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# HEALTHCARE EXECUTIVE

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**EXECUTING  
ON YOUR  
SAFETY PRIORITIES**



American College of  
Healthcare Executives  
*for leaders who care*®



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## Leading From the HELM

*Navigating the choppy waters from competition to collaboration.*

The problems facing the healthcare industry are too complex and wide ranging for any one sector to solve. Improving health outcomes and quality of life requires an ecosystem view that recognizes the need for diverse sectors—including providers, payers, life sciences, public health and others—to operate interdependently.

Working as an ecosystem, the sectors have the potential to deliver higher quality care and value, while meeting critical imperatives such as patient-centricity, population management, cost reduction, improved coverage, optimization of value-based payment models, and leveraging technology and innovation.

Cross-sector collaboration is complex and requires time and skill. Successful efforts recognize the value of working together and acknowledge each sectors' contributions to meeting the challenges of the industry at large. Working across the ecosystem requires organizations to grapple with issues of reimbursement, investment, uses of technology and decision rights.

Stakeholder organizations must engage in an open dialogue and share their respective business objectives. And financial and operational challenges must be confronted to generate collaborative solutions. Leaders who can cultivate

partnerships to drive value and transform health are at the core of this work.

### Case Study

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, one leading payer organization realized it could not manage healthcare costs alone. The payer population was overwhelmingly unhealthy, rural, poor and served by primary care providers that were largely small, independent and lacking in electronic records or infrastructure. The payer recognized that effectively managing costs would require it to collaborate with providers and give them the resources needed to effectively manage patient populations.

Working with multiple stakeholders from the provider sector, the payer designed a program that supported the state's largest family practice physician association and several hospital-based systems. The program strengthened the relationship between the payer organization and the providers and supported primary care physicians while also respecting their independence.

The collaboratively designed solution created an IT infrastructure that included EHRs, access to claims data and pharmacy claims data, and clinical data pulled from EHRs to populate registries. The registries provided

physicians with new insights and allowed the payer organization to provide care coordination and outreach for the providers. The data also enabled the payer organization to understand quality and performance metrics and implement a reward system for providers who delivered outstanding care to patients with chronic diseases.

By the end of the first year, the program improved quality of and access to care across chronic diseases and reduced the total cost of care by approximately \$25 per member, per month.

### Becoming an Ecosystem Leader

The kind of cross-sector collaboration described in the case study requires the adoption of an ecosystem mindset, commitment of time, development of trust, alignment on business priorities and belief in the value of collaboration.

Leadership is key to navigating these hard issues, and the Healthcare Ecosystem Leadership Model outlines the competencies leaders must demonstrate to create successful cross-sector solutions.

The HELM is organized into the four capabilities described below, followed by examples of how HELM leaders demonstrate these capabilities to create collaborative population health solutions.

**Envision the future.** First and foremost, HELM leaders build and evolve a clear vision of the direction their organization is heading and what is required to achieve success. Thinking with an ecosystem mindset, they generate ideas about how collaborating with organizations from other sectors can contribute to that success. HELM leaders also:

- **Generate “what-if” ideas** by seeking out views from other people and not jumping to conclusions
- **Iterate those initial ideas and integrate them with the ideas of others** by actively listening to other perspectives and acknowledging views and concerns of diverse ecosystem stakeholders
- **Continuously evolve the vision** by examining and adapting their assumptions as they learn about different views and approaches

**Align stakeholders.** In creating their vision, HELM leaders identify and engage with stakeholders from other sectors. As engagement develops, they incorporate the input and interests of others so a shared solution emerges. These conversations develop the trust and respect necessary to overcome the tension and resistance that may emerge as solutions are defined. It’s crucial to:

- **Seek connections with others** by actively engaging with stakeholders, not overstating their own position and soliciting contributions from others
- **Take concrete steps to enable the group to come together and build relationships** to ensure there is sufficient time and opportunity to build trust

- **Demonstrate respect for diverse expertise, perspectives, interests and values** by placing their own assumptions to the side, asking questions and working to understand each stakeholder’s organization
- **Encourage open dialogue** by getting everyone involved and focusing the conversation on inquiry rather than advocacy

**Manage boundaries and obstacles.**

When developing collaborative solutions, HELM leaders navigate obstacles by focusing on opportunity and the purpose of the partnership. They willingly initiate the difficult conversations necessary to resolve points of tension. They also:

- **Support constructive conflict** by encouraging productive engagement, keeping an open mind, disagreeing respectfully and identifying common ground
- **Focus on opportunity in the face of disagreement** by viewing conflict as part of the process, listening to objections, acknowledging concerns, redirecting conversations to the shared purpose and seeking ways for all parties to contribute
- **Resolve tension** by working with others to generate options and solutions that meet the shared interests of the group and achieve common goals

**Act and learn.** Advancing the shared vision usually requires teams to act under uncertain conditions. Effective HELM leaders approach action steps as a learning process. They give and receive feedback and seek ways to iterate the vision and plans to achieve success. HELM leaders also recognize how important it is to:

- **Define plans and take concrete action** by outlining and initiating tactical steps with critical performance indicators
- **Act despite uncertainty** by taking reasonable steps that keep the plan in motion and avoiding overanalysis and inaction
- **Use feedback to adapt plans and advance the vision** by identifying which objectives were achieved and which were not, as well as which parts of the solution worked and which need to be changed

We believe that an ecosystem approach is essential to realizing significant changes to the health of our nation, and that leadership is the key ingredient to that success. Development of the HELM skillset, mindset and capabilities for individuals and teams within and across sectors is possible and will enable the industry to realize cross-sector solutions to our most pressing healthcare challenges. Development takes time and concerted effort. We invite you to explore the health ecosystem leadership approach and to develop your capabilities as a HELM leader. ▲

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