Can Multi-Stakeholder Community Coalitions Solve the Transparency Problem?

This brief provides insights and recommendations for the national healthcare transparency movement by drawing on the experience of 16 multi-stakeholder community coalitions (“alliances”) as they worked to produce and subsequently sustain public reports of provider performance. We address this issue as part of the evaluation of the Aligning Forces for Quality (AF4Q) initiative.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provided an unprecedented amount of financial resources and technical assistance to 16 alliances through its AF4Q initiative to “lift the overall quality of health care” in targeted communities across the country. Public reporting of provider performance was a key component of the initiative’s overall strategy to improve quality of care. The public reporting goals and expectations established for alliances under AF4Q were ambitious, with the hope that alliances could play a lead role in the emerging transparency movement by providing “models” for public reporting that could be adopted in other communities across the country.

What is the motivation for public reporting?

By the time the first alliances were selected to participate in AF4Q, there was considerable national momentum for reporting provider performance, especially quality measures. The national reporting landscape continued to evolve and expand, in both the public and private sectors, throughout the course of the AF4Q program.

There were several aspects of locally produced reports that appeared promising in adding value to transparency and deserving of support in the AF4Q initiative, specifically, locally produced reports could: (1) increase the number of sources of provider performance information and consumer awareness; (2) be more likely to draw attention to comparatively performance measures; (3) be viewed as more credible to providers; and (4) be more salient to the local health care community.

How did alliances fair in public reporting?

At the onset of AF4Q in 2006, there were still relatively few community public reporting efforts nationally; only 5 of the 16 alliances had some experience in reporting prior to AF4Q, with 2 more engaged in measure selection.

Overall, each of the 16 alliances reported physician quality measures for a period of time during the AF4Q initiative; however, there was considerable variation in report scope and sophistication. The primary contribution of the alliances to provider transparency in their communities was in the areas of physician quality and patient experience, where alliances expanded the type and amount of information available to consumers through their reporting activities. Alliances contributed the least with respect to measures of hospital performance; for the most part, alliance leaders and stakeholders viewed hospital performance reporting as an area already “occupied” by other state or national organizations.

How will alliances sustain public reporting?

AF4Q alliances experienced various degrees of success in expanding and sustaining their reporting activities during the initiative. This is not surprising, given the diverse characteristics of the alliances and the environments in which they operated. The challenges faced by alliances in maintaining their public reporting efforts were substantial, and not all alliances chose to do so. While 6 alliances seemed highly likely to continue reporting efforts after withdrawal of AF4Q funding and technical support, 4 seemed less certain, and 6 ceased reporting. Several factors distinguished those alliances that seemed likely to continue reporting versus those terminating their report efforts.
### What insights were gleaned from the experiences of alliances?

The signature accomplishment of AF4Q, related to public reporting was demonstration that alliances, differing in history and stakeholder support, could publicly report provider performance, given stable funding, technical assistance, and program guidance. However, sustaining reporting efforts proved challenging for most alliances. To enhance transparency in the future, alliances will need to be clear about what they hope to accomplish in their reporting efforts; address the challenge of funding the public reporting infrastructure; make greater use of collaborative approaches to improve reporting efficiency; and monitor and adjust to national transparency developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alliance Insight</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on provider responses as the most likely channel through which public reporting can improve quality</td>
<td>Providers are the key stakeholders in constructing reports and their buy-in is essential for reporting to stimulate quality. Involve providers early in measure selection and construction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address the challenge of funding the public reporting infrastructure from the beginning</td>
<td>Develop a sustainable funding strategy for public reporting. The most successful funding model employed by alliances relied on stakeholder “dues,” a portion of which were used to support the reporting infrastructure. Explore state funding and partnerships in states with all-payer claims databases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek out collaborative approaches to increase efficiency</td>
<td>Partner with other alliances to share data submissions and measure construction activities. Collaborate with other community organizations to avoid duplication in measure development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a strategy for responding to changes in national reporting environment</td>
<td>Alliances can make valuable contributions by focusing on resolving local stakeholder issues around reporting, assisting in the dissemination of reports produced by other entities, and facilitating provider responses to report contents, with states or national bodies assuming day-to-day reporting responsibilities, including dataset and website maintenance. Alliances can add value as “experimental laboratories” for developing and testing new measures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Where does the transparency movement go from here?

The findings of our evaluation suggest that unless alliances and their participating stakeholders see intrinsic value in reporting, funding and technical assistance may not be sufficient to motivate reporting efforts. The larger question of what entities (e.g., federal government, state governments, provider associations, alliances, or some combination) are best positioned to assume broad responsibility nationally for providing and paying for transparency remained unresolved at the end of AF4Q.