This factsheet features the key elements of sustainability success for a population health initiative. It is based on experiences of the University of Chicago Medicine’s (UCM) 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.

**Flexible Programming**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Initiatives should be tailored to the needs of each organization, allowing for adaptability and ultimately leading to greater membership engagement and value. Standard practices and procedures are necessary for consistency. However, it is important to leave room for autonomy based on the needs of unique organizations.

**Use Timely and Effective Communication to Manage Stakeholder Relationships**

Leaders must be intentional about regular and ongoing communication with stakeholders. While a variety of channels can be used, the goal is to create an environment where everyone feels they can freely receive and share information.

**The Power of Inclusion: Every Partner Has a Voice**

Understanding the needs of stakeholders and community members is integral to creating a mutually beneficial and satisfying collaboration. Host regular feedback sessions, solicit new member input, and engage in team building exercises to ensure stakeholder engagement throughout the process.

**Identify and Manage Conflict Quickly**

The most effective way to address conflict is to develop and implement a problem resolution methodology to identify, manage, and mitigate conflict while maintaining healthy group relationships. The leadership team should work with members to address concerns and determine the best way to move forward.
The Project Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO Chicago)—an innovative effort to expand access to specialized care for vulnerable, underserved communities by using advanced communications technology—was implemented after SSHC members identified a large volume of resistant hypertensive patients who needed specialty care at member clinics and were waiting months to see specialists due to limited availability.

Although ECHO Chicago started with training primary care physicians to treat resistant hypertensive patients, it has evolved to include a variety of specialty areas such as childhood obesity, Hepatitis C, Risk based women’s health, and integrated primary and behavioral health.

Benefits of the effort include:
• The ability to bring academic medical center expertise together with primary care providers on the ground
• Enables underserved patients to receive state-of-the-art, evidence-based care for complex chronic conditions within the familiar surroundings of their medical home.
• Training primary care providers on the ground to treat prevalent specialty care conditions builds capacity of the physicians to be able to take care of their patients in an environment with limited specialty care resources.

After recognizing these benefits and the value of building capacity within their health centers, more SSHC member organizations are joining ECHO.

The Elements for Successful Sustainability Planning

Manage Turnover in the Collaboration by Effectively Onboarding New Members
Proper onboarding should include personal meetings and the provision of documents that outline your group’s history, mission, and vision. Assign a point of contact to be responsible for seamless integration of new members into the group.

Build Capacity so the Work can be Sustained
Capacity building should occur at the operational, programmatic, financial, organizational, and community levels to ensure stakeholders can efficiently and effectively execute their tasks and guarantee long-term sustainability. Consider training, workshops, and financial assistance to build skillsets and strengthen the two-way flow of knowledge and expertise.

Maintaining your Initiative After the Funding Ends
Begin identifying opportunities for ongoing funding early. Consider a diverse pool of funding such as grants, individual donors, philanthropic giving, giving campaigns, corporate contributions, and membership fees and dues as options to sustain funding.

Managing Sunsetting of an Initiative
When ending a program, develop and follow a well thought out plan that includes timelines, task leaders, a communication plan, and outreach to other stakeholders. Select someone to manage execution of the plan to guide activities and phase out the initiative.