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

State Medicaid Agencies: *Why Partner with a Public University?*

In many states, Medicaid agencies are partnering with research centers at public universities 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 of policy innovation and address the many challenges facing Medicaid programs today, including the opioid crisis and coronavirus pandemic. Public universities can offer state agencies in-depth research and policy expertise in medicine, public health, public policy, data science, economics, and other disciplines.

A Shared Vision and Trusted Relationship. Public universities can be trusted partners for Medicaid agencies. They embrace public service as an integral component of their mission along with research and education. Health-focused research centers and Medicaid agencies often share a 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 can also often offer a lower cost structure than private sector contractors.

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 strong analytic and technical skills can provide 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 help Medicaid agencies design state-of-the-art IT infrastructure that supports advanced analytics and data linkages across state agencies.

Dependability and Deep Knowledge. Public university research centers offer stability during changes in state administrations. Many university faculty and staff engaged in state agency partnerships have been doing this work for many years and possess extensive institutional knowledge.

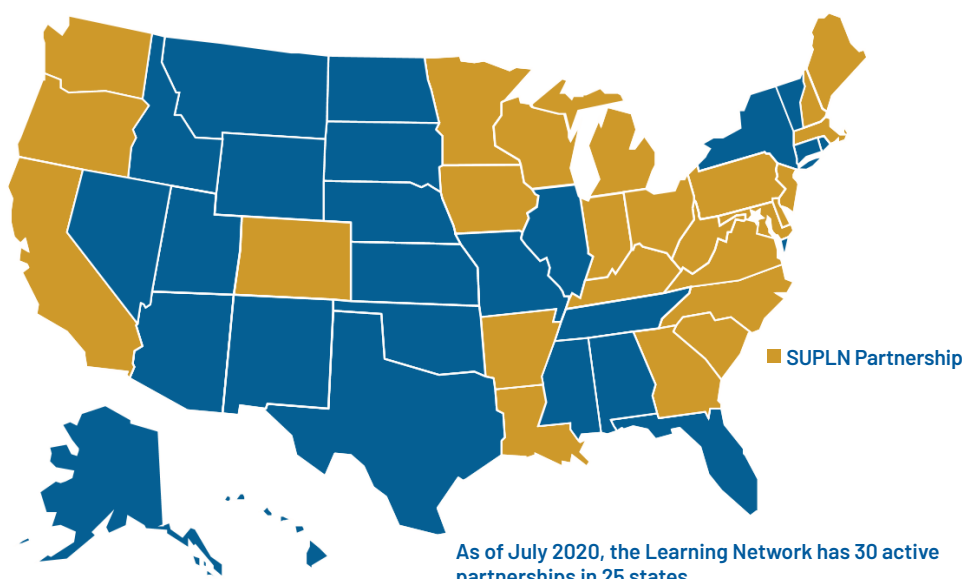**Understanding of State Health Policy and Agency Needs.** University researchers engaged in state agency partnerships understand how to balance the needs of state agencies with academic rigor. They regularly engage with state and local stakeholders and understand the state health policy landscape. State agencies pose the research questions and collaboratively work with university researchers to ensure questions are addressed to expeditiously inform policymaking.

Infrastructure and Other Resources. Public universities offer expertise in IT infrastructure building, data security, and workforce training. Many are involved in community engagement activities addressing population health, violence prevention, and social justice issues that affect Medicaid beneficiaries.

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 mov-ing 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.