CROSS-SECTOR ALIGNMENT: BUILT TO LAST

OCTOBER 7, 2020
**National Convening Turns Virtual**

Cross-Sector Alignment: Built to Last was intended to be the national kick-off meeting for Aligning Systems for Health. It was scheduled for April 21-22 in Baltimore, Md. with the following stated purposes.

1. Enhancing understanding of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change
2. Sharing important and timely learnings and making sense of it together
3. Building community through intentional networking opportunities
4. Developing a learning system
5. Leaving in action

As a part of the preparation for the meeting a small, ad hoc team of stakeholders representing health care, public health, and social services convened to give input to the design of the event sessions. Key recommendations from the group included:

- Value the voice and contribution of individuals from the community with lived experiences.
- Ensure there is sufficient opportunity for interaction and exchange of information and ideas.
- Allow for purposeful engagement in the discussion of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person national meeting was rapidly reassembled into a series of video introductions by Anne Weiss, managing director of RWJF, and Karen Minyard, CEO of GHPC and principal investigator of Aligning Systems for Health, followed by three monthly virtual convenings. These virtual sessions retained the original purpose of launching Aligning Systems for Health, engaging in meaningful learning, building connections across stakeholders, and exploring what it means to align health care, public health, and social services.

In the COVID-19 era, now more than ever, the importance of aligning health care, public health, and social services to better address individuals’ needs and ultimately build healthier, more equitable communities is evident. There was great interest in virtual series, exceeding participation anticipated in the in-person format.

What follows is a summary of the three virtual sessions, along with links to the video recordings.
The importance of aligning health care, public health, and social services to better address individuals’ needs and ultimately build healthier, more equitable communities is evident as communities work to forge meaningful responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

**Aligning Systems for Health**, led by the Georgia Health Policy Center and supported by RWJF, is exploring the importance of alignment and developing an evidence base about what works.

**Figure 1: Aligning Systems for Health Journey Map**
Developing A Learning System

A core purpose of the Built to Last series is to engage in meaningful learning and build connections across stakeholders. Both of these stated purposes contribute to the creation of a learning system.

Within the environment of cross-sector alignment, initiatives are being implemented as part of practice and research that feed results and information into the bodies of learning encompassed in the literature and experience. To date, all of this learning around alignment has created diffuse learning meaning that a lot of individuals have bits and pieces of learning about what works, for whom, and under what circumstances. The hope is that throughout the three virtual sessions and the course of Aligning Systems for Health, these learnings will be disseminated and learnings will become consolidated, meaning that all interested stakeholders have an understanding of what works, for whom, and under what circumstances.

The COVID-19 pandemic challenges systematic learning. The following diagram was presented to illustrate that the pandemic has placed cross-sector alignment in a context that is far from certainty and far from agreement, which places us in a place of chaos.

Karen Minyard explained that it is the job of participants on the call and researchers studying cross-sector alignment to reach into this place of chaos and to grab a little piece of it, and to organize it so that rather than being totally chaotic, it becomes complex. While learnings about cross-sector alignment will remain complex, over the next years, Aligning Systems for Health will be continuously trying to bring some order to the chaos. This provides an opportunity to organize insights, learn from them, and create the consolidated learning that we are seeking.
Figure 2: Agreement & Certainty Matrix


Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change

A brief overview of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change was presented to illustrate the concept that by aligning the three sectors through the development of the core components, aligned systems will be able to have a lasting impact on individuals and communities.

By starting with individuals and communities in mind, the first virtual session focuses on a panel features organizations working in the real-world to meet the goals and needs of the individuals and communities they serve.

Why Cross-Sector Alignment Matters: Real Life Stories

The live panel featured people on the front lines who shared their own personal challenges navigating complex systems and how they are now helping others navigate those same systems.
**Vondie Woodbury**, a senior level strategic consultant with over 30 years of experience in community organizing, public policy and health improvement strategies, served as moderator of the discussion. She previously served as the vice president of community benefit at Trinity Health and was the executive director of the Muskegon Community Health Project.

**Yolanda Bell** is a CAFSI case manager at Our House in Little Rock, Ark. where she helps families maintain stability and prevents them from becoming homeless. Since 1987, Our House has provided a pathway out of homelessness for families and individuals in Central Arkansas.

**Marquis Childers** is a community engagement specialist with Access Health in Muskegon, Mich. Access Health works closely with the community to provide a bottom-up, financially-sound health coverage model.

**Josie Williams** is the director of community engagement at the Greensboro Housing Coalition in Greensboro, N.C. Josie is driven to develop collaborative strategies that integrate health and community with economic development through processes that include multisector partners in order to create sustainable and healthy communities.

Panelists spoke about their lived experience about the power of aligned systems to help and the consequences on individuals' needs when systems are not aligned.

**Insights from the Panelists**

The panelists' stories are unique to them and to the local context of the communities they are from and continue to serve, but they do contain some common wisdom.

*Listen to the people:* People in communities are the real experts on what they need. There was widespread recognition that trying to navigate misaligned system requires grit and determination. Listen to these experiences. These individuals are resilient, strong, and innovative. Further, they want their voices to be heard and respected within their communities.

*Engagement follows trust:* To involve community members in decision making, you first must spend a lot of time building trust. Without buy-in and trust from the community, they won’t show up. Basing strategies off of what the residents want and need will help build trust.

*Let on-the-ground needs guide the work:* Residents' voice should be grounding and foundational. Let these needs guide the work. A major pitfall is for organizations or funders to come in with their own agenda. Develop the agenda together with the people being served.

*Be with them:* Once a common agendas and vision is determined, use it to remind everyone to unite with the community and not for them. The priority should be what the residents want to see happen in their community. They have that lived experience and know the community best.
**Aligned systems are a service in and of itself:** Alignment of multiple systems bridges gaps and removes barriers in scheduling, referrals, and access. This in and of itself is a benefit enabling individuals to not have to choose between endless appointments and work.

**COVID-19 can be make or break:** The pandemic is shining a huge flashlight on inequities and disparities in communities. Use it as an opportunity to partner and really come together. Otherwise, it could breed further distrust.
What is a Pixel?

According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, a pixel is any of the small, discrete elements that together constitute an image (as on a television or digital screen). On May 27, 2020, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grantees shared the work they are engaged in around cross-sector alignment: What is it? What does it mean? Why does it matter? How can we use these lessons in light of the current fight against COVID-19? By bringing the pixels together, we can form a more complete picture of cross-sector alignment efforts.

Recordings from each break out presentation can be accessed here. Recordings can also be accessed for the opening and closing sessions.

Three hundred and twenty-five participants heard 19 stories of alignment from 26 presenters. The session was designed to be an interactive discussion about impactful cross-sector alignment, told through the stories of individuals with lived experience, folks engaged in the work firsthand in communities, and those supporting the work through catalytic and research
efforts. Each story is focused around a small picture image or pixel explaining the broader concept.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENTER</th>
<th>ORGANIZATION</th>
<th>PRESENTATION TITLE (with recording link)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lauren Gerlach</td>
<td>AcademyHealth</td>
<td>Happy Trails Ahead: Stay sure-footed with research as a guide to cross-sector alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrew Jager</td>
<td>American Hospital Association</td>
<td>The Partnership for Public Health: Health care and public health collaboration with community for better health for all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maliha Ali</td>
<td>American Institutes for Research</td>
<td>Where Do We Go From Here: Shared measurement as a North Star to guide alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donyel Barber and Linda Kinney</td>
<td>Kintegra Health and Care Share Health Alliance</td>
<td>Community-led Collaboration Advancing Health Equity: The Healthier Highland Evaluation Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar Carrillo Tinajero</td>
<td>Center for Community Investment</td>
<td>Moving Partnerships to Action! Using a framework to improve community investment systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alissa Beers</td>
<td>Center for Health Care Strategies</td>
<td>A Marriage Between Medicaid and Public Health: Accelerating the adoption of proven prevention strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeff Levi</td>
<td>George Washington University</td>
<td>And Then a Miracle Happens: Funding partnerships after founding funders leave the scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sean Yoo</td>
<td>Health Leads</td>
<td>Making the Pieces Fit: Aligning diverse interests and needs amidst a crisis that calls for equitable, responsible system transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Eckart and Clare Tanner</td>
<td>Illinois Public Health Institute and Michigan Public Health Institute</td>
<td>Building on a Strong Foundation: Systems aligned for health and equity supported by shared data and information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Bruner</td>
<td>Integrated Care for Kids</td>
<td>Let's Transform Child Health Care! Value = volume; physician, transform thyself; we know enough to invest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremy Cantor and Alison Salomon</td>
<td>JSI</td>
<td>Developing the Recipe: Equity and core components of alignment in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Hoornbeek</td>
<td>Kent State University</td>
<td>Pathways Community HUBS (PCHs): Aligning public health, health care, and social services?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Blackburn</td>
<td>Nemours Children's Health System</td>
<td>Strong Foundations Accelerate the Journey: What are integrative activities and how do they promote alignment to accelerate the work of cross-sector networks?</td>
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Putting the Pieces Together

RWJF grantees’ stories of alignment proved to be a fruitful means to engage others to share their stories and to begin a joint sensemaking process, of beginning to consolidate learning as part of a learning system. The hope is that as more pixels are filled in with additional stories of alignment and collaboration, we will progressively gain greater detailed clarity about what it takes to create aligned systems that are built to last. It is through identifying patterns through these stories that communities will most benefit.

Some themes emerged from the discussions.
Alignment and Outcomes: Does a commitment to the principles of alignment or lessons from communities that have achieved some level of cross-sector alignment demonstrate that some communities are in a better position to respond to crises, such as COVID-19? Some participants gave examples of unprecedented collaboration due to the pandemic, but as research and sensemaking within the Aligning Systems for Health team similarly has shown, this is a topic of much interest, but it remains too early in the pandemic response to draw conclusions.

Shifting Priorities During a Pandemic: Given that COVID-19 is requiring organizations to pivot now to urgent community needs, how can leaders ensure that momentum continues to align preexisting priorities and state health improvement plans or state equity-focused plans? How can engagement around those shared priorities continue? Participants emphasized that using
and equity frame may be an important focal point for the three sectors and an opportunity to ensure health public health has a seat at the table.

What is the Incentive? Participants emphasized the importance of having a really specific use case that drives this multisector work so that people and organizations are able to stay focused on a shared cause that has mutual benefit.

Learning Locally: Some expressed that the downside of this work is that it is very local and subjected to the context constraints of a specific community. That really encourages stakeholders committed to learning about cross-sector alignment to document how it is happening so that lessons can be pulled and shared. There was agreement that with a critical mass of local examples, there will be lessons to be gleaned. So, exercises like Pixels, along with the broader work of Aligning Systems for Health offers the opportunity to contribute to consolidated learning from these examples.
The Cross-sector Alignment Theory of Change grew out of many years of work and learning within RWJF. Since its launch one year ago, the Aligning Systems for Health team has been gathering feedback from research and practice to advance the theory of change to its next iteration.

On June 24, the virtual session, Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change Charette, invited stakeholders to publicly weigh in on the theory of change and provide input as to how it can better support the work of those implementing cross-sector alignment, including catalyst organizations, those directly involved in community implementation, researchers, and funders.

What is a Charette?

- A charette is a meeting in which all stakeholders in a project attempt to resolve conflicts and map solutions. (Oxford Dictionary)
- A charette is a term describing a period of intense design activity, often immediately preceding a deadline. (Urban Dictionary)
- The word charette may refer to any collaborative session in which a group of designers drafts a solution to a design problem. (Wikipedia)

With the goal of soliciting input that will inform the next iteration of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change, participants were charged with thinking of themselves as designers and participate in facilitated, small-group discussions about how the theory of change be modified (more or different) in a way that will better provide support and guidance to people who are thinking about and participating in alignment activities.

The Story of the Theory of Change

"The Story of the Theory of Change" was presented by Hilary Heishman, senior program officer at RWJF. She presented a "story of learning" over the last decade — external milestone events, research, and the foundation's own strategic thinking — that improved understanding of what it seems to take for collaboration of people and coordination among organizations to last so that together they can tackle complex challenges at the local, state, or regional levels.

Heishman shared that the 2017-2018 timeframe was when RWJF "put the pieces together" and committed to a cross-sector alignment strategy that strengthens the alignment among the
public health, health care, and social service systems to better meet the goals and needs of people in the community they serve, especially those most effected by racist or otherwise inequitable systems.

For the past year Aligning Systems for Health has been piloting an image of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change that depicts a hypothesis about what it takes to align these systems. It is widely understood that this is not a linear process, so the image is imperfect, but is intended to capture the key components of cross-sector alignment. Thinking about the theory of change and the image continues to evolve, especially as understanding of the role of equity, power and accountability, and people's role in systems changes. Yet, the need to make sustainable progress toward improving health and well-being in communities, especially among populations most at risk of inequities, is clearly understood.

The Theory of Change

Participants were verbally guided through the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change and how the theory of change is guiding the work of Aligning Systems for Health.

Figure 3: Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change

It was further emphasized that learnings emerging from this session will help to inform the next iteration of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change, along with insights gained from a
comprehensive literature review, stakeholder dialogue, expert interviews, case studies and briefs, supported research, and an upcoming GHPC sensemaking session.

Insights Gained

Participants were broken up into small, facilitated conversations around the theory of change and were asked to provide feedback based on their experience. Three questions guided these conversations.

- How do you see cross-sector alignment playing out in your work?
- How is that work captured in the framework here?
- What’s missing from the framework?

Some common themes emerged in the breakout chat rooms.

- A good fit: Many participants reported that overall, they thought it was a good model and that they could see themselves and their work in it.
- Two-dimensional limitations: Recognizing the limitations of a two-dimensional model, there was a desire for the theory of change to be more dynamic and express the interconnection, particularly of the core elements.
- The three sectors: The theory of change assumes that the three sectors are willing and able to work together. While implicit in several of the "buckets of factors" some participants thought that trust and relationship building should be explicitly called out.
- Structures to support alignment: There was question whether or not the core elements strongly enough call out the structures that need to exist — the building the infrastructure — to support these kinds of partnerships.
- Community voice: There was significant tension in terms of where to place community, community engagement, and the voice of community in the theory of change. As currently structured, having strong community role and engagement at the bottom, while undergirding the model, just seemed too simplistic for folks. Given that it permeates all of the model, it should be thought about probably more intensely or explicitly across the diagram. Additionally, there was discussion that community voice is not just about engagement of community-based organizations, but rather community members and individuals with lived experience and their role in helping to direct this work. There was also a desire, possibly in the glossary, to better understand what the mechanisms are to have a stronger community role and enable people to participate.
- The "glue": The "stuff that happens in between" isn't quite captured in the theory of change. While understood to be invisible in the diagram, these softer elements are happening in between the structures in the model.
• **Power**: Recognition of power, power dynamics, and stewardship may be missing from the theory of change.

• **Equity**: There was widespread sentiment that equity is underplayed in the visual depiction of the theory of change and that it should be shown as an overarching theme.

GHPC researchers will further evaluate the recordings from the breakout sessions in order to distill insights on the depiction of the theory of change, what can be altered, and what is missing. This feedback will be incorporated into an August 2020 sensemaking session on the next iteration of the Cross-Sector Alignment Theory of Change.