

## Lessons Learned from Community Engagement

HealthierHere is non-profit organization dedicated to helping all people in King County improve their health and wellbeing. We partner with providers, community organizations and consumers to catalyze, innovate and test new and better ways to respond to health and social problems so the systems can work better for everyone. At the heart of our work is an understanding that many factors affect our health, and a belief that everyone should have the opportunity to live a healthy life. HealthierHere is committed to moving beyond the clinic and hospital walls by addressing a whole person's needs, building strong partnerships between healthcare, behavioral health and social service systems to address social determinants of health and implementing large-scale improvements in our delivery system that reduce health disparities. HealthierHere believes that transformation efforts should be driven by those most impacted by changes in the system and has embarked on large scale community engagement efforts as part of our work.

HealthierHere is contracted by the state to serve as the Accountable Community of Health (ACH) for the King County region. ACHs are regional collaboratives that bring together health and social service partners, local government, managed care organizations, advocates and consumers to provide local oversight around population health and wellness, and support initiatives such as the Medicaid Transformation Project (MTP). As part of the MTP, HealthierHere is working on a set of innovation targets for our region to prevent disease, promote well-being, and improve the quality of life for residents in our region.

## Response to Questions

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### Question 1 – Community Engagement Strategy

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Authentic community engagement is central to HealthierHere's vision, mission, values and way of working. To ensure that authentic community engagement is a commitment, as opposed to a concept, HealthierHere embeds community engagement within its governance structure and program planning, design and implementation. HealthierHere strives to: (1) respect and recognize the strengths within our communities; (2) recognize that those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution; (3) consult with community early and often; (4) value the time and expertise of community participation; and, (5) listen to, and act on, the expertise that is offered.

Community voice and participation are part of the governance of HealthierHere. HealthierHere's twenty-six (26) member Governing Board includes five (5) seats designated for community coalitions, consumers, and community health boards. Additionally, 4 seats are designated for local tribal nations including Seattle Indian Health Board, as well as the Cowlitz, Muckleshoot and Snoqualmie tribes. Representatives of community and tribes sit as equals at the

table, together with leaders from hospitals and health systems, managed care organizations, and others responsible for the delivery of healthcare and social services in our region. Including community voice in the governance of HealthierHere has not only provided accountability for HealthierHere's commitment to community engagement, it has ensured that community is engaged in the foundation of its work and has assisted in building, and maintaining, relationships with community partners.

The Community and Consumer Voice Committee (CCV) serves as the primary vehicle for community engagement and community accountability within HealthierHere. The CCV convenes community leaders, community based organizations (CBOs), Medicaid enrollees, and others committed to advancing health equity in King County for the purpose of incorporating community voice into HealthierHere's governance, daily operations and MTP planning. The CCV is a formal committee of the Governing Board, formalizing the Committee's role in the HealthierHere governance structure. CCV members represent critical stakeholders working with diverse populations, including racially and ethnically diverse populations, immigrants, refugees, and those who statistically experience health inequities such as individuals with behavioral health conditions or who are experiencing homelessness. The CCV meets monthly and provides guidance, advice, and input into HealthierHere's design, implementation planning and decision-making processes to ensure that community supports to advance health equity are in place, while also working to ensure that changes to the healthcare system reflect the priorities of those served and that the system becomes more culturally and linguistically responsive.

HealthierHere is also taking steps to engage Community-based Organizations (CBOs) and community groups to deepen community engagement. HealthierHere is funding a small grants program to build capacity within community to increase participation in HealthierHere activities, including reaching out to CBOs' respective focus populations, especially non-English-speaking populations to engage them in the work. This small grant program will be used to create capacity for CBOs to attend HealthierHere committees and workgroups, to bring information about HealthierHere's work and innovations to communities, and to support CBOs to bring community and consumers together via focus groups and other community events to gather information about how to make systems work more effectively for those most impacted by the transformation work. The small grants program is being developed and administered by the CCV through a contract with the Center for Multicultural Health (a well-respected Community-based Organization grounded in community solutions).

The Governing Board has dedicated resources within HealthierHere's budget to support the CCV and small grants program. In addition, HealthierHere has budgeted resources to provide stipends directly to consumers and community members to support participation on committees and workgroups and cover transportation and other costs associated with participation.

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## Question 2 – Centering Community Voice in Planning, Design & Decisions

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The CCV has assisted in the co-design and co-creation of solutions and plans developed by HealthierHere. The CCV is involved in co-designing HealthierHere’s comprehensive community engagement plan which includes: (1) direct outreach to community members who utilize Medicaid services – paying specific attention to those who are experiencing health disparities to ensure that their voices are included in project design, planning and implementation; (2) utilizing an equity tool in HealthierHere’s planning and decision-making processes; (3) building a network/coalition of CBOs and community groups working in partnership to advance health equity in King County; (4) identifying community priorities and solutions related to eliminating health disparities; and, (5) maintaining accountability for HealthierHere’s work within community.

The CCV has also helped to co-design HealthierHere’s innovation targets under the MTP including, but not limited to:

**HealthierHere Initial Project Design:** Community members and CBOs participated in designing HealthierHere’s Project Portfolio through participation in Community Learning Sessions and Project Design Teams throughout 2017.

**Project Implementation Planning:** CCV members are being invited to serve on project implementation planning committees where they will co-design project implementation strategies and identify CBO and community partners necessary to advance transformation efforts.

**Governing Board Participation, Membership and Committees:** Community members/CBOs/coalitions/tribes currently comprise 35% of the Governing Board’s membership. Consequently, community voice informs all of HealthierHere’s decision-making. These members also serve on the Governing Board’s Executive, Transformation, Performance Measurement and Data and Finance Committees to further co-design all aspects of innovation planning and finance.

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## Question 3 - Leading with Equity

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HealthierHere’s work is deeply rooted in the following values established by the Governing Board: (1) Equity; (2) Partnership; (3) Results; (4) Community; and, (5) Innovation. HealthierHere’s working definition of equity acknowledges the systematic inequities that affect health including power differentials, racism, etc. It reads, “HealthierHere leads with equity. We work to eliminate disparities in health and well-being and address the current power dynamic and structural racism in our healthcare system that perpetuates inequities.” This value serves as a guide for HealthierHere’s work, including community engagement. HealthierHere shares power at its Governing Board and committees by working to ensure everyone, including community and consumers, have a voice and vote and that no one system dominates. Public comment is also

held prior to all major decisions that are made by the Governing Board to ensure all voices can be heard and considered.

Membership of the CCV is ethnically, culturally, linguistically and economically diverse. Members also conduct outreach to their respective communities and within their respective organizations to highlight community identified priorities and solutions to address systematic inequities and elevate them so that they can be incorporated into transformation planning.

The CCV developed, and HealthierHere's Governing Board adopted, an Equity Tool for use in HealthierHere's operations and activities, including community engagement. Utilizing this tool illuminates potential unintended consequences and unconscious bias that may impact decision-making and community engagement. HealthierHere intentionally approaches community engagement work in a humble, thoughtful, transparent manner and values each interaction with community.

HealthierHere includes discussion and presentations about authentic community engagement at its Governing Board meetings and will be conducting ongoing trainings to ensure that community engagement and leading with equity is intentional and not an afterthought. Leading with equity in commitment, conversation, planning, decision-making and action are intentional strategies to address systemic inequities in HealthierHere's work.

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#### Question 4 – Achieving Success Through Living our Values

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HealthierHere is a new organization; consequently, it is premature to determine the success of its efforts. However, HealthierHere is hopeful that the foundation it has laid will lead to authentic community engagement. That foundation includes, but is not limited to:

**HealthierHere Values:** The Governing Board adopted five (5) values to guide its work – all of which acknowledge the important role of community engagement. HealthierHere's values are: Equity, Community, Partnership, Results, and Innovation.

**Governing Board Structure:** The governance structure of the Governing Board designates 35% of the Governing Board seats for community and/or consumer voice through CBO, community coalition, tribes and consumer seats.

**Community and Consumer Voice (CCV) Committee:** The CCV is a formal committee of the board with equal weight and authority of other Governing Board Committees.

**Resource Allocation:** HealthierHere has allocated \$5.3 million dollars in 2018 to support non-traditional, community-based social service agencies in system-wide transformation. HealthierHere has also allocated \$350,000 in 2018 for use by the CCV to assist in the implementation of the CCV's community engagement plan. A portion of those funds will be

utilized to support a small grants program to resource and build capacity for CBO and community group engagement.

**HealthierHere Organizational Structure:** HealthierHere created a Senior Management Level position of Director of Equity and Community Partnerships to ensure the strategic implementation of community engagement within all areas of operation. This position will be supported by a Community and Tribal Engagement Manager further ensuring capacity to prioritize engagement work. HealthierHere is committed to hiring staff who are dedicated to eliminating health disparities through authentic community engagement and utilizing an equity lens in their work as represented in our interview questions and the composition of our interview panels.

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### Question 5 – Growth Opportunities and Considerations

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While HealthierHere tries to be thoughtful and intentional in its interactions with community, it still faces potential challenges and obstacles inherent in time-limited, quantitatively measured results-based initiatives. Efforts of this nature often fail to account for the value of building authentic relationships that create sustainable change. It is much easier to measure tangible “activities”, but it is harder to measure, and report, the lasting impact of cumulative activities.

Competing priorities, time limitations, institutional and structural inequities coupled with the urgency of the need for system-wide transformation all create a potential for challenges, obstacles and missteps in this work. HealthierHere seeks to build relationships with community partners in a manner that builds agency with community, removes barriers to transformation efforts and creates a model of authentic community engagement as a way of doing business. Thus, HealthierHere is centering the following principles in all community engagement efforts to mitigate the potential risks inherent in authentic outreach and engagement efforts:

**How deadlines are met is more important than just meeting the deadline:** One of the greatest challenges to community engagement related to the MTP arises from the tension between needing to meet very quick/aggressive deadlines and the reality that authentic community engagement is predicated upon trust and relationship building. Consequently, HealthierHere prioritizes the way that we engage with partners rather than rushing community to check and arbitrary community engagement “box.”

**HealthierHere is a steward of public information:** While HealthierHere may not be positioned to act on all information received through engagement interactions, it is important to ensure that information gets into the hands of those who can act.

**Communicate for understanding and transparency:** The MTP is full of complex jargon in which the very intent of the work often gets lost in translation. Consequently, HealthierHere is committed to maintaining transparency with community and ensuring effective and accessible

communication both in languages that are representative of the communities we seek to engage as well as the translation of very complex concepts and ideas about the Medicaid program and system transformation in ways that are easily understood.

**Manage expectations:** There simply are not enough resources to address all solutions and ideas that partners will be able to offer related to the MTP. As a result, HealthierHere needs to be clear about its commitments and decision-making process, especially related to the allocation of a limited pool of financial resources.

**Live our values:** HealthierHere's values of equity, partnership and community engagement are more than just words, they are a lens that guides everything that HealthierHere does. Operationalizing what it means to lead with those values within all aspects of the organization and Governing Board processes will ground the work, the way HealthierHere works and mitigate the missteps that we anticipate will be made along the way.

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### Question 6 – Our Hope

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**Regional Momentum for Change:** A foundation has been established in King County for equity and social justice work that centers on community voice. This work has been led by community and has been institutionalized by City and County Governments through the King County Equity and Social Justice Initiative and the Seattle Race and Social Justice Initiative. At the same time, other sectors including philanthropy, education, criminal justice, housing, transportation and healthcare systems are all incorporating principles of equity and social justice within their work.

**Unveiling the truths about health disparities:** A great deal of work has been done to collect and analyze data related to health disparities. Once disaggregated, the data is clear and undeniable: race, place and economics matter when it comes to health outcomes. HealthierHere is committed to continue to unpack disaggregated data and regularly monitor progress to judge success toward improving health disparities within the region.

**Building from the ground up:** As a new, start-up organization, HealthierHere can build an organization that is founded upon equity and authentic community engagement. With strong values of equity and community engagement, a commitment to partnerships and the latitude to innovate and do things differently, HealthierHere is poised to experience different outcomes and influence change within the healthcare system. With leaders who not only espouse those values, but live those values, HealthierHere is hopeful that its work will have a lasting impact toward improving the overall health of all community members in King County.