

THE WILLIAM D. RUCKELSHAUS CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Collaborative Healthcare Policy



The Ruckelshaus Center provides collaborative problem-solving approaches for public policy development and multi-party conflict resolution. The Center is hosted at the University of Washington by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance and hosted/administered at Washington State University by Washington State University Extension.

The Center envisions a future in which governmental leaders, policy makers, stakeholders and citizens in the state of Washington and the Pacific Northwest routinely employ the tools of collaborative decision making to design, conduct and implement successful public policy processes.

The Need

Healthcare is a dynamic topic that continues to create some of the Northwest's most urgent and challenging public policy issues. Healthcare needs, laws and funding have changed dramatically over the past several decades making healthcare more complex and more costly.

Sustaining health, improving quality of care, and lowering costs are driven by complex policy factors:

- healthcare reform and transformation;
- aging and increasingly complex patient populations;
- a shortage of skilled healthcare providers;
- frequently fragmented delivery systems; and
- non-medical determinants of health (environmental, behavioral and others).

Many healthcare issues are interconnected with growing public health challenges in obesity, community wellness, disease prevention and even global health. Health policy decisions are also connected to environmental health, community and population health, urban and transportation planning, recreation access, and emergency preparedness for pandemic and catastrophic natural disaster.

Efficient, effective and sustainable healthcare delivery will require close collaboration and innovation from all involved parties, including healthcare providers, governments, insurers, advocates and the consuming public. Unlike some other sectors, however, health policy in the Northwest has not benefited from the systematic use of collaborative governance and neutral third party facilitation to improve policy design and coordinate delivery.

The Opportunity

A recent study by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center identified strong interest in using university-based third party neutral services to build consensus among diverse and often competing healthcare interests. Many are enthused about and supportive of the potential for collaboration to build integrative value, streamline workgroup momentum, and obtain collaborative results to address healthcare challenges. For example, the current *Healthier Washington* Initiative, State Innovation Model grant, and proposed Medicaid Transformation Demonstration Waiver rely heavily on community collaboration to develop integrated solutions to fragmented physical and behavioral health delivery.

The Center acts as a neutral resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and Pacific Northwest and assists leaders in efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. The Center has deep expertise and credibility in complex, multi-party collaborative policymaking and access to health policy resources at both the University of Washington and Washington State University. The Center also has a unique ability to involve the universities and other partners to pioneer advanced problem-solving techniques and build consensus among involved parties within and across healthcare sectors.

Our Approach

The Center's university-based third party neutral services provide an innovative, collaborative space for healthcare authorizers to build political capital and stakeholder support. Those services include:

- convening diverse parties with multiple perspectives,
- providing strategic, structured facilitation for complex multi-party negotiations, and
- providing neutral forums for involved parties to work together to build creative, integrative solutions.

The Center is seeking support to add an experienced health policy professional to build a sustainable health policy practice. The Center's Healthcare Policy Study identified university capacity and Northwest examples of integrated care delivery, new payment models, prevention and wellness, community and population health interventions, and other important public policy issues that could greatly benefit from advanced collaborative problem-solving techniques. Once the Center secures initial funding, it will complete a health policy practice strategic plan and work with its sponsoring universities and potential project partners to identify strategic projects that expand the Center's expertise and help institutionalize the use of collaborative problem-solving in the healthcare sector.

Why it Matters

Healthcare transformation is one of the most pressing issues facing Washington State's regions and communities, impacting both quality of life and economic value in the Northwest. The state of U.S. healthcare is well documented – care outcomes are among the lowest of developed countries; per capita costs are the highest; mortality rates are among the highest; healthcare as a percentage of GDP is among the highest and growing; and variance in outcomes between different U.S. regions is too wide. Health policy, program design and implementation have reached an important juncture in Washington and the Pacific Northwest.

Simply insuring the uninsured does not guarantee access to care; federal and state initiatives (including Washington state) involving healthcare reform, population health, and wellness and prevention policy are now being focused on interventions at the community and individual level. Many statewide reform goals are also dependent on new regional and local governance structures for successful implementation and outcomes. Federal and state healthcare authorizers have mandated collaboration and consensus building between these parties, requiring significant participation by those with a stake in the outcomes of healthcare policy. These new mandates and governance structures, however, often include diverse organizations with divergent interests and goals.

Advanced facilitation and other collaborative problem solving techniques can help parties attain policy consensus by providing a structured process and building integrative value. While the healthcare sector has lagged behind other sectors in leveraging this expertise, demand for consensus-building services is real, and services are needed to satisfy existing federal and state program reform goals and deadlines. The risks of not achieving consensus include withdrawal of federal funding, failed integration, increased barriers to access, lack of integrated and coordinated care, and continued cost increases of publicly and privately funded care.

The Ruckelshaus Center, as a university-based third-party neutral with relevant subject matter expertise, can serve as a trusted and credible facilitator to help achieve integrative value, policy consensus and durable, effective, sustainable health outcomes.

Kevin Harris, a national healthcare public policy expert, recently completed a 2015 Healthcare Policy Study assessing the Center's capacity to expand its involvement in collaborative healthcare policy development.

*For more information,
please contact:*

Kevin Harris, Senior Associate for Healthcare Policy
kevin.harris2@wsu.edu

William D. Ruckelshaus Center

121 Hulbert Hall	901 Fifth Avenue
PO Box 646248	Suite 2900
Pullman, WA 99164	Seattle, WA 98164
(509) 335-2937	(206) 428-3021

RuckelshausCenter@wsu.edu
<http://RuckelshausCenter.wsu.edu>

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