



## Ecosystem case study

# York, Pennsylvania

Ecosystems of care are composed of interconnected programs and services designed to holistically address community members' complex health and social needs. They result from organizations in a community working collectively and intentionally across sectors to better address the root causes of poor health, poor quality of life, and health inequity among populations with complex health and social needs.

In April 2021, the Camden Coalition's National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs initiative convened representatives from five ecosystems of care from around the country to participate in an 18-month Ecosystems Learning Collaborative. The Ecosystems Learning Collaborative was an action-oriented opportunity for teams to learn from peers and technical experts about how to rapidly expand and sustain cross-sector partnerships to address the needs of individuals with complex health and social needs in their communities.

This is the story of how one ecosystem of care — in York, Pennsylvania — was developed.

## About this ecosystem of care

### Ecosystem participants:

- ▶ [WellSpan Health](#)
- ▶ [WellSpan Philhaven Specialized Treatment and Recovery Team \(START\)](#)
- ▶ [Community Action Recovery Diversion \(CARD\)](#)
- ▶ [York County Department of Probation Services](#)
- ▶ [York County District Attorney's Office](#)
- ▶ [York County Reentry Coalition](#)

**Community of focus:** Individuals and families involved in the county-wide criminal legal continuum (e.g., pre-trial, jail, parole, probation) who also have behavioral health and social needs.

**Ecosystem aim:** Ending chronic use of the emergency department and preventing escalated criminal legal involvement, with a focus on improving physical and behavioral health.

**How it started:** Community Action Recovery Diversion (CARD) and the York County Reentry Coalition (YCRC) were natural partners: their missions closely align and they share leadership. Meanwhile, WellSpan Health (WSH) developed the WSH Prison ReEntry Program to connect reentrants to health and social resources upon release. When WellSpan's Specialized Treatment and Recovery Team (START), a SAMHSA grant-funded Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic (CCBHC), opened in 2021, they immediately began coordinating extensively with CARD and YCRC. The collaboration between CARD and START, whose offices are located in a connected set of office suites, allows for greater alignment of key criminal justice and county mental health case management staff and the development of strong and timely connections between health, justice, and human service systems. They joined the Ecosystems Learning Collaborative to learn more about collaborative data collection, sharing, and evaluation, and to increase their engagement with the community.

## Successes:

- ▶ **Smoother and more efficient structures and processes providing access to treatment.** At the beginning of the learning collaborative, referrals from probation and prison to behavioral health services were siloed and complex which delayed access to treatment. This could result in longer prison stays, delayed sentencing, or reoffending/relapsing. As the ecosystem grew, new structures and processes were developed that enabled individuals to connect to behavioral health services in a more timely and efficient manner.
- ▶ **They created a template for a successful ecosystem of care in other communities.** The process of building this ecosystem created a template for helping others replicate the supports in another geography. Organizations in other communities can now know who they need to work with, what organizations they should bring in, and what community partners need to be at the table because of this collaborative's success in York.
- ▶ **They identified and built value and transparency for the community.** The learning collaborative led the team to identify value beyond financial return on investment. They brought a community (consumer) advisory board into the ecosystem, softened the boundaries between community and government, and incorporated a bigger picture of community value. They shared decision-making with a community (consumer) advisory board and successfully communicated to their stakeholders big picture impacts of finding a better way of connecting justice involved individuals to healthcare.

## Challenges:

- ▶ **There was a lot of work happening at once.** The ecosystem team was figuring out how to build a CCBHC, stand up a diversion program, design a building, and hire 30 staff while also learning what an ecosystem of care was and how to build one. They had many opportunities and competing priorities during the learning collaborative, but each initiative made the others stronger.
- ▶ **There were many barriers to data sharing.** Although the ecosystem approach improved their data sharing practices, there are still barriers to sharing in the most efficient and productive ways. They ran into challenges including strict regulations, protected data, and systems miscommunicating with each other.
- ▶ **The ecosystem team needed to educate stakeholders outside the group on the importance of healthcare and social and community resources for a successful reentry.** The team held a reentry simulation developed by the Franklin County Reentry Coalition that assigned each staff member to a persona of someone exiting incarceration with various levels of needs and strengths. Each person had 8 weeks (15 minutes in the simulation) to accomplish everything they needed to do amidst the stressors of childcare, offers of drugs, and the option to sell belongings and blood plasma. By week 3, only one person had accomplished everything they needed to. This simulation helped raise staff awareness of the context of the populations they're serving and the importance of healthcare and social care support after leaving incarceration.





“As one person or one organization, it’s hard to just push at something as big as an ecosystem and hope that something happens. Especially if a community is in really early stages, I advise finding champions from a couple of different sectors. People that get it and can pull levers and make things happen that you couldn’t if you were by yourself.”

– Amy Evans, AICP – CARD Project Director

## One piece of advice for others looking to build an ecosystem:

- ▶ **Building an ecosystem is about building relationships in new and different ways.** Well-functioning ecosystems of care require institutional trust, flexibility, and responsiveness from cross-system partners with a willingness to think outside the box and partner in new and different ways.

## Next steps for this ecosystem of care:

- ▶ **A new integrated space for co-located reentry services will support the ecosystem.** A new Reentry Opportunity Center is opening soon and will provide co-located services and opportunities for new partnerships and ecosystem growth. It will also house an ongoing weekly complex case collaborative where ecosystem partners talk through specific cases, challenges, and supports.
- ▶ **A new diversion center and systems changes mean new opportunities.** A new diversion center is in development. This will provide an alternative to central booking and will be a place for health and treatment instead of incarceration. It will provide an assessment function as well as behavioral healthcare and crisis stabilization. This, along with changes in how pretrial services are assessing people, will provide the ecosystem participants with new opportunities to provide and coordinate care.
- ▶ **New collaborations will spark based on the existing structures and processes.** The ecosystem team is already noticing that new collaborations are easier. For example, the housing coalition was working on a grant and needed behavioral health support. Because of existing relationships, they were able to ask the CCBHC to support care for 18–24-year-olds and submit a grant application within a week. This ecosystem is facilitating solutions in many complex situations where before no one knew where to turn for support.



[Learn more about this ecosystem of care](#) ➔

## About the Camden Coalition

We are a multidisciplinary nonprofit working to improve care for people with complex health and social needs in Camden, NJ, and across the country. The Camden Coalition works to advance the field of **complex care** by implementing person-centered programs and piloting new models that address chronic illness and social barriers to health and well-being. Supported by a robust data infrastructure, cross-sector convening, and shared learning, our community-based programs deliver better care to the most vulnerable individuals in **Camden** and **regionally**.

The **National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs** (National Center), an initiative of the Camden Coalition, connects complex care practitioners with each other and supports the field with tools and resources that move complex care forward.



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

---

800 Cooper St., 7th Floor  
Camden, NJ 08102

**P** 856-365-9510

**F** 856-365-9520

[camdenhealth.org](http://camdenhealth.org)