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Health Policy Forums

Achieving Population Health: What Evidence Will We Need?

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This Forum presentation focused on the growing importance of adopting a population health approach to national health policy. Lisa Simpson, President and CEO of AcademyHealth, reviewed current federal policies promoting population health and described the national research agenda.

Dr. Simpson began her presentation by offering a detailed overview of the mission and programs of AcademyHealth, a non-partisan organization that represents a broad community of people committed to using health services research to improve care. It supports the development and use of rigorous, relevant, and timely evidence to: increase the quality, accessibility and value of health care; reduce disparities; and improve health. It has over 4,000 member organizations and a number of interest groups. AcademyHealth's new strategic priority areas include: delivery system transformation; public and population health; and value and health care costs.

Critical to the field of population health is the formation the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). Initially established by the Affordable Care Act (ACA), it is now an independent organization. Simpson explained that PCORI provides a new emphasis on the patient's voice in research and it helps people become more informed about health decisions.

Simpson explained the relevancy of some key provisions in ACA related to population health. For example, the ACA addresses the need for systematic approaches to definition, funding, evidence base, communication and the need for cooperation.[1] It also encourages the development and use of common metrics to measure effectiveness. Other programmatic provisions include the National Prevention Strategy, Prevention Fund, Benefit Designs to Promote Wellness, and Employer Wellness Programs. Simpson emphasized the use of the population health "lens" for implementing health reform.

The field of public health services research was eloquently summarized by Dr. Simpson. She defined it as a field of inquiry examining the influence of the organization, financing, and performance of the public health system on population health outcomes. She also discussed public health services research needs assessment and the importance of filling the evidence gaps. Simpson concluded by raising the questions: *How can policy and systems change improve outcomes*? *How do we measure these improvements in population health?* Clearly, more evidence and more funding are needed to answer these questions.

For more information on AcademyHealth visit: http://www.academyhealth.org/

REFERENCES

1. Bovbjerg et al. What directions for public health under the Affordable Care Act? The Urban Institute Health Policy Center. November 2011. http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/412441-Directions-for-Public-Health-Under-the-Affordable-Care-Act.pdf. Accessed March 31, 2012.