

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PA

SAFETY NET RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

**February 2020
Community Update**



Report prepared by
HealthSpark Foundation
www.healthspark.org



A NEW VISION FOR THE MONTGOMERY COUNTY SAFETY NET

Why we need the Safety Net Resiliency Initiative

The Montgomery County safety net system provides vital support to our community. The safety net system is comprised of organizations that support the physical, emotional, and financial well-being of people, families, and neighborhoods. It catches people when an unexpected crisis hits—like a sudden illness or job loss. It provides necessary services during vulnerable times in our families' lives, from early childhood through retirement. The safety net provides valuable resources that give all people the opportunity to thrive in a society that often predetermines opportunity based on zip code, race, gender, or social strata.

Yet, as vital as it is to our community's health and well-being, the Montgomery County safety net system is fragile:

- Safety net providers are faced with insufficient funding, burdensome regulations, lackluster technology solutions, and overworked staff.
- Public and private support is shifting away from safety net services, and the margins nonprofits operate on are becoming even thinner as a result.
- As the county's demographics shift, safety net providers are challenged to serve an increasingly diverse population.
- Stigma of using safety net services often prevents people from reaching out for help before issues have reached a crisis level, making services more expensive to deliver.

And, as our community experiences growing inequity and disparity, the safety net is challenged to address deeply rooted social issues like discrimination and access to opportunity in meaningful ways.

We're at a crossroads, where the safety net system is tasked with greater responsibility than ever before, without the resources it needs to meet these challenges.

Economic and demographic challenges precipitating the Safety Net Resiliency Initiative:

- **Nonprofit financial instability:** A 2017 report of the financial health of nonprofits showed that 40% of the region's nonprofits operate with zero or negative operating margins, and 13% of human services nonprofits are technically insolvent.*
- **Cost of living:** Montgomery County has the second highest cost of living in the five-county Greater Philadelphia region, where a family of four needs to earn over \$100,000 per year just to pay for necessities like housing, transportation, and childcare. This is over 6 times the minimum wage.**
- **Race and gender inequity:** Montgomery County has a worse race and gender wage gap than the state and nation. Women of all races in the county earn 75% of what men earn, compared to 79% in PA or 80% in the US. However, Black/ African American women and Hispanic/ Latina women experience an even greater gap in the county, earning 68% and 52% of what White men earn, respectively.***
- **Growing cultural diversity:** Montgomery County has the highest proportion of foreign-born residents in the five-county area, at 10.6% of the population. This population has been steadily increasing, up from 10.3% in 2015.****

*"The Financial Health of Philadelphia-Area Nonprofits." October 2017.

Oliver Wyman, et al. Available on www.HealthSpark.org.

**Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator, www.epi.org.

***The Status of Women in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania: 2018 Report." The Montgomery County Foundation, Inc. Available on www.mcfoundationinc.org

****Data retrieved from Data USA (datausa.io).

These challenges led us to create the Safety Net Resiliency Initiative. **This 10-year effort aims to improve the foundation of the Montgomery County safety net system so that it can remain financially sustainable and resilient, while also doing a better job of meeting the needs of all of our residents.** The effort is community driven, where our success depends on each of us to fundamentally shift how we work together.

In this Initiative, we dare to have bold vision for a new future in Montgomery County. Join us.

OUR VISION for the Safety Net

We envision a resilient and financially sustainable safety net that allows anyone in Montgomery County to access high-quality, coordinated, equitable, and culturally appropriate services no matter who they are, what they need, or where they live.



Our 5 Goals for the Safety Net Resiliency Initiative:

Collaboration becomes the new way of doing business: Providers make strategic, intentional, and systemic collaboration the standard approach for addressing consumer and community challenges.

Momentum grows in size and scope: The number of people, organizations, and sectors actively engaged in the Initiative increases, as do the activities the Initiative undertakes.

Knowledge deepens: Providers and others grow a deeper understanding of community needs and consumer perspectives through more regular and meaningful engagement practices.

Data and evidence are used routinely: Quantitative and qualitative data is gathered and evaluated by diverse perspectives to inform, evaluate, and plan.

Adaptive systems leaders are developed across the safety net: Systems leadership is employed at all levels within safety net organizations and across the system.

How to get there? We've identified 6 key strategies for reaching these goals, outlined on the next page.

HealthSpark Foundation serves as a funder and convening partner for this Initiative. However, we are just one of many organizations working towards this vision. As a private independent foundation, HealthSpark has a unique capacity to invest in catalytic change on behalf of the entire Montgomery County safety net, while continuing to align our work with our partners.

6 KEY STRATEGIES

How we're bringing the Safety Net Resiliency Initiative to life

INNOVATION LAB

- Safety net practitioners encouraged HealthSpark to support systems change through a new way of grantmaking that would allow community partners to test new ideas, build relationships, and pilot systems change opportunities. In response, HealthSpark launched the Innovation Lab in 2018.

COMMISSIONED RESEARCH

- Research projects allow us to take a deeper dive into local data and perspectives and scan the nation for promising practices to craft better policies and programs for our safety net.

ADVOCACY COALITION

- Public advocacy efforts for single safety net sectors or policies have long been uncoordinated. An Advocacy Coalition is building to create a network of aligned and mobilized partners to advocate on behalf of the safety net as a whole.



COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

- Partners need a time and place to share ideas and contribute to the Initiative as it grows. The Community of Practice brings together nonprofits, government, philanthropy, residents, and others to promote the vision and culture of the Initiative.

COMMUNICATIONS CAMPAIGN

- The safety net sector needs a fresh set of messaging strategies, so HealthSpark is engaging a PR firm to craft a new narrative that promotes the value of the safety net system and destigmatizes use of the system.

SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

- Training leaders and board members to increase their capacity for leading systems change.

2019 HIGHLIGHTS

of the Montgomery County Safety Net Resiliency Initiative

Community of Practice attendees

139

Unique organizations attending
Community of Practice

109

2019 Innovation Lab Grantees

10

Innovation Lab grant funds distributed
in 2019

\$316,050

Organizations participating in System
Leadership Capacity Building program

14

Policy recommendations for Your Way
Home developed through research on
advancing racial equity

27

Focus groups held to inform Initiative
next steps

7



**"People are hungry
for engagement,
sharing, and
breaking down
silos."**

**2019 Community of Practice
attendee**

The Innovation Lab provides grant funding to support systems change projects that will support the safety net in becoming more equitable, coordinated, culturally appropriate, and financially sustainable.

Systems change means realigning the underlying relationships, functions, incentives, and motivations to achieve a greater level of well-being and impact for all people. Rather than focusing on providing direct services, systems change work focuses on changing policies, practices, and relationships between partners. Most importantly, systems change can't be done by one organization alone. Systems change requires bringing together local communities, nonprofits, governments, businesses, donors, and others to jointly work towards a shared vision, recognizing that each partner will need to work differently in order for the change to be successful and sustainable.

The vision for the Innovation Lab is supported by Equal Measure, a nonprofit evaluation and consulting firm, and Capacity for Change, LLC, a public interest consulting group.

Systems change means realigning the underlying relationships, functions, incentives, and motivations to achieve a greater level of well-being and impact for all people.

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT

The Innovation Lab

In our 2020 Innovation Lab, HealthSpark is offering two types of grants to support systems change:

- Design Grants, which are short-term grants to support planning, research, and design of potential systems change projects
- System Impact Grants, which are long-term grants to support implementation of a systems change strategy

2020 Innovation Lab grants will work towards systems change through:

- Changes in policies and practices among service providers, policy makers, and funders
- Growth or depth in peer networks and support
- Improvements in public perception and awareness
- Enhanced service access and alignment
- Increase in quality and cost-effective outcomes

HealthSpark's priority topic areas for 2020 included:

- Improving access to safety net services (location, language, etc)
- Addressing racial, gender, or other inequities in services or outcomes
- Improving the system's response for households living "in the economic middle"
- Improving system coordination to better serve people with multiple cross-sector needs

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT

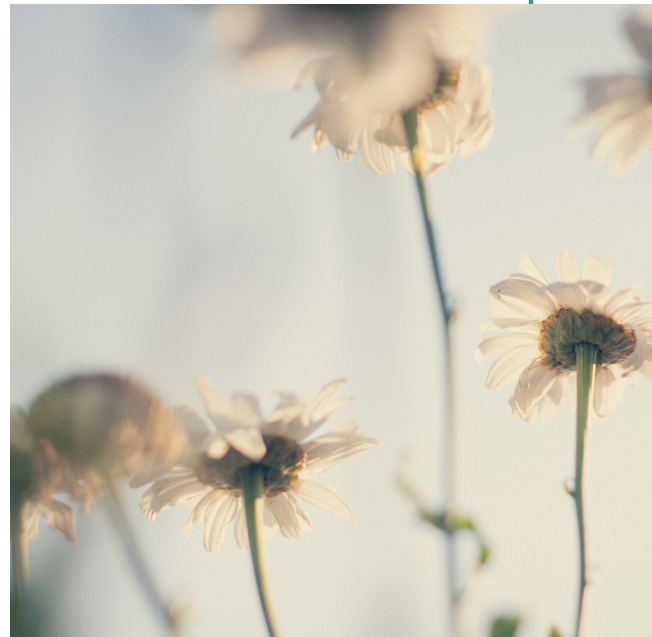
System Leadership Capacity Building Program

Today's nonprofits require leaders who are more than managers - they need to be boundary-spanners, innovators, and collaborators to meet today's challenges. However, traditional leadership programs often neglect the unique skills necessary to position one's nonprofit for success in a systems change environment.

Partnering with the Nonprofit Executive Leadership Institute (NELI) at Bryn Mawr College, HealthSpark co-designed a course curriculum specifically to address these system leadership challenges.

"The Leadership Capacity Building Program helped me think about and build skills around dealing with the ever changing nonprofit landscape. Second, and perhaps more important, it helped me make positive collegial connections with other members of our cohort."

Cohort 1 participant



The System Leadership Capacity Building Program is designed to:

1. Strengthen leadership and organizational capacity within nonprofit and public organizations.
2. Increase the capacity of public and nonprofit executives and board members to incorporate systems thinking in their planning processes.
3. Strengthen organizations' knowledge and skills in developing effective partnerships and cross-system collaborations.

In six full-day sessions and one evening board session, safety net leaders are trained by professionals in the field of nonprofit finance, evaluation, diversity and inclusion, and board management. Sessions are offered in a cohort model, so participants are learning alongside their peers across the safety net sector.

KNOWLEDGE & COMMUNITY BUILDING STRATEGIES

- Commissioned research
- Community of Practice

As our initiative grows, so does the need for continued learning and engagement. We want to deepen our understanding of community experience and what residents want to see changed in the safety net. We seek new ideas from other communities across the country and engage providers in meaningful conversation about what's working- and what isn't. Our journey is a commitment to continual learning.

"We must place a priority on creating a system that not only acknowledges the unique barriers that marginalized communities face, but that actively works to counteract barriers through changes in how we make decisions and how we design services."

Your Way Home Racial Equity report,
2019

- HealthSpark has a longstanding history of partnering with the community on **Commissioned Research** projects to support the health of the safety net. These projects allow us to engage external researchers and topic experts, as well as local practitioners and persons with lived expertise, to dig deep into policy issues. Our most recent work, a Racial Equity analysis of the homeless service system undertaken in partnership with Your Way Home, has led to meaningful discussions on race, equity, and what it means to advance justice in social services, with potential for impact far beyond the homeless service sector. We plan on announcing our 2020 research project in the spring.
- The Safety Net Resiliency Initiative was created out of crowdsourcing events in 2017, where community partners came together to define a new and collective vision for change. To keep the movement grounded in our community, the Initiative continues to host **Community of Practice** events, which bring together safety net advocates from across sectors, geographies, languages, and industries. We have hosted 5 Community of Practice events since 2018, with over 100 unique organizations represented.



EMERGING SAFETY NET STRATEGIES

- **Communications Campaign**
- **Advocacy Coalition**

How we advocate for and mobilize on behalf of the safety net matters. While our sector has been under-resourced for years, recent federal and state actions to cut safety net programs have made collective advocacy an even greater priority for our system's longevity.

Recent federal & state actions to cut safety net programs have made collective advocacy an even greater priority for our system's longevity.

- First, we need to change the narrative so that the general public has a better understanding of the benefits the safety net provides. To craft that new narrative, a Safety Net Action Team hired Message Agency to create a **Communications Campaign** that will provide guidance on messaging strategies and communication techniques to gain broader public support for the safety net.
- Second, we need a unified approach to advocacy, where individuals and organizations are working towards common policy goals using a coordinated strategy. PA Health Access Network is building an **Advocacy Coalition** to do this, starting by supporting advocacy efforts for the 2020 Census.

2020 SAFETY NET RESILIENCY INITIATIVE CALENDAR

Never miss an event!
Sign up for our newsletter by emailing info@healthspark.org



JANUARY

- System Leadership Capacity Building Program begins for Cohort 2

FEBRUARY

- 2020 Innovation Lab Grants Awarded
- Community of Practice, "Building Community: People, Power, and Purpose"

MARCH

- Safety Net Resiliency Initiative 2017- 2019 Evaluation Report to be released

APRIL

- 2020 Commissioned Research project to be announced

MAY

- 2020 Innovation Lab, Round 2 Grant RFP opens

UPCOMING SUMMER/ FALL EVENTS

- System Leadership Capacity Building Program, Cohort 3
- Community of Practice Events
- Advocacy Coalition continues to grow
- Communications Campaign report to be released

Please note that events and times are anticipated but subject to change. Additional events will be added as scheduled. All events are posted on our website at www.HealthSpark.org/Events or communicated through our newsletter and social media.