Executive Summary

Introduction
When pursuing a public health initiative, collaborators must develop both a strategic plan and sustainability plan to help guide the implementation process and produce purposeful short- and long-term outcomes that improve population health. While strategic planning is vital to navigating key decisions, thought must also be given to ensuring that fundamental tools are in place to ensure long-term success.

This learning guide is intended for established collaborative bodies made up of numerous organizations that are embarking on a joint population health initiative.

What is Strategic and Sustainability Planning?
A strategic plan is a roadmap for implementation that allows stakeholders to assess whether goals, objectives, and metrics of an initiative are met. A sustainability plan focuses on the necessary steps to assure efforts are sustained over time. Integrating sustainability planning into the development of a strategic plan ensures the initiative is goal-oriented, effectively executed, and leads to maximum impact and longevity.

The Discovery Phase: First Steps toward Developing the Strategic Plan
The discovery phase is a set of critical steps to consider prior to beginning the strategic and sustainability planning process: identify needs of the target population, develop a market assessment, and map assets.

Needs Assessment
A needs assessment uses quantitative data and/or qualitative research—existing or newly undertaken—to identify the highest priority challenges of the target population, the current state of resources to address these challenges, and thus establishes the strategic priorities. The needs assessment aims to be an unbiased data source that helps guide decisions to ensure the collaborative will provide the most value for the target population.

Market Assessment
Market dynamics should be considered before developing a strategic plan. These dynamics include the evolving healthcare landscape and organizations; changes in local, national, and state regulations or policies; payer reimbursement changes; and patient or consumer trends and how these changes and trends will impact implementation.

Asset Mapping
Successful execution of a population health initiative relies on community assets. If these are sparse, the strategic plan must include a plan to build or acquire assets. Stakeholders should thus identify the community assets and resources that are available and can be leveraged to execute the strategic and sustainability plans which will also help control costs, minimize waste and duplication, and assure effective use of time and effort. Commitment of resources is fundamental to successful execution of and participation in a collaborative initiative.

Elements of an Effective Strategic Plan
Using the market and needs assessments to inform the plan, a strategic plan should identify the process of creating a program or initiative to address the needs of a community. There are seven strategic planning steps:
1. Identify goals and objectives.
2. Prioritize goals.
3. Write a charter for your overall plan that identifies the main goal(s) of the plan. C
4. Design solutions/initiatives based on priorities and available resources to address identified issues.
5. Build a framework that illustrates a systematic process and visual way to understand the pathway to the expected outcomes.
6. Develop an evaluation framework.
7. Establish a governance structure around the strategic plan.

Strategic planning ensures stakeholder commitment and provides the roadmap to success, while sustainability planning looks at what is needed to guarantee the program succeeds over time. Combining them under one umbrella strengthens the potential for success for the future for the collaborative.

**Sustainability Planning**

Sustainability planning should begin as soon as the strategic planning process begins and can be imbedded within the strategic plan. Many of the same elements that are crucial to a good strategy, including identifying goals, assessing risk, and building and maintaining positive relationships, are also important to sustainability planning. The creation of a sustainable population health initiative should be a priority during the development and execution of a strategy. The needs assessment, market assessment, strategic plan, charter, work plan, logic model, and other tools that provide ongoing oversight into the group’s activity and achievements will also be a roadmap for sustainability. When planning to sustain a collaborative initiative the following elements should be considered:

- Flexible Programming.
- Use timely and effective communication to manage stakeholder relationships.
- The power of inclusion – every partner has a voice.
- Identify and manage conflict quickly.
- Manage turnover in the collaboration by effectively onboarding new members.
- Build capacity so the work can be sustained.
- Maintaining your initiative after the funding ends.
- Managing sun setting of an initiative.

**Conclusion**

This guide outlines a series of crucial steps and considerations necessary to ensure stakeholder buy-in and develop a strategic plan that is sustainable over time to develop goal-oriented, impact-driven population health initiatives. It is based on the University of Chicago Medicine’s 11-year experience convening the South Side Healthcare Collaborative (SSHC) – a network of over 30 federally qualified health centers, free and charitable clinics, community hospitals, and an academic medical center. The guide gives examples from the SSHC that are illustrative of the steps needed to plan and execute an initiative successfully. In the case of the SSHC, thousands of patients were educated about the importance of primary care—costs of care and emergency room visits also decreased. Such positive outcomes led to expansion and ongoing investment into the initiative.