

The Future of Health Services Research: Advancing Health Systems Research and Practice in the United States

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The impact of health services research

As the principal tool for determining the performance of health practices, technologies, and strategies, health services research provides the foundation for the progress, the results, and the value we get from health and health care. Since the 1960s, health services research has provided the foundation for progress, effectiveness, and value in health care. Ironically, at a time when appreciation has never been higher for both the need and potential from health services research, the political and financial support for sustenance and growth appear to be weakening. In response, the National Academy of Medicine, with support from AcademyHealth, American Association of Colleges of Nursing, American Board of Family Medicine, American Society of Anesthesiologists, Association of American Medical Colleges, Federation of American Hospitals, and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, held a workshop to examine federal and non-federal funding trends, discuss the major contributions of the field, and identify strategies for improving the ability of the field to address key priorities over the next decade. Participant discussions included a recognition of the critical need for federal support for health services research, as well as a desire for the field to better articulate its priorities, demonstrate its utility, and transform to meet the needs of a 21st century health care system.

Research for a 21st-Century Health System

The range of issues that health services research must consider, address, and potentially overcome is so wide-ranging and complex that participants individually and collectively called for a set of activities required to transform the field, including expanding the **vision** to account for the full range of health system forces in play; developing a robust taxonomy of the issue and leveraging **priorities** for action; identifying the **tools** and strategies - available and emerging - to refine and deploy in the change process; stewarding the societal-wide advancement of a **culture of continuous learning** and sharing throughout the system; fostering the development of the **data infrastructure and research teams** required for real-time insights and feedback in the virtuous cycle of continuous learning; creating a working **network** of stakeholders, including patients as partners in research, for expedited coordination, collaboration, and as required, governance; establishing shared network-wide **goals** and a process for tracking and adapting strategies; characterizing the anticipated and actual **results** for improvement, in qualitative and quantitative personal, societal, and economic terms; **linking** those real and potential returns to investments and investment requirements among stakeholders; and capturing and **communicating** the contributions, real and potential, in a broad and sustained fashion.

“Health services research (HSR) is essential. Whether the focus is on maximizing quality, fostering efficiency, reducing costs or addressing disparities, HSR provides the evidence base for health care that works. **By connecting challenges in health care delivery to practical solutions, HSR saves lives and dollars.** Against either measure, the price of under-valuing and under-investing in this crucial avenue of research is simply too high.” *Mary Woolley, President, Research!America*

“For half a century, health services research has not only shown us what ails United States health care delivery, but provided the tools and resources to heal it. **Now more than ever, the rigor of this field is essential** to addressing the complex issues we face and ensuring high quality care for all.” *Carolyn M. Clancy, Deputy Undersecretary for Health, Department of Veterans Affairs*

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