Medicaid Agency-State Public University Partnership: The Value Proposition for Public Universities

Public Universities: *Why Partner with Your State Medicaid Agency?*

In many states, research centers at public universities are partnering with their Medicaid agencies to conduct data-driven policy analysis and support program development, monitoring, and evaluation. These state-university partnerships offer unique advantages as states strive to serve as laboratories for state innovation and address the many challenges facing Medicaid programs today, including the opioid crisis and the coronavirus pandemic. Importantly, partnerships offer new opportunities for cross-disciplinary research and engaged scholarship involving faculty from medicine, public health, public policy, data science, economics, and other disciplines.

A Shared Vision and Trusted Relationship. State Medicaid agencies can be trusted partners. As in public universities, public service is integral to the mission of state Medicaid agencies, which work to promote the health and well-being of low-income families and individuals with disabilities. State Medicaid agencies share public universities' commitment to achieving the triple aim of better care, improved health, and lower costs; ensuring analytic integrity; and being a responsible steward of state data and other resources.

Expedient and Cost-Effective Contracting. In most states, state agencies and public universities can enter into non-competitive interagency agreements. Public universities offer a lower cost structure than private sector contractors. While many states limit indirect costs in interagency agreements, long-standing state–university partnerships can offer sustained support to the university and oftentimes flexibilities and opportunities not available through federal or private research grants.

Federal Medicaid Match. State agencies can take advantage of the federal Medicaid match when partnering with state universities, matching state dollars with federal dollars either through project-specific claiming or by including the interagency agreement with the university as a line item in the Medicaid administrative budget.

Expertise in Data Science and Advanced Analytics. Universities are at the forefront of innovation in data science. Quantitative social scientists with expertise in advanced analytics and predictive modeling that can inform program development and operations and guide decisions about allocation of scarce resources. Universities can also support Medicaid agencies in designing a state-of-the-art IT infrastructure that supports advanced analytics and data linkages across agencies.

Dependability and Deep Knowledge. University research centers that partner with state Medicaid agencies offer constancy during transitions in state administrations. University faculty and staff possess valuable institutional knowledge that cannot be readily duplicated, nor can their expertise and experience in analyzing state administrative data. For this reason, many universities have benefited from long-term partnerships with state agencies that transcend many administrations.
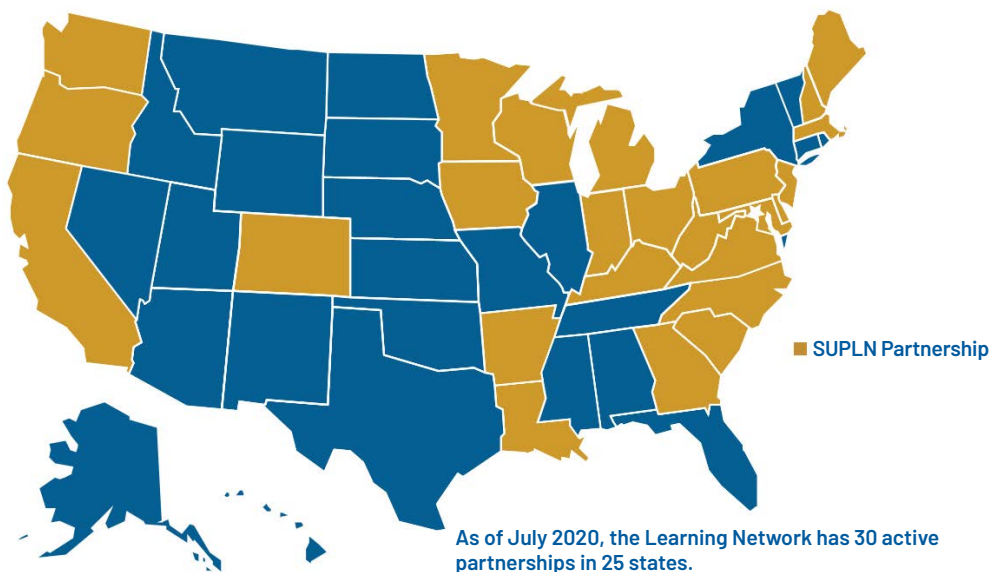
Policy Relevant Research that Benefits Communities. By partnering with state agencies, public universities have an opportunity to conduct research and engaged scholarship to advance their mission of public service. Many universities are involved in community engagement activities addressing population health, violence prevention, and social justice that impact the lives of Medicaid beneficiaries. State agencies are seeking new approaches to addressing the challenges communities face in promoting health and well-being.

Robust Resources Beyond Research and Advanced Analytics. Public universities offer expertise in IT infrastructure building, data security, and workforce training. Many deploy IT teams to assist with new technology applications and partner with state agencies on internship and fellowship programs.

WHAT IS THE STATE–UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP LEARNING NETWORK (SUPLN)?

SUPLN was established in 2014 to support the growing network of state–university partnerships. Currently, Medicaid agencies in 25 states have active partnerships with 30 public universities. AcademyHealth's SUPLN is managed by their Evidence-Informed State Health Policy Institute whose collective mission includes working with state health policymakers and researchers to advance health by moving evidence into action. SUPLN has four important functions.

1. **Technical Assistance to New Partnerships.** SUPLN provides consultation to new and developing partnerships on relationship building, establishment of interagency agreements, and accessing federal Medicaid matching support for projects undertaken by the state–university partnership.

2. **Information Sharing and Professional Development.** SUPLN offers a forum for the exchange of state and federal health policy news and research ideas and encourages the sharing of best practices and lessons learned. SUPLN convenes a two-day annual meeting for members, distributes monthly newsletters, and hosts periodic webinars and collaboration calls.

3. **Rapid Response Networking.** SUPLN members have ready access to a trusted, responsive network of state agency staff and university researchers to inquire about policies and programs, share insights, and exchange information. Members have readily available answers to that question frequently posed by state policymakers: *What are other states doing?*

4. **Medicaid Research Partnerships.** SUPLN works with federal funding agencies and private foundations, state agency staff, and university researchers to develop multistate Medicaid research initiatives that address policy-relevant questions.

■ SUPLN Partnership

As of July 2020, the Learning Network has 30 active partnerships in 25 states.

SUPLN's **Medicaid Outcomes Distributed Research Network (MODRN)** was launched in 2017. MODRN uses a common data model and standard analytic code to produce and aggregate state analyses of Medicaid data. MODRN's first project—funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse—is focusing on the quality and outcomes of opioid use disorder (OUD) treatment among Medicaid beneficiaries in 13 states.

For more information, please visit the SUPLN website.