

By Rick Friedman and Anita B. Light



Building a Culture of Analytics: Health and Human Services Symposium for Action

Since 2013, APHSA has surveyed its membership on topics related to the integration of health and human services (H/HS). Of particular note was the use of analytics and its ability to drive decision-making on service provision. Survey participants noted in 2013, in 2015, and again in 2018, that there has been some increased use of analytics over the last five years. Yet, for the most part, their information systems and the orientation of their staff were primarily focused upon addressing issues related to program integrity and tracking program efficiencies. Using these systems to identify the root causes of the client problems or contributing to the solution of structural barriers within the organization or community are largely untapped analytical capabilities at this point, at least in the field of human services.

As a result of these findings and in discussions with Optum, an APHSA Strategic Industry Partner, we proposed convening a small number of senior-level H/HS thought leaders to talk about their experiences applying analytics to a diverse set of issues in child welfare, Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, behavioral health, and a host of other H/HS disciplines. Thus began the nearly year-long planning effort that went into developing the *Health and Human Services Symposium for Action* (the Symposium) that was held at the University of Chicago's Booth Business School's downtown Chicago Gleacher Center, on July 20–22. More than 60 state and local H/HS officials from 18 states and 3 localities were in attendance, together with APHSA

APHSA
American Public Human Services Association

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES ANALYTICS SYMPOSIUM FOR ACTION

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staff, consultants from Optum and The Lewin Group, and faculty from Chapin Hall—the University of Chicago's pre-eminent research center dedicated to promoting the well-being of children, youth, and families.

Purpose of the Symposium

The Symposium was designed to explore current practices and operations taking place in the H/HS

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system relative to building capacity and creating a culture that actively supports the use of analytics to achieve sustainable positive outcomes for program participants. Informed by programmatic and population-based data, whole family approaches, and continuous improvement feedback loops, the Symposium’s focus sought to shine a spotlight on what’s working and what’s not, and why.

In addition, the Symposium sought to focus upon H/HS organizations achieving their desired future state as they evolve from the traditional model rooted in regulatory and statutory compliance, to one that works seamlessly across multiple programs by engaging whole communities in addressing root causes of the challenges faced by their program participants.

Pre-Symposium Survey

Leading up to the Symposium, APHSA conducted an electronic survey of those who expressed interest in attending to develop a clear understanding of what the participants hoped to get out of their experience. Chief among these were to (a) bring back tools, models, and ideas to share with others that could help them improve their analytics work at home; (b) gain an understanding of the critical steps in a roadmap to help move their organizations toward a culture of analytics; and (c) learn what others have done successfully in the field. The Symposium planners were interested in learning more about the biggest obstacles attendees face as they seek to make use of analytics. While the responses varied, knowing what questions to ask, enhancing staff analytic competencies, and building trust across organizations so they were comfortable contributing data and expertise to analytic efforts were all near the top of the participants’ list.

Agenda Topics

Desired Future State. Tracy Wareing Evans, APHSA’s President

The HSVC and Analytics

HSVC Stage	Analytics Used To
Regulative	Improve program-specific INTEGRITY
Collaborative	Improve CLIENT SERVICE + EXPERIENCE
Integrative	Generate ROOT CAUSE–DRIVEN solutions at the FAMILY level
Generative	Formulate ROOT CAUSE–DRIVEN strategies at ENVIRONMENTAL and STRUCTURAL levels

and CEO, began the Symposium by describing a desired future state for H/HS in which the well-being of all people is achieved by (a) influencing modern approaches to sound policy, (b) building the capacity of public agencies to enable healthy families and communities, and (c) connecting leaders to accelerate learning and generate practical solutions together.

Nature of Evidence as It Relates to Analytics. Senior Fellow Fred Wulczyn, from the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall, underscored that we do not need newer technology solutions so much as we need to bring our human capital up to speed by using the tools we have more effectively. Analytics should not be viewed as the end, but as the bridge between data and evidence. Ultimately, we need to use evidence to support decisions.

Human Services Value Curve and Analytics. Because analytics is so highly dependent upon the people and the culture in which it is being applied, Phil Basso, APHSA’s Vice-President of Strategic Mobilization, discussed a common lens for realizing the potential of people and organizations—the Human Services Value Curve—as it relates to analytics. At each stage, analytics can be used to achieve different goals (see chart above).

Future of Analytics. As analytics evolves, data must be made actionable, according to Ali Shirvani-Mahdavi, Vice President of Analytics Consulting, Optum. Predictive analytics is becoming commonplace, and we must now begin to look at how

such analytics can help inform decisions through outcome tracking and improvement, coupled with proactive analytics that use artificial intelligence to perform automated actions.

State and Local Case Studies Discussed at the Symposium

Indiana: FSSA Creates Customized H/HS Analytic Solutions. Secretary Jennifer Walthall of Indiana’s Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA), shared the steps her agency is taking to develop an in-depth analytics capacity and infrastructure. The FSSA is currently marrying their internal H/HS program subject matter expertise with Medicaid and health data housed in the state’s Management Performance Hub to gain a better handle on the current opioid crisis.

Massachusetts: Using Analytics to Achieve a Data-Driven Response to the Opioid Crisis. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, under Governor Baker’s leadership, has relied on data analytics to drive a highly targeted approach to addressing the opioid crisis that includes increased access to treatment and recovery services and strengthened education and prevention efforts. Using the data they were able to collect and analyze, Secretary Marylou Sudders, of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), received a Medicaid 1115 Waiver to expand treatment options, including

the addition of recovery coaches. In addition, MassPAT (Massachusetts Prescription Awareness Tool), an on-line prescription monitoring program, was instituted and required by state law to be used each time prior to a prescriber seeking to issue a prescription for a Schedule II or III narcotic, as well as prior to a prescriber prescribing a benzodiazepine to a patient for the first time.

Tennessee's Analysis and Response to High Placement Turnover Rates in Child Welfare. Britany Binkowski, Special Assistant to the Commissioner of Tennessee's Department of Children's Services, described the state's use of analytics to identify, analyze, understand, and create policy and programmatic solutions to a situation in which more than 50 percent of teens and delinquent youth in Nashville experienced a placement move within seven days—higher than anywhere else in Tennessee. The Office of Child Welfare Reform reviewed a variety of possible contributing factors—from entry reasons and placement types over time to individual youth assessments and the availability of foster homes. It became apparent that what Tennessee thought was a model system was one that had several structural deficiencies. These were quickly addressed by expanding the network available to meet the need of youth entering custody and decrease the need for moving a teen from one placement to another.

Washington State's Use of Analytics to Make Better Public Assistance Policy Decisions. Assistant Secretary David Stillman, of the Washington Department of Social and Health Service's Economic Services Administration, described his state's Integrated Client Database that successfully links individual level administrative data from separate data systems both inside and outside the H/HS enterprise. Having such a rich database, and the analytical tools necessary to apply to a variety of interconnected policy questions, Washington State has been able to analyze and respond to such issues as the effect of receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

“Data matters ... but stories convince.”

**JENNIFER WALTHALL, SECRETARY,
INDIANA FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES
ADMINISTRATION**

concurrent benefits on the reunification of children following placement in out-of-home care, trends in food and medical assistance following termination of TANF benefits due to time limits, and outcomes for the TANF home-visiting program relative to engagement with WorkFirst activities.

Michigan's Road to Integrated Service Delivery. Chief Compliance Officer, Cynthia Greene-Edwards, of Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services, described her state's activities to achieve a holistic, person-centric view of consumer needs and services, following the merger of Michigan's Department of Community Health with the Department of Human Services. Through the creation of an enterprise data warehouse and a statewide care management portal called Michigan CareConnect360, they were able to develop detailed client profiles, create interactive care plans, and undertake population-based analyses among other activities. The portal was recently made available to more than 1,800 foster care workers and juvenile justice workers to develop comprehensive H/HS case plans.

Dakota County (Minnesota) Created Community Wellness Indicators by Mapping Their Services to the SDOH. Deputy Director of Dakota County Community Services, Stephanie Radtke, Minnesota's third largest county, discussed the integrated delivery system they have developed by using the Human Services Value Curve as a guide when developing strategies and indicators for each of the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) categories—environmental health, safety, food and nutrition, employment and income stability, health and well-being, housing stability, transportation, and education. The county has now mapped all of its services to these

indicators and has begun to study the impact of service on the drivers of health and well-being, such that they can keep, modify, or limit services accordingly.

Texas' Plan for an Integrated, System-Wide Performance Management and Analytics System. Deputy Executive Commissioner of Performance with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Calvin Green, shared how Texas focused on relationship building to develop success measures across the enterprise.

Breakout Roundtables

Over the course of the Symposium, the participants discussed their respective journeys on the road to creating a culture of analytics. While many believed they were making good progress, others highlighted challenges, many of which appeared to be quite common. Among the related lessons:

- 1. Leadership, in the form of an executive champion or sponsor, makes a big difference.** Such champions are critically important in socializing the application of analytics at the staff level so that people on the front lines understand its value.
- 2. Understanding what is required relative to privacy and confidentiality is a critical step.** There remains much ambiguity over what the federal and state rules are on these topics and clarity is essential.
- 3. Success in creating a culture of analytics is based on building trust.** Participants underscored the importance of building effective bridges into the community to show how analytics positively affect them and to identify success measures and a common vocabulary as important first steps.
- 4. Data segmentation remains a wide-spread challenge.** As several roundtable participants pointed out, “We have a lot of data, but little useful information because it is very ‘siloe’d’ and not everyone has access to it.”
- 5. Asking the “right questions” is critically important.** A common challenge is that “the producers of the data don't know what is helpful

to the users, and the users don't know how to frame their questions for the producers to effectively make use of the data they have."

6. Having access to model agreements—Data Use Agreements, Requests for Proposal, and Advance Planning Documents—would save much time, energy, and resources.

Participants were asked to formulate the actions they plan to take over the next 6–18 months to continue their journey toward making more and better use of analytics in their organizations at home. Each participating team took away tangible next steps for moving forward, shaped around three general tactics: work first on changing the culture, connect with

the state/agency chief information officer and other agencies to gain their support, and learn more about data-sharing agreements and memoranda of understanding.

Take-Aways from the Symposium

In the end, embedding analytics is as much about system change as it is about data science. It is, therefore, just as important to find executive champions and people capable of serving as translators between the program staff and the technical staff as it is to identify data scientists who understand the fundamentals of using analytics to drive change. Fortunately, there is a growing list of examples, within H/HS organizations at all levels of government, where

analytics are being used effectively today. To the extent the Symposium was able to shine a spotlight on some of these leaders and practices, as well as spark a renewed spirit of enthusiasm for continuing to push the frontiers of analytics in our world, the participants, the speakers, the underwriters, and APHSA are encouraged to continue holding additional webinars, seminars, and, quite possibly, more symposia in the future. 

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How Can Programs Support Self-Regulation and Goal Achievement?

Human services programs can apply the science of self-regulation and goal achievement in three primary ways to improve people's progress toward self-sufficiency. First, programs can support self-regulation skills. Many evidence-based interventions can help to develop self-regulation skills among children and adults. These include interventions such as cognitive behavioral therapy, which focuses on changing patterns of thoughts and beliefs, and thus behaviors; mental contrasting with implementation intentions, a behavioral strategy that helps people consider why their current reality does not match their desired future and supports them in developing a plan to achieve their desired goals; and mindfulness, an approach to helping people direct attention to the present and the associated

feelings and thought patterns in an effort to redirect thoughts and feelings while reducing stress.

Second, programs can focus on supporting the goal achievement process. These types of approaches can focus on any stage in the process, including discussing mind-set and readying people for growth and change; scaffolding (providing structured support) to the goal achievement process by collaboratively setting goals and laying out action steps while encouraging people to engage in the process more and more independently; and reminders or nudges that draw people's attention to specific information and promote motivation. These activities not only promote goal achievement, but also provide people with an opportunity to practice self-regulation and potentially improve those skills.

Third, programs can consider how their policies and structures may ease or burden participants' already taxed self-regulation skills. Reducing the cognitive burdens associated with complex application procedures

and challenging logistical aspects of program enrollment and attendance, as well as providing clear information, are ways that programs can create an environment that makes it easier for participants to fully use their self-regulation skills and engage in a process to achieve goals.

Despite a strong scientific basis for the importance of self-regulation skills generally across the lifespan, much remains unknown and untested. In particular, little is known about how particular skills interact to support goal-oriented behavior and the ways in which self-regulation and goal achievement training influence outcomes across human services sectors. Research is needed to address whether and how strengthening skills and facilitating their use leads to improvements in key employment, self-sufficiency, and well-being indicators and evaluation of new interventions, including studies of their implementation. Such research is critical to understanding the real potential of these concepts to improve program participant outcomes.