

In Milwaukee, the Near West Side Partners is a community non-profit organization founded through the support of five anchor institutions, representing the higher education, corporate, and nonprofit sectors. In 2018, the NWSP, in partnership with Marquette University, was awarded a contract from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute to develop an infrastructure for engaging stakeholders from diverse sectors in building capacity for patient centered outcomes research that improves the health of their employee populations. The project, called Patient Centered Outcomes Research for Employees (PCORE) of Milwaukee's Near West Side, has brought together employees with chronic conditions, health and wellness representatives, researchers, and NWSP leadership to share perspectives and explore research as a tool to address health and wellness challenges in employee populations. PCORE has slowly integrated into NWSP's Work Group structure and has been embraced as another way in which the NWSP is helping people to Live, Work, and Play in the Near West Side of Milwaukee. A sustainability plan has been developed to continue PCORE, establish a dedicated NWSP Health Working Group, and expand to more employers and the NWS community.

Clear Communication

Through the capacity building process we have recognized the need for effective communication among the panel members. As part of the PCORE Panel governing rules we established the panel meetings would occur every other month and anchor partner one-on-one meetings would occur on alternate months. Additionally, the project leadership team meets on a weekly basis, at a minimum, to discuss project progress and plan panel meetings. To ensure that PCORE continues to successfully address its mission and vision, beginning in September 2020, the project leadership team will continue to meet weekly and panel meetings will be scheduled monthly. Due to the increased frequency of the panel meetings, anchor partner one-on-one meetings will occur on an as-needed basis.

In alignment with the PCORE guiding values, we strive to keep all members informed with regular and timely communication and actively encourage open input and transparency in communications. As PCORE continues its work, we remain committed to having clear and effective communication among the panel. We will continue to share meeting minutes and reference materials with all panel members. A constant item on the panel meeting agenda has been to provide a brief update of what is happening in the Near West Side. This general overview helps keep the panel members up to date on general organization information, highlight events and milestones, and shares opportunities for further engagement. We will continue providing these updates at each meeting.

Shared Ownership

As PCORE moves forward, the panel will revisit the mission, vision, and goals of the project at least annually to ensure that PCORE continues to meet the needs and current context of the panel members and employees of Milwaukee's Near West Side. One of the key strengths of PCORE rests in partnering with employees to develop research initiatives that meet their unique needs and interests. Since the inception of PCORE, employers in the NWSP have lost

employees to addiction, suicide, and a mass shooting. As a result, the PCORE panel collectively identified a need for research initiatives for building resilience among employees as a useful strategy for optimizing employee health. The panel's decision to focus on building resilience is supported by findings from a recent survey of NWS employees. In that survey, managing stress/behavioral health was one of the top five health areas employees wanted their employers to focus on.

Potential threats to shared ownership within any partnership are transitions and uncertainty. The anchor institutions remain supportive of the NWSP and its endeavors, including PCORE, as evidenced by each anchor recently recommitting resources to sustain the NWSP organization to continue its mission. Despite this commitment at the institutional level, it is possible that transitions within institutions will lead to changes in panel membership. Should an individual transition off the panel, the project co-leads will meet with them for an exit-interview to understand the reason for their departure, their experiences with PCORE, and any other pertinent information. When an individual joins the board, we will continue to follow our established onboarding process where the project co-leads meet with the new panel member to discuss PCORE's mission and vision, guiding principles, roles and responsibilities and provide an overview of the educational materials covered to date.

COVID-19 has led to acute disruptions in US workplaces and the businesses represented in PCORE were not immune to these. As PCORE works to manage the uncertainty that has resulted from this public health and economic crisis, we will continue to dialogue with panel members about changes in their work environment, institutional prioritization of employee health, and delivery of workplace programming.

Shared Benefits

Over the last two years, PCORE has provided employees, wellness representatives, and researchers with an opportunity for multi-directional communication about topics related to employee wellness. Panel members have spoken of the value of such a forum informally within the panel and have also articulated these ideas during the evaluations of PCORE. The perceived value of PCORE for panel members is further evidenced by the fact that none of the anchor representative panel members have been compensated for participation, yet they remain fully engaged. Additionally, each anchor has provided in-kind support in the form of meeting spaces during the time when panel meetings occurred in person. Also, during the June one-on-one meetings, each panel member enthusiastically expressed a desire to continue in their role as a panel member. PCORE provides panel members facilitated access to benefits around planning and implementing wellness strategies. Knowing that multiple worksites have an interest in supporting employee mental health, the leadership team facilitated direct communication and the sharing of resources between partner organizations. Panel members also have access to the PCORE Resource Officer and research skills of the research team.

Power Dynamics

As part of our capacity building process we have worked to balance power dynamics between employees, wellness representatives, and researchers. Educational sessions have been instrumental in developing a shared language for patient-centered outcomes research and comparative effectiveness research among panel members. We use panel participation to elevate the voice of employees with chronic conditions showing the value of their input early in the decision-making process in wellness. The panel has transitioned over time from the opinion of employees being 'nice to have' to it now being seen as essential, showing that the expertise, experience, and wisdom of all panel members are equally respected. Importantly, our employee-representatives are seeing this respect as other panel members specifically seek their input on topics. This is a crucial feature of our panel and we will safeguard this as we move forward in addressing issues pertinent to the health and well-being of employees on Milwaukee's NWS. Additionally, should there be a transition in panel members, we will review PCORE's mission and vision, guiding principles, roles and responsibilities, and previous educational content with new members to ensure continued shared responsibility, authority, and accountability.

Spending/investing time

The ability to spend time together on a regular basis has been critical to the PCORE panel's ability to perform as a team. As stated earlier and at the request of panel members, beginning in September 2020 the panel will begin to meet on a monthly basis to continue the work necessary to meet its mission and vision. The project co-leads have committed to supporting the transition to a NWSP working group with continued support once established as a working group. The project co-leads will also continue panel members engagement with one another and the larger community by sharing social opportunities offered in the Near West side. Examples of past events include the farmer's market held on the Harley Davidson campus, the Doors Open event hosted by Historic Milwaukee, and social hour at the Summerfest music festival. In the era of COVID-19 a socially distanced community clean up was organized by NWSP that we shared with all panel members.

Institutionalization

The PCORI capacity building award has undoubtedly achieved its goal of building capacity for PCOR/CER among diverse organizations that share a geographic location. PCORE brought the founding anchor partners of the NWSP together to learn and participate in PCOR/CER and to understand and value the employee (patient) voice to improve the health and wellness services these businesses offer their employees. Having laid the foundation of networking and relationship building around employee health and wellbeing, we are encouraged that the Near West Side Partners are reviewing their strategic plan with designs to formalize a new working group focusing on the health and wellness of not only employees but all neighbors in partnership with the other established NWS teams: Safety, Housing, Commercial Corridor and Neighborhood Identity and Branding. This will further leverage and expand the engagement of those dedicated to helping ensure the NWS is a great place to live, work, and play. In the initial discussions of the larger NWSP health working group, PCORE will remain intact as a subcommittee of the health workgroup with a specific focus on employee health and wellness.

Funding

As a working team of the Near West Side Partners, PCORE will have support of the Steering Committee (the executive leadership team which ultimately has funded the partnership). Like the other working teams, team members volunteer and/or provide community time and engagement as representatives of their organizations. All working teams are staffed by Center for Peacemaking volunteers. Although funding has not been a requirement for the NWSP working teams, continuing to educate, research and share findings, building Comparative Effectiveness Research (CER)/PCOR capacity around employee health with a focus on chronic conditions remains top priority. Having Marquette University as an anchor partner opens resources from the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects available to investigate research funding opportunities. We have engaged this office and are seeking funding through grant submissions the leadership team is strategically thinking about creative funding opportunities including philanthropic giving. The project co-leads will utilize NWSP networking platforms and publications to share the success of the PCORE project and promote the newly established cohort dedicated to health and wellness in Milwaukee's Near West Side.

Outside factors

The need to be flexible and creative while spearheading a project is essential. The current health crisis, economic crisis, and racial injustices and unrest have forced all our stakeholders to readjust and adapt. COVID-19 has caused major disruption in every workplace resulting in temporary closures, furloughs, and staff working from home. Through listening and dialogue the team has been able to adjust the process and format of the meetings to create cohesion and continued engagement in the PCORE process. In each of these circumstances rapid learning has been needed and our panel members have found value in sharing benefits across multiple formats. Our meetings transitioned to a virtual environment and will continue to occur virtually based on current health guidelines and organizational policies regarding events with multiple people. As priorities and strategic initiatives change, we will re-evaluate and re-prioritize how to elevate the employee voice to assure continued understanding and shared power as we work to improve health and wellness in the NWS. By maintaining core principles of engagement and being flexible to how engagement is executed, we will remain well-poised to address additional outside factors.

Connector role

The PCORE panel is and will remain a connector. One of the primary roles has been to facilitate shared benefits across partners. During our capacity building we have identified health and wellness needs and research priorities across partners. By understanding the skills and capacity around the table we have been able to match capacity and skills with needs. Recent one on one meetings in June resulted in our connecting two panel members as they were separately developing corporate toolkits on the same topic. Other NWSP members have heard of our work with health and wellness and are seeking to learn more about what we do and what we can offer. PCORE has been promoted and shared at events such as the monthly seven neighborhood meeting, NWSP e-news letter, blog posts, and the NWSP CEO

symposium. We will specifically seek to expand our connector role through strategic networking to improve health and wellness in the NWS. As PCORE expands to other NWSP organizations, we will continue to develop relationships and share knowledge and resources.