the nucleus of a learning community. It had to be inclusive.

Second, the planning committee came to conceptualize the convening as both an end in itself and as a launch-pad for the learning community. The convening would need to engage the audience through offering practical solutions to pressing problems as well as opportunities for conversation and sharing. With support from thought leaders including the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation of Massachusetts and the Health Policy Commission, local providers, and community advocates/individuals with lived experience, this group developed a consensus about the project's mission, vision, goals, and objectives.

Vision: We envision a world where all people can live healthy lives, including those who have been historically and disproportionately marginalized.

Mission: We aim to create a state-wide community of consumers, providers, payors, and consumers that improves the lives of those with unmet behavioral, social, and physical health needs by creating positive, lasting changes in the system of healthcare delivery in which complex care is fully integrated into the spectrum of services.

Goals and Structure: We are actively building a shared complex care learning community with a kickoff convening in early 2021. Through this group, we seek to share best practices and learn from one another, accelerate the rate of program

improvement, and open channels of communication with national leaders such as the National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs. We aim to integrate the rapidly growing knowledge base into our work and community.

Objectives:

- o Build a community of consumers, providers, payors, and policymakers
- o Create of resource map of complex care programs across the state, including location, population, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and services
- o Learn about and promulgate best practices
- o Provide advocacy and leadership for supporting complex care
- o Promote rigorous evaluation of outcomes and quality

The convening was held on April 8, 2021 with over 120 attendees, which exceeded our expectations. The program began with remarks from Secretary of Health and Human Services Marylou Sudders who voiced her commitment to integrated care. We also heard from a panel of people with lived experience ([Dennis Heaphy](#), Lois Jerome, and Jaqueline Martinez) who reminded us that patients must be partners in this work. David Blumenthal, President of the Commonwealth Fund and a national leader on complex care, gave our keynote presentation and discussed the national landscape. This was followed by Rebecca Koppel of the National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs who focused on workforce development and Heidi Bossley who shared person-centered approaches for evaluation and data collection.

Several major themes emerged. Key lessons from the event include:

- Value-based care can promote quality care if it is informed by the needs of individuals served.
- Contrary to current practice, patients need to become partners in assessment, intervention, and evaluation processes. This will require shifts in the power dynamics and paradigms of medical care.
- Inclusion of peers and people with lived experience into care teams is becoming a standard of care, with important implications for workforce development.
- People with complex needs share patterns of frequent utilization of medical systems, but are otherwise very diverse. There is high need for effective typologies that can be shared across programs.
- Complex care programs need to adopt a community-based framework, in which home-based care is an essential element.
- A major challenge is finding the balance between standardization and customization. Tools like the [Blueprint for Complex Care](#) are useful in thinking about a statewide standard, but there is a need to give each team enough flexibility to tailor interventions that best meet their community's needs.

- Participation in the events and in the break-out discussions was lively, substantiating that there is considerable interest in building the Massachusetts Complex Care Learning Community.

Next Steps

The Center conducted a post-convening survey to help identify how the learning community could best be utilized and supported (see Appendix 1). Participants identified interest in many proposed topic areas, most notably integrated teams/workforce development, metrics/evaluation, and use of peers. They also identified wanting opportunities to learn such as educational webinars.

Based on this feedback, the Center has been focused on developing a structure for continuing learning and community building. Staff from the Health Policy Commission have taken a leadership role in these conversations, leading to a plan for a series of four webinars to be held over the next year on key topics. The Center and Health Policy Commission envision these as a course package in which participants will commit to attend all the sessions, which will be a mixture of presentations and participant discussions. The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation has agreed to co-sponsor the series.

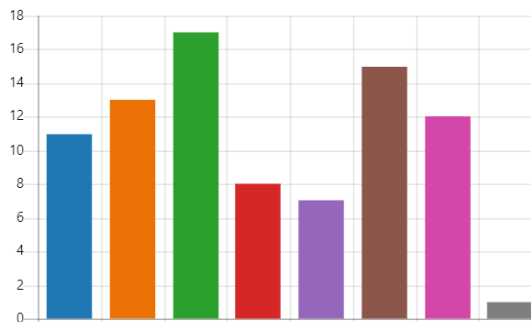
A learning community will open a path toward effective advocacy. Each of us see only a part of the healthcare system — and by working together we can identify service gaps, bureaucratic barriers, and regional funding needs that can be used by policymakers to craft new responses and best practices that can be promulgated throughout the state to serve our most vulnerable citizens.

For more information, please contact Dr. Henry White at henrywhite@brooklinecenter.org, or Megan Smith at megansmith@brooklinecenter.org.

Appendix 1

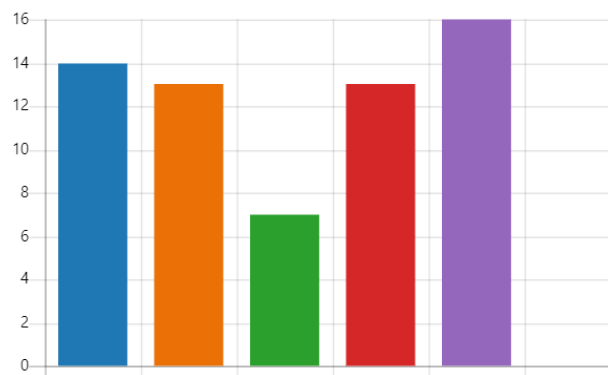
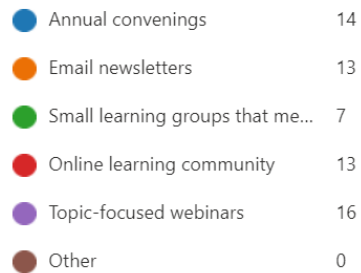
What topics are you most interested in learning more about?

[More Details](#)



How would you most like to connect in the future?

[More Details](#)



As conveners, what is the most helpful role we could play to support you in your work?

[More Details](#)

● Technical assistance and progr...	7
● Cross-program relationship b...	16
● Educational and learning opp...	22
● Advocacy	8
● Other	0

