



Population Health Leadership At Essential Hospitals

A Toolkit For Hiring and Evaluating
Population Health Executives

FOREWORD

America's Essential Hospitals, the leading champion for hospitals dedicated to caring for the nation's most disadvantaged patients, proudly shares this toolkit for hiring and training population health executives. This important work is driven by our dedication to population health improvement and community-integrated health care.

Our member hospitals are united by their commitment to providing access to high-quality health care to all, including the vulnerable. Essential Hospitals Institute—the research, education, dissemination, and leadership development arm of the association—supports the nation's essential hospitals as they provide high-quality, equitable, and affordable care to their communities, improving patient outcomes and quality of life.

Essential hospitals are committed by mission and infrastructure to their local communities. They often are among the largest employers in their area and help drive the local economy with their purchasing and investment decisions. In 2016, essential hospitals accounted for more than 650,000 U.S. jobs and nearly \$115 billion in economic activity. As anchor institutions, essential hospitals have significant capacity to improve the health of their patients, neighbors, and communities.

The Institute created this toolkit to help essential hospitals develop a leadership position responsible for strategy and coordination of population health improvement. As hospital-based population health improvement efforts continue to mature, America's Essential Hospitals and Essential Hospitals Institute are committed to helping hospitals build the workforce and leadership they need to maximize their local impact and improve health in the neighborhoods they serve.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	2
KEY TERMS.....	4
WHAT IS A POPULATION HEALTH EXECUTIVE?	5
ESSENTIAL SKILLS.....	6
HIRING CONSIDERATIONS.....	12
HIRING AND EVALUATION TOOLS	
JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE.....	13
SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET	15
REFERENCES AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	21

INTRODUCTION

As health care providers, hospitals strive to ensure the health of their patients. But good health cannot be achieved by focusing within the walls of the hospital alone. Experts estimate the effects of social, economic, and environmental circumstances can account for as much as 50 percent of an individual's health.ⁱ Essential hospitals—those that treat a large proportion of disadvantaged patients—are acutely aware of the challenges vulnerable people face, including housing instability, food insecurity, transportation barriers, and other social needs.

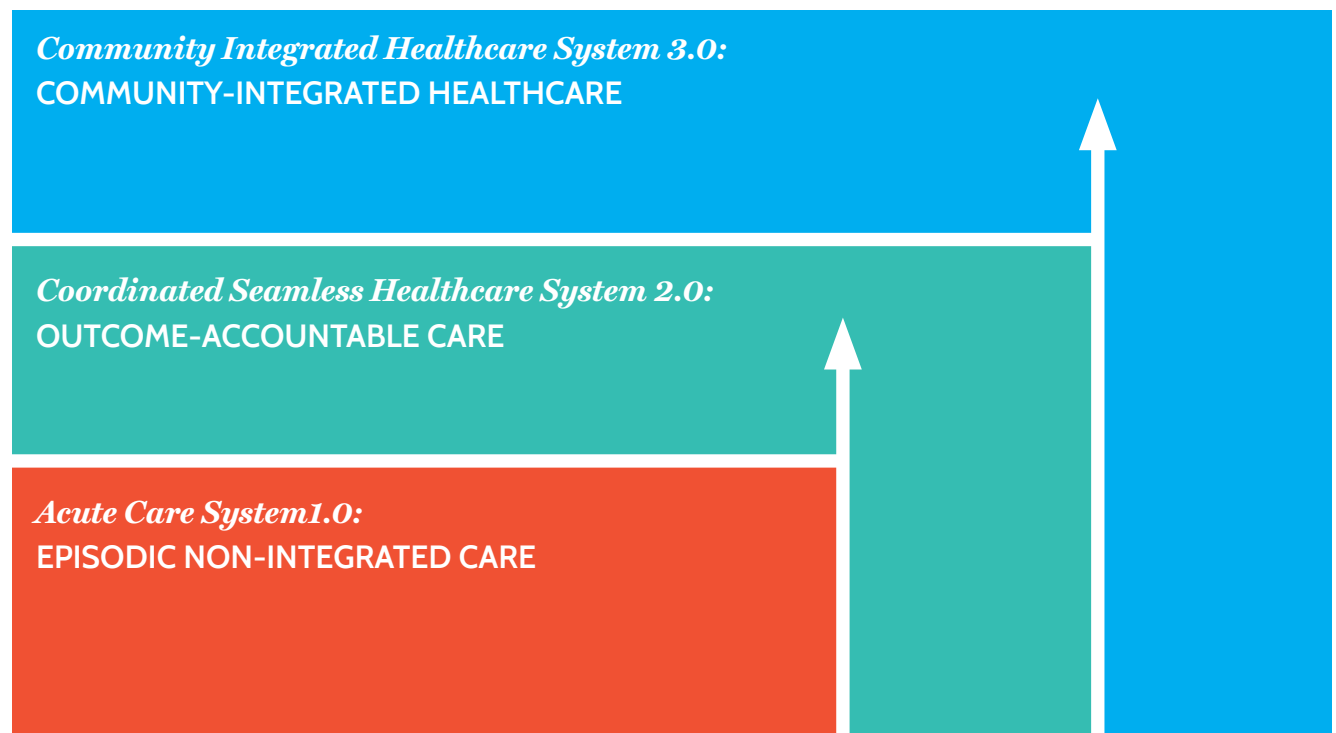
The U.S. health care landscape has evolved from a system in which hospitals are paid for episodic care toward one that seeks to pay for health outcomes. Risk-based payments lead health systems to rethink the way they care for their patients and communities. For many, the

clear next step is community-integrated health care (Figure 1). By integrating social services and care systems, providers focus on the total health of the patient.

Health systems aiming for community-integrated care can benefit by targeting the social determinants of health. Addressing the social forces challenging the community can lead to improved health outcomes, as well as long-term cost savings for the health system.ⁱⁱ

Essential hospitals are in a unique position to drive community-integrated health care because of their role as anchor institutions and their commitment to serving those with the highest need. As community anchors, hospitals can have a great influence on community infrastructure, community investment, and collaborative dynamics to improve the health of the population.

FIGURE 1: THE EVOLUTION OF THE HEALTH CARE DELIVERY SYSTEM



Adapted from Hester et al., 2015.

In 2016, the Essential Hospitals Institute conducted foundational research on population health improvement activities at essential hospitals. This research illuminated the strategies essential hospitals use to mitigate the social determinants of health, their capacity to expand that work, and the support they need to advance those efforts. One of the needs uncovered by that research was a desire to understand the skills population health leaders require to be successful in creating and guiding hospital-based population health improvement.

Essential hospitals and health systems—those that treat a large proportion of vulnerable patients—are in a unique position to drive community-integrated health care.

Institute staff conducted further research to understand the specific skills needed to be a population health executive—a position responsible for guiding hospitals' efforts to implement community-integrated health care. This toolkit was developed through a review of existing literature, interviews with experts in the field, focus groups with existing population health leaders, and analysis of job descriptions from individuals currently in this role. Our findings were reviewed and deliberated by population health executives and experts, who helped shape the direction of the final product.

This document provides tools for hiring, training, and advancing the role of a population health executive. The skill set, job description template, and assessment tool can be used as stand-alone documents or as a collective set. This toolkit can be used by leaders of health care organizations looking to create a population health executive position, by those already in the position, or by individuals looking to transition into this role. Each document outlines the expectations, needs, and qualities that are essential for an individual in this role.

KEY TERMS

COMMUNITY-INTEGRATED HEALTH CARE

A strategy by which health care providers work with other sectors (e.g., government, social service, community development) in both complementary and collaborative ways to promote health. Successful community-integrated health care is a connected system that meets the physical, mental, and social needs of individuals and improves the structures and conditions that influence those needs.

OPERATING ENVIRONMENT

The internal and external settings—including departments, the hospital, the larger health system, policy, financing, and the community surrounding the hospital—in which a health care provider or executive must function. The operating environment is made up of personnel and institutional requirements, facilitators, and constraints that determine how the individual can function.

POPULATION HEALTH

A proactive, prevention-based approach of addressing the social, economic, political, and environmental factors that impact communities and affect the health outcomes of individuals. Kindig and Stoddart in 2003 first defined population health as “the health outcomes of a group of individuals, including the distribution of such outcomes within the group.” This concept has evolved to include a range of target “groups.” Population health practice can focus on specific individuals, patient populations, or the community-at-large.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The conditions in which individuals live, work, and play that affect their health outcomes. These determinants include but are not limited to community infrastructure; education; employment and income; family and social support; food insecurity; health behaviors; health literacy; housing instability; interpersonal violence; legal needs; transportation access; and utility needs. Unequal distribution of these factors creates inequity in the health outcomes of different groups.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Individuals who are racial or ethnic minorities, children, elderly, socioeconomically disadvantaged, or underinsured, or those who have certain medical conditions. Members of vulnerable populations often have health conditions that are exacerbated by inadequate care.ⁱⁱⁱ

WHAT IS A POPULATION HEALTH EXECUTIVE?

A population health executive is a senior staff member, at an executive or senior management level, fully dedicated to population health improvement.

The exact nature of a population health executive's position varies based on the specific environment in which they work. Population health executives might oversee community-integrated health care for an individual hospital or for multiple facilities within a larger system. In some settings, a population health executive will manage a robust department of personnel, while those working in hospitals with nascent population health efforts might be the only full-time staff member in their department. Population health executives will report to a C-suite leader within the health system or hospital, though the specific leader overseeing this role will vary by organization. For example, some might report to a chief medical officer while others report directly to the president and/or CEO.

A population health executive serves as a liaison to the surrounding community and a champion for population health improvement.

Population health executives play multiple roles at essential hospitals. While some of their responsibilities mirror those of typical hospital leaders, others differ in important ways. As leaders, they provide direction and oversight to the hospitals' community-integrated health care efforts. They engage in collaborative work with internal departments and external organizations to execute multidisciplinary, innovative programs. A population health executive also serves as a liaison to the surrounding community and a champion for population health improvement, engaging in constant communication with internal and external stakeholders.

ESSENTIAL SKILLS

“Population health done well means it will affect almost every part of your operation.”

– Expert Interviewee

The complex work of improving the social determinants of health requires leaders to take collective action and to blend the assets of the hospital and community. Only through collaborative efforts, mutual trust, and data sharing will our communities successfully influence the factors that inhibit people’s ability to achieve optimal health.

The varied roles and responsibilities of a population health executive demand an equally varied set of skills. Their responsibilities span departments within the hospital and stretch into the community in their role as cross-sector leaders. Therefore, the skills they employ in their work must be applicable to both the hospital and community setting. These individuals should be excellent communicators adept at understanding the motivations of and translating ideas for a variety of audiences. They must be strategic leaders able to craft and implement a vision. They will be tasked with the management of projects and initiatives and with measuring success.

To be effective, population health executives must master skills in five broad areas:

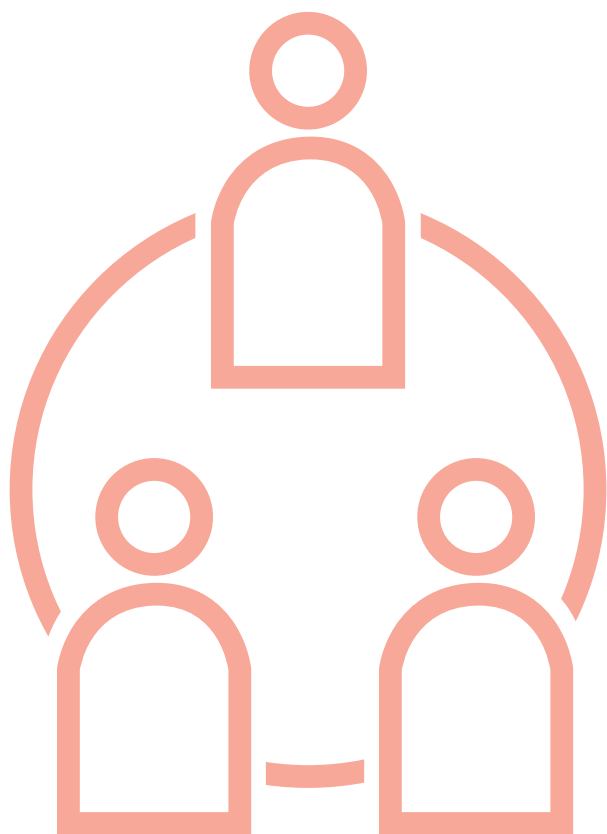
- ◆ COLLABORATING ACROSS COMMUNITIES
- ◆ COMMUNICATING TO ADVANCE SHARED GOALS
- ◆ LEADING STRATEGICALLY
- ◆ MANAGING FOR INNOVATION
- ◆ MEASURING FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT

Key elements of these skill areas are outlined on pages 7-11.

COLLABORATE ACROSS COMMUNITIES

Partnership and collaboration are critical for the population health executive to maximize the impact of hospital resources and initiatives. As the bridge between the hospital and community, the population health executive should be skilled in engaging and building trust within the community. Their role also requires that they represent the hospital in partnerships with community organizations, social service providers, and community members.

- ◆ Develop partnerships with internal and external stakeholders to bridge the hospital and the community in support of community-integrated health care
- ◆ Champion collaboration with public health, social services, local governmental agencies, and community-based organizations
- ◆ Work collaboratively with other hospital/health system leaders to further population health goals
- ◆ Lead and facilitate multisector working groups
- ◆ Develop culturally competent community engagement strategies to build community trust
- ◆ Cultivate, preserve, and prioritize external relationships to effectively serve the community
- ◆ Represent the hospital/health system as a liaison to community boards, partners, public health, community groups, and community members
- ◆ Identify and remove barriers to collaboration within the hospital/health system and the community
- ◆ Leverage hospital assets to build community capacity to improve population health and increase health equity



COMMUNICATE TO ADVANCE SHARED GOALS

Communication is a core component of a population health executive's daily work. Their position—between the hospital and the community—demands the ability to engage and communicate with a wide variety of stakeholders and audiences. They often are called on to be the facilitator and translator between various groups. Their role often requires that they be an educator to those who are not familiar with population health and a motivator for those who might not recognize its importance.

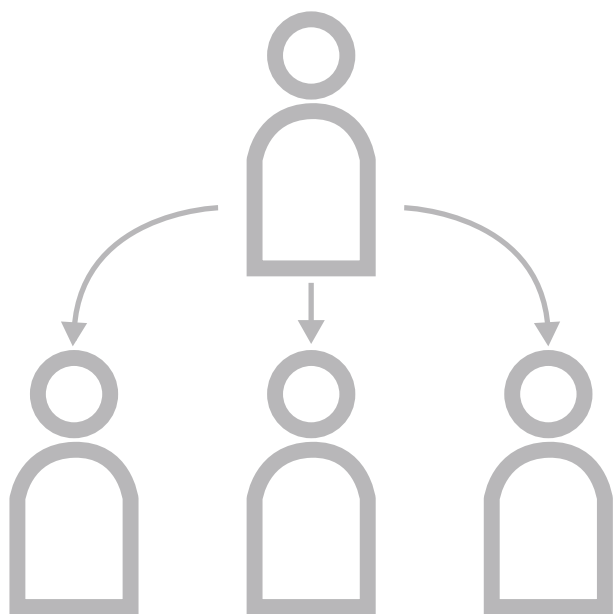
- ◆ Articulate a vision for a healthy community
- ◆ Communicate effectively to diverse audiences, including hospital/health system and community leaders, government officials, physicians, patients, and community members
- ◆ Facilitate communication between stakeholders to ensure common understanding of population health goals and objectives
- ◆ Convey the value of community-integrated health care to internal and external individuals
- ◆ Educate hospital/health system leadership and governance on the need to implement community-integrated health care
- ◆ Promote a shared understanding of population health within the hospital/health system
- ◆ Motivate all hospital/health system staff to consider the impact of social determinants of health within their work
- ◆ Translate evidence and information to various stakeholders



LEAD STRATEGICALLY

An important part of the population health executive's role is to provide the direction and vision for addressing social determinants of health in the patient population and the wider community. The population health executive will need to be able to create greater strategic alignment between hospital and community efforts. Setting goals, creating vision, managing change, and driving that change are key elements of their position.

- ◆ Develop clear goals for population health work
- ◆ Champion a community-oriented approach among hospital/health system leadership
- ◆ Integrate population health goals into the hospital/health system's vision
- ◆ Establish innovative strategies to accomplish the hospital/health system's population health goals
- ◆ Apply knowledge of the organization's current context, culture, and relationship with the community to advance strategic vision
- ◆ Direct hospital/health system strategy to incorporate community investment and community-integrated health care into the strategic plan
- ◆ Conceptualize population health strategies at the systems level and promote an understanding of the institution and the community as part of the same system
- ◆ Employ core concepts of population health improvement—such as social determinants of health, health services research, epidemiology, and statistics—to guide hospital/health system initiatives
- ◆ Prepare and support individuals, teams, and the hospital for changes in the health care environment
- ◆ Monitor, articulate, and provide direction to hospital leadership on local, state, and federal policies affecting population health



MANAGE FOR INNOVATION

In their role as managers, population health executives provide the general direction, management, and oversight associated with heading a department. Population health executives need skills and experience managing personnel, programs, finances, and contracts. A population health team must be flexible and adaptable to addressing the social determinants of health in a community. It is the responsibility of the population health executive to create that flexibility in their team and build its capacity to engage in strategic opportunities.

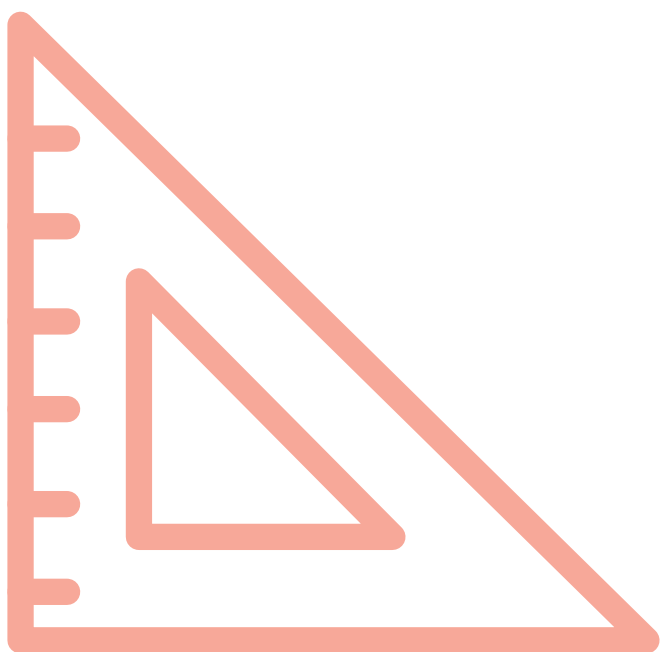
- ◆ Navigate the internal operating environment with an understanding of hospital/health system operations and systems
- ◆ Integrate population health improvement projects and programs into the workflow of the hospital/health system
- ◆ Oversee departmental planning, finance, and personnel to ensure operational effectiveness
- ◆ Maintain adaptability to explore strategies and opportunities arising from a changing health care and policy environment
- ◆ Coordinate with multidisciplinary staff within the hospital/health system for population health work
- ◆ Manage individuals with expertise in varied areas, such as policy, advocacy, health information technology
- ◆ Build staff capacity through teaching, mentoring, and professional development
- ◆ Leverage familiarity with the population health funding landscape—including community benefit investment, philanthropy, and government resources—to grow and sustain initiatives
- ◆ Direct the hospital/health system's community investment portfolio



MEASURE FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT


The population health executive must leverage data and data systems to monitor their community and assess its needs. They might be called on to expand the data capacity of the hospital and build systems that allow data sharing between the hospital and its partners. Translating data for use by different stakeholders is a critical element of turning data into action for their community.


- ◆ Develop community needs assessment models and social needs screening tools
- ◆ Use risk modeling to identify high-risk, vulnerable populations
- ◆ Leverage relevant internal and external data sources to facilitate population health work
- ◆ Build population health data capacity in collaboration with the hospital/health system's information technology department
- ◆ Improve the hospital/health system's data system to monitor the health of the community
- ◆ Use clinical and community-level data to articulate the return on investment of population health interventions
- ◆ Evaluate programs and initiatives by defining and tracking metrics, monitoring impact, and reporting outcomes
- ◆ Establish exchanges for sharing data with cross-sector partners
- ◆ Translate data into actionable evidence to inform strategic planning, policy, and partnerships
- ◆ Apply health informatics to treat patients more effectively and increase health equity in the community





HIRING CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the skills listed in the previous section, our work revealed several factors hospitals should consider when hiring population health executives. Population health executives will be more successful when they have:

 **A STRONG CONNECTION TO THE COMMUNITY.** Population health executives should have a clear understanding of the community. Beyond communication and engagement, this calls for cultural competency and an ability to represent diverse populations.

 **A PERSONAL MISSION AND GOALS THAT ALIGN WITH THE ORGANIZATION'S AIMS.** Beyond credentials, a population health executive candidate should be considered based on their personal dedication to and interest in the hospitals' mission and priorities.

 **CLEAR GOALS AND STANDARDS FOR THEIR POSITION.** The expectations for a population health executive need to be clearly outlined and communicated. This starts with defining population health and ensuring a common understanding for all involved.

 **APPROPRIATE AUTHORITY TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR TASKS.** Leading population health improvement for a hospital or health system requires change. Population health executives need the authority to enact that change, including freedom to make decisions and implement innovative strategies that span the organization.

“When looking for individuals to lead population health initiatives, an organization needs to be open to looking outside what the normal course of hiring might be.”

– Expert Interviewee

JOB DESCRIPTION TEMPLATE

Hospital administrators and/or human resource personnel can use this job description template to recruit, screen, and hire population health executive candidates. The content of this job description was informed by Essential Hospitals Institute research but can and should be tailored to the individual needs, context, and culture of a specific hospital or health system.

POPULATION HEALTH EXECUTIVE*

DEPARTMENT: _____ **SUPERVISOR:** _____

POSITION SUMMARY:

The Population Health Executive (PHE) provides leadership, direction, and oversight for the organization's efforts to improve the health and well-being of the community. The PHE does so by working across departments and across sectors to implement community-integrated health care. The PHE will build strategic partnerships with external organizations to meet shared population health improvement goals. The PHE drives change by setting the vision, establishing clear goals, and building capacity for the organization's population health initiatives. The PHE is responsible for directing the operations of improvement programs while managing a dynamic team. The PHE champions community-integrated health care by communicating its need, importance, and impact to a diverse set of stakeholders. The PHE creates innovative approaches to address the social determinants of health and improve health equity.

MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Establish, monitor, and accomplish the hospital's population health improvement goals
2. Champion community-integrated health care by articulating its goals and value to hospital leadership, staff, and the community
3. Inform the organization's strategic planning from a population health and community investment perspective
4. Coordinate with leaders and staff from various hospital departments to further population health goals within the organization
5. Build, preserve, and prioritize collaborative relationships between the hospital and external organizations, including, but not limited to, public health, social services, local government agencies, and community-based organizations
6. Use community needs assessment models, social needs screening tools, and risk modeling to monitor the health of the community and identify vulnerabilities
7. Navigate the population health funding landscape, including community benefit investment, philanthropy, and government resources
8. Serve as the hospital liaison to community boards, partners, public health agencies, community groups, and community members

9. Evaluate programs by defining and tracking metrics, monitoring impact, and reporting outcomes
10. Harness and reconcile clinical and community-level data to facilitate population health work
11. Develop and maintain a skilled team of individuals with expertise in relevant fields, including, but not limited to, policy, advocacy, and health information technology
12. Provide direction to hospital leadership on relevant local, state, and federal policies
13. Explore and integrate relevant data systems within the hospital and data exchanges with cross-sector partners

REQUIRED SKILLS:

1. Highly effective communication and interpersonal skills
2. Ability to collaborate with a diverse set of partners, including other health care professionals and individuals or organizations from other sectors
3. Operational, financial, and personnel management
4. Ability to adapt to and understand a changing health care and policy environment
5. A cultural competency, sensitivity, and understanding that will build trust and rapport with the community
6. Understanding of health informatics and technology
7. Ability to translate data or evidence into digestible information for various stakeholders

QUALIFICATIONS:

- ◆ Master's or professional degree in a related field
- ◆ 8–10 years of experience in community health improvement, public health, or a closely related field
- ◆ 3–5 years of progressive management experience

* *Exact title will vary by organization*

SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

This worksheet is intended to help population health executives and those seeking to hire population health executives assess skill level and familiarity with population health related tasks. Given the broad set of skills expected for a population health leader, this tool can help identify skill areas to target for improvement or training.

On the following pages, you will be asked to rate the experience or skill level of the subject in five areas: strategic leadership, communication, collaboration, management, and measurement and data. Once you have rated the individual skill areas, add the total points in each section and record the total below, then divide by the indicated skill total to find the average rating for each domain. This average rating highlights areas of strength and areas for improvement.

Each skill is framed in the context of hospital-based population health improvement. However, experience and demonstrated ability in other contexts should be considered.

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

SKILL	TOTAL (FROM WORKSHEETS)		AVERAGE RATING
Strategic Leadership		÷ 10	
Communication		÷ 8	
Collaboration		÷ 9	
Management		÷ 9	
Measurement and Data		÷ 10	

SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Rate these **COLLABORATION** skills using the following scale:

- 4** = High skill level: extensive experience in the skill area
- 3** = Moderately high skill level: good experience in the skill area
- 2** = Average skill level: some experience in the skill area
- 1** = Low skill level: little experience in the skill area
- 0** = No experience in the skill area

COLLABORATION					
Develop partnerships with internal and external stakeholders to bridge the hospital and the community in support of community-integrated health care	0	1	2	3	4
Champion collaboration with public health, social services, local governmental agencies, and community-based organizations	0	1	2	3	4
Work collaboratively with other hospital/health system leaders to further population health goals	0	1	2	3	4
Lead and facilitate multisector working groups	0	1	2	3	4
Develop culturally competent community engagement strategies to build community trust	0	1	2	3	4
Cultivate, preserve, and prioritize external relationships to effectively serve the community	0	1	2	3	4
Represent the hospital/health system as a liaison to community boards, partners, public health, community groups, and community members	0	1	2	3	4
Identify and remove barriers to collaboration within the hospital/health system and the community	0	1	2	3	4
Leverage hospital assets to build community capacity to improve population health and increase health equity	0	1	2	3	4

COLLABORATION TOTAL _____

SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Rate these **COMMUNICATION** skills using the following scale:

- 4 = High skill level: extensive experience in the skill area
- 3 = Moderately high skill level: good experience in the skill area
- 2 = Average skill level: some experience in the skill area
- 1 = Low skill level: little experience in the skill area
- 0 = No experience in the skill area

COMMUNICATION					
Articulate a vision for a healthy community	0	1	2	3	4
Communicate effectively to diverse audiences, including hospital/health system and community leaders, government officials, physicians, patients, and community members	0	1	2	3	4
Facilitate communication between stakeholders to ensure common understanding of population health goals and objectives	0	1	2	3	4
Convey the value of community-integrated health care to internal and external individuals	0	1	2	3	4
Educate hospital/health system leadership and governance on the need to implement community-integrated health care	0	1	2	3	4
Promote a shared understanding of population health within the hospital/health system	0	1	2	3	4
Motivate all hospital/health system staff to consider the impact of social determinants of health within their work	0	1	2	3	4
Translate evidence and information to various stakeholders	0	1	2	3	4

COMMUNICATION TOTAL _____

SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Rate these **STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP** skills using the following scale:

4 = High skill level: extensive experience in the skill area

3 = Moderately high skill level: good experience in the skill area

2 = Average skill level: some experience in the skill area

1 = Low skill level: little experience in the skill area

0 = No experience in the skill area

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP					
Develop clear goals for population health work	0	1	2	3	4
Champion a community-oriented approach among hospital/health system leadership	0	1	2	3	4
Integrate population health goals into the hospital/health system's vision	0	1	2	3	4
Establish innovative strategies to accomplish the hospital/health system's population health goals	0	1	2	3	4
Apply knowledge of the organization's current context, culture, and relationship with the community to advance strategic vision	0	1	2	3	4
Direct hospital/health system strategy to incorporate community investment and community-integrated health care into the strategic plan	0	1	2	3	4
Conceptualize population health strategies at the systems level and promote an understanding of the institution and the community as part of the same system	0	1	2	3	4
Employ core concepts of population health improvement—such as social determinants of health, health services research, epidemiology, and statistics—to guide hospital/health system initiatives	0	1	2	3	4
Prepare and support individuals, teams, and the hospital for changes in the health care environment	0	1	2	3	4
Monitor, articulate, and provide direction to hospital leadership on local, state, and federal policies affecting population health	0	1	2	3	4

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP TOTAL _____

SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Rate these **MANAGEMENT** skills using the following scale:

- 4 = High skill level: extensive experience in the skill area
- 3 = Moderately high skill level: good experience in the skill area
- 2 = Average skill level: some experience in the skill area
- 1 = Low skill level: little experience in the skill area
- 0 = No experience in the skill area

MANAGEMENT					
Navigate the internal operating environment with an understanding of hospital/health system operations and systems	0	1	2	3	4
Integrate population health improvement projects and programs into the workflow of the hospital/health system	0	1	2	3	4
Oversee departmental planning, finance, and personnel to ensure operational effectiveness	0	1	2	3	4
Maintain adaptability to explore strategies and opportunities arising from a changing health care and policy environment	0	1	2	3	4
Coordinate with multidisciplinary staff within the hospital/health system for population health work	0	1	2	3	4
Manage individuals with expertise in varied areas, such as policy, advocacy, health information technology	0	1	2	3	4
Build staff capacity through teaching, mentoring, and professional development	0	1	2	3	4
Leverage familiarity with the population health funding landscape—including community benefit investment, philanthropy, and government resources—to grow and sustain initiatives	0	1	2	3	4
Direct the hospital/health system's community investment portfolio	0	1	2	3	4

MANAGEMENT TOTAL _____

SKILLS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET

Rate these **MEASUREMENT AND DATA** skills using the following scale:

- 4** = High skill level: extensive experience in the skill area
- 3** = Moderately high skill level: good experience in the skill area
- 2** = Average skill level: some experience in the skill area
- 1** = Low skill level: little experience in the skill area
- 0** = No experience in the skill area

MEASUREMENT AND DATA					
Develop community needs assessment models and social needs screening tools	0	1	2	3	4
Use risk modeling to identify high-risk, vulnerable populations	0	1	2	3	4
Leverage relevant internal and external data sources to facilitate population health work	0	1	2	3	4
Build population health data capacity in collaboration with the hospital/health system's information technology department	0	1	2	3	4
Improve the hospital/health system's data system to monitor the health of the community	0	1	2	3	4
Use clinical and community-level data to articulate the return on investment of population health interventions	0	1	2	3	4
Evaluate programs and initiatives by defining and tracking metrics, monitoring impact, and reporting outcomes	0	1	2	3	4
Establish exchanges for sharing data with cross-sector partners	0	1	2	3	4
Translate data into actionable evidence to inform strategic planning, policy, and partnerships	0	1	2	3	4
Apply health informatics to treat patients more effectively and increase health equity in the community	0	1	2	3	4

MEASUREMENT AND DATA TOTAL _____

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