

Success Story

Bridging Disability and Aging to Maximize Capacity: The Oklahoma Aging and Disability Alliance, LLC

Introduction

The U.S. health care system is undergoing dramatic changes as it shifts from one focused on volume to one focused on outcomes and value. Medicare and Medicaid programs are under pressure to better plan for, coordinate and deliver appropriate, high-quality care across care settings and payment models. Public budget pressures will intensify this focus on effectiveness and efficiency. And although there are many unknowns about the future direction of health care delivery and payment, the entities responsible for health care will continue to look for ways to reduce costs and improve quality by addressing the social determinants of health such as housing, employment, nutritious food, access to community services, health care, transportation and social support.

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) are key players that can help health care entities address these factors through the services they offer, such as in-home services, evidence-based health promotion/disease prevention programs, case management and care coordination, caregiver support services, transportation, and meal programs. This gives CILs and AAAs the opportunity to diversify their funding streams and potentially increase revenue, while maintaining their mission focus— to support persons

with disabilities and older adults to live successfully and independently in their homes and communities.

This case study highlights a unique collaboration between the CIL and AAA in the Tulsa, Oklahoma area and the factors that contributed to embarking on a business collaboration—The Oklahoma Aging and Disability Alliance, LLC. For this case study, Carla Lawson, Executive Director of Ability Resources (the CIL) and Clark Lewis, Executive Director of Indian Nations Council of Governments (INCOG AAA) were interviewed. The authors are grateful for the time



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they spent answering questions and providing additional information for the study.

Purpose

The purpose of the alliance is to strengthen the position of Ability Resources and Indian Nations Council of Governments to meet their mission by expanding community services and receiving payment for those services from health care entities such as hospitals and insurers. The Oklahoma Aging and Disability Alliance, LLC (LLC) was established to help achieve this aim.

The LLC allows Ability Resources and INCOG to strategically position their organizations as a unified entity that offers an array of services greater than what their agencies provide separately to meet the needs of a wider target population. Comprised of an aging organization and a disability organization, the LLC offers a unique and broad array of services. This is attractive to health systems or other payers looking for community-based organizations with which to contract. Another purpose for the LLC is communication and marketing. Rather than parsing out which agency provides which service, the collaboration offers potential payers a comprehensive listing of services. Currently, the Alliance is exploring contracts to offer services such as case management, evidence-based fall prevention and chronic disease self-management programs, and nursing home diversion.

Structure

The LLC was established as a single-member LLC, which means that one member is in the lead role—in this case, Ability Resources, Inc. The LLC is governed through the five-member LLC Board of which three members represent Ability Resources and two members represent INCOG. Executive

directors of both organizations serve on the Board. The total cost of developing the LLC was \$3,500 including the cost of the attorney and CPA fees.

The LLC was established over a five month period in 2015. The work in 2016 focused on relationship building with health care entities, assessing the market, and laying the ground work to cultivate contracts with health care payers. The collaboration is now pursuing potential contracts for Veterans Directed Home and Community Based Services and fall prevention programs. The collaboration will use a mix of existing agency staff and independent contractors who will be hired when agreements with payers are finalized. Staffing and contractor configuration will depend on the work to be performed as determined by the agreement with the health system payer.

Factors Contributing to Success

Ability Resources and INCOG have a long history of collaboration beginning over eight years ago when they partnered on a transportation initiative that sparked a lasting collaboration between the organizations. Taking the collaboration to the next step with an LLC then seemed like a natural progression. Ability Resources and INCOG found the services they offered were complimentary: The CIL provided services in transportation, housing, and case management while the Area Agency on Aging provided Older Americans Act funding for services such as nutrition, in home care, health and wellness, family caregiver support and other supportive services. Their collaboration at the local level is also indicative of changes at the national level with CILs

and AAAs both housed at the Administration for Community Living.



“In this time of stagnant government funding, both our networks needed to be better positioned to seek out new business opportunities. The process of developing a LLC challenged our mindset of being grant-funded entities; to one where we began to understand how new business opportunities can support our long-term sustainability.”

-Clark Miller, Director, INCOG AAA

Lessons Learned

The Oklahoma Aging and Disability Collaboration learned several lessons through their work in establishing an LLC:

Expect a Learning Curve. The learning curve is long and may have “rabbit trails.” Going down one path and then retracing steps and going a different direction may happen and may actually provide more opportunity. The Oklahoma Aging and Disability Alliance learned not to be discouraged. Developing a legal structure and giving important decisions appropriate consideration and buy-in takes time.

Working with Health Care. It is important to be prepared to spend a lot of time building relationships to enable contract discussions. There is often turnover at these agencies that sets relationships back. Understanding the “pain points” of the health sector as well as the requirements of insurers’ contracts, and then being able to incorporate that knowledge into a discussion with a potential business client takes time and practice.

Legal Services. Legal services were important for writing and filing LLC paperwork and providing guidance on the process. However, it is important to

recognize that attorneys will not necessarily have knowledge about the aging or disability networks, much less knowledge of a collaboration representing both networks, and they will need education. Documents that the attorney prepares may need substantial re-works—it is easy to underestimate legal expenses.

Choose A Structure Carefully. Ability Resources and INCOG decided to be a single-member rather than multi-member entity because they valued having one organization that was in the lead. With this structure, they can add additional minority members at a later time if they choose. Additionally, the structure of an agency may lend itself to the lead role. In the case of the Oklahoma Aging and Disability Alliance, Ability Resources as a non-profit organization had more flexibility to be a lead agency than INCOG which operates under a council of governments structure. A single-member LLC is just one type of legal structure that can be selected—other options include corporate non-profit or multi-member LLC. Different structures offer different benefits and challenges that should be considered.

Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) Will Ask About Scaling Up. MCOs will want to know about

capacity to expand. The Oklahoma Alliance has been straightforward in these conversations—capacity to expand hinges a lot on reimbursement rates. A next step may be to assess the rate necessary at different expansion levels to provide services.

Prepare for Challenges and Maintain Open Lines. In developing the LLC, Ability Resources and INCOG recognized that challenges will undoubtedly happen and they have committed to keeping lines of communication open when challenges do arise. For example, one potential challenge that has been discussed is if the AAA, represented by two Board members, were to be consistently out-voted by the three Board members representing Ability Resources, the CIL. INCOG and Ability Resources have committed to re-discussing their collaboration if that happens. With the Alliance built upon several

years of prior collaboration, the AAA and CIL feel confident that most challenges can be resolved if identified and addressed.

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