Over a 20-month period, the National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) convened multi-agency teams from Alabama, Colorado, and Massachusetts in a learning collaborative focused on developing processes for evidence-based health policymaking with a specific focus on patient-centered outcomes research (PCOR) and comparative effectiveness research (CER).

Alabama focused on the goal of increasing the use of evidence within health policy decision-making by increasing their capacity to locate, identify and apply PCOR and CER to policymaking. Efforts were focused on a specific topic, follow-up for children after hospitalization for a mental health disorder, which is one of the incentive measures for the state’s Medicaid Regional Care Organizations to be launched in late 2017.

Participating Agencies and Organizations

- Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), Alabama Department of Public Health
- Alabama Medicaid Agency
- Department of Mental Health
- Department of Rehabilitation Services
- University of Alabama School of Public Health
- Alabama Child Health Improvement Alliance
- Alabama Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics
- At least one patient or consumer representative

Accomplishments

- Coordinated work across CHIP and Medicaid agencies with a shared interest in finding and implementing evidence for policies to increase follow-up rates within 30 days of discharge.
- Piloted and refined skills for finding, analyzing, and applying evidence using their specific topic as a “case study.”
- Collaborated with Medicaid to nominate follow-up after pediatric behavioral health hospitalization as a topic for the Medicaid Evidence-based Decisions (MED) project. MED ultimately accepted the topic and is currently conducting a review of the available evidence.
Challenges and Lessons Learned
Alabama’s experience highlighted some of the challenges that can arise in identifying relevant research and applying it to policymaking. The Alabama team learned that finding evidence-based literature on a specific topic requires practice and can be difficult due to lack of available research, especially for sub-populations of interest such as children. Going forward the team plans to apply the research skills gained in the learning collaborative to ensure that, when possible, new policies such as coverage decisions are evidence-based.

Technical Assistance Highlights
April 2016 Site Visit: Evidence-Informed Health Policy Workshop with the Center for Evidence-based Policy (CEbP)
- Topics included identifying what constitutes as evidence, understanding and using systematic reviews, using evidence to inform 1115 demonstration implementation, and translating evidence into policy.
- Participation from the Governor’s office and leadership from Children’s Rehabilitative Services.

Throughout the learning collaborative, state teams received individualized technical assistance through bi-monthly calls with NASHP. Highlights from Alabama’s calls include a discussion with Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Alabama and New Directions Behavioral Health and a presentation from the Oregon Health Authority about Oregon’s follow-up after behavioral health hospitalization measure.

About the National Academy for State Health Policy:
The National Academy for State Health Policy (NASHP) is an independent academy of state health policymakers working together to identify emerging issues, develop policy solutions, and improve state health policy and practice. As a non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping states achieve excellence in health policy and practice, NASHP provides a forum on critical health issues across branches and agencies of state government. NASHP resources are available at: www.nashp.org.

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