Talking About Complex Care:

At-A-Glance Tips for Clear and Effective Communications

Complex care is a growing field that seeks to improve health and well-being for people with an array of health and social needs. This includes individuals with multiple chronic physical and behavioral health conditions who often face many barriers, such as homelessness, unstable housing, food insecurity, lack of transportation, and/or structural racism and other forms of discrimination, as well as frail older adults and people with serious illness.

Since the field is relatively new, the language used to talk about complex care has evolved considerably over the last decade and is not always consistent across organizations, sectors, and geographies. Using common messaging will help strengthen the field at large as well as enhance opportunities to support the adoption of complex care programs and strategies.

The Importance of Clear Language in Complex Care

Consistent and clear language is essential to carrying out complex care work, and for anyone working to build support for complex care programs and approaches, including providers, program leaders, consumer advocates, and communications professionals or grant writers. Clear language can help stakeholders:

- ✓ Communicate program goals and priorities to patients, families, and the community at-large
- ✓ Coordinate more effectively with patients, families, providers, and community partners to meet patient needs
- ✓ Engage institutional leaders and payers to invest in new complex care programs
- ✓ Recruit community partners to participate in existing complex care programs
- ✓ Demonstrate that existing programs **are** complex care programs
- ✓ Advocate for policy change
- ✓ Develop promotional or social materials for their programs or speak to the media

Learn More

This fact sheet is part of ***Talking About Complex Care: A Guide for Clear and Effective Communications***. The guide outlines core messages for communicating about complex care to help organizations and individuals within the field present a clear and aligned vision of the current and future state of complex care. The guide was developed by the National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs and the Center for Health Care Strategies through support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The SCAN Foundation.

Download the guide at **nationalcomplex.care/complex-care-messaging-guide**.

Center for Health Care Strategies

The National Center for Complex Health & Social Needs
An initiative of the Camden Coalition

Core Messages on Complex Care

Complex care is a person-centered approach to care that brings together patients and their families, the community, and the healthcare system to collaboratively improve health outcomes and well-being for people with complex health and social needs. Following are core messages that describe key issues addressed by complex care programs and the value these programs provide:

Our health and social systems typically focus narrowly on an individual's single need and are not designed to work together to address multiple needs, often leading to costly and avoidable care.

Many causes of poor health are best addressed through non-medical interventions that require cross-sector and community collaboration.

Complex care provides person-centered, whole-person care that addresses the multiple drivers of health and uses a multidisciplinary team to coordinate care across settings, services, and sectors.

Complex care seeks to improve health and well-being for patients, ensure access to the right services at the right time, reduce costly healthcare use, and advance health equity.

These core statements can be used together as an "elevator speech" on the value of complex care or they can be used separately and tailored for specific needs.

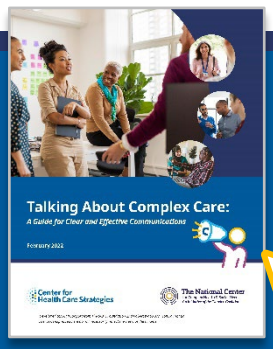
Using People-First, Destigmatizing Language

The words we use matter. The culture of complex care respects the experiences and autonomy of individuals with complex needs. Language used to describe complex care and the people it serves should accurately and respectfully refer to individuals and their experience.

Messaging

When crafting messages, it is important to be clear and concise and focus on audience needs. Following are sample complex care messages tailored for audiences at the individual, community, and systems levels:

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL	
Complex care addresses…	**A lack of person-centered care**: The existing healthcare system and workforce are not equipped to meet the needs and preferences of people dealing with multiple health challenges. **The drivers of health:** Current care delivery often focuses on patients' immediate medical issues and fails to address the social and economic causes of poor health.
Complex care improves…	**Health and well-being:** Complex care addresses challenges that interfere with a patient's ability to achieve optimal health, well-being, and quality of life. **Patient and provider satisfaction**: Complex care provides a better experience for patients, families, and providers, including opportunities to co-design care approaches.
COMMUNITY-LEVEL	
Complex care addresses…	**Rigid and fragmented care delivery systems:** Our health and social systems (e.g., healthcare, public health, social care, housing, education, etc.) typically focus narrowly on a single need and are not designed to work together to address multiple needs. **High costs due to preventable utilization:** Lack of access to necessary physical health, behavioral health, and social services often results in poor health outcomes and avoidable, and often expensive, use of services.
Complex care improves…	**Access to quality care:** Complex care helps patients get access to the right services at the right times from the right providers. **Cost and utilization:** Complex care improves services for a population that despite frequent, and often costly, use of healthcare and social services, still has poor health outcomes.
SYSTEMS-LEVEL	
Complex care addresses…	**Systemic racism and implicit bias:** Members of marginalized groups (e.g., people of color, people with disabilities) face racism, ableism, and other systemic forms of bias and oppression. These forces are also present within our health and social systems and impact the quality of care. **Chronic underfunding of essential systems:** For decades, the United States has under-resourced public health institutions, behavioral health services, and community-based organizations necessary for maintaining the health and well-being of populations and communities.
Complex care improves…	**Collaboration by reducing fragmentation**. Complex care strengthens opportunities for collaboration – within the healthcare system and across sectors and the community – to better meets patient, provider, and organizational needs. **Systems for all**: Complex care infuses a focus on person-centered and equitable care delivery into our health and social systems, and supports integrated care delivery to align with the needs of the individual.



Explore ***Talking About Complex Care: A Guide for Clear and Effective Communications*** for more about how to use language that reflects the values and goals of complex care and the people it serves. Visit **nationalcomplex.care/complex-care-messaging-guide**.