

Insights from the First Community Conversation with the Center for Health Care Affordability

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Community Conversation with Advocates

The [Center for Health Care Affordability](#) (the Center) held its first community conversation with patient and consumer advocates on November 20th at the Wilder Foundation in St. Paul. More than 30 participants attended, including individual advocates and community members, as well as representatives from interested organizations such as the Children's Defense Fund, LeadingAge Minnesota, HealthCare for All Minnesota, ISAIAH, Blue Cross Blue Shield MN, Portico HealthNet, AFSCME, SEIU, and others.

Meeting Objectives

- To introduce the Center as well as its purpose and direction
- To gather input on the Center's strategy for future engagement with patients, families, and advocacy groups

Overview Presentation

The meeting began with a brief presentation about the establishment of the Center in the 2023 legislative session and its purposes as described in [Minnesota Statutes 62J.312](#). The Center's responsibilities include conducting research on and analyzing leading causes of health care spending growth in order to increase transparency and identifying and recommending strategies to make health care more affordable.

Small Group Discussion Topics

Attendees then participated in discussions in a small group format. Each small group had a facilitator and recorder. Meeting attendees were asked about three different topic areas:

- Because the Center recognizes the importance of engaging Minnesotans across the state and intends to convene public meetings in different areas, attendees were asked to provide their advice on how to most effectively plan, organize and publicize regional meetings.
- The Center wants to ensure Minnesotans have the opportunity to share their personal stories and experiences with health care affordability challenges. While quantitative data are important to help policy makers understand the scope of health care affordability issues, so too are the stories of individual Minnesotans. These stories meaningfully inform the policy-making process by illustrating the direct impacts of high health care costs on Minnesotans' decisions about and experiences with seeking and paying for health care. Meeting participants were asked for their input on how to most effectively gather, honor, and share Minnesotans' stories.

- Finally, participants were asked to share their ideas about how the Center's research and data could inform the activities of their respective organizations and help their members learn more about health care affordability.

Key Takeaways from Meeting Attendees

- Participants highlighted the need for the Center to be clear on its reasons **for holding regional meetings** as well as for collecting stories. The Center should also make it clear how the regional meetings and the story collection fit into the Center's overall plan to move the needle on health care affordability in Minnesota.
- Attendees emphasized that the Center should **work with trusted partners and messengers**. Attendees suggested the Center should partner with existing organizations to plan and host regional meetings as well as partner with for story collection. Examples included:
 - Advocacy groups (ISAIAH, Unidos, Chamber of Mothers, NAMI, Main Street Alliance, MN Elder Justice Center, Prepare & Prosper, etc.)
 - Labor unions (SEIU, MAPE, AFSCME, Farmers Union, etc.)
 - Faith-based organizations (Gichitwaa Kateri Catholic Church)
 - County-based organizations and associations (PrimeWest, Local Public Health, MN Association of Counties)
- Participants want to **receive consistent communication** from the Center on what work is being done and to maintain a relationship with individuals who share their time and experiences with the Center.
- Attendees pointed out potential challenges with hosting regional meetings in cities such as Duluth or Mankato rather than in rural locations. While attendance may be stronger in cities the Center may **miss hearing from people who experience the most significant access issues due to their geographic location and related factors**.
- There was widespread agreement the **Center needs to be creative in its outreach and communication methods about meetings** and story collection, leveraging social media and other communication strategies.
- Participants urged the Center to **collect stories via multiple methods**, including QR codes, speaking with community leaders, and more - and make clear how those stories will be used and how storytellers will be protected.
- Attendees noted that **accessibility is important** when it comes to public meetings. The Center should make an effort to remove as many barriers to the events as possible by providing food, care assistance, stipends, and transportation. The Center should also consider holding meetings at different times of the day to offer individuals an opportunity to participate at a time that is convenient for them. The Center may also want to consider meeting people where they are – at clinics, workplaces, schools, and other community hubs.

- Participants also **named several areas of research that would help their organization's work in health care affordability**, including topics such as analyses of health care spending drivers, administrative costs, price variability, low value care, and insurance rate review.

Next Steps

- The Center will integrate feedback from participants and lessons from this meeting as it plans for future community engagement events.
- The Center will continue to build relationships and maintain communication with organizations dedicated to making health care more affordable, including those who attended this meeting.

Links:

- [Center for Health Care Affordability](https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/affordability/index.html)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/data/affordability/index.html>)
- [Minnesota Statutes 62J.312](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/62J.312) (<https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/62J.312>)

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