

ABSTRACT

In 2024, New York State's Medicaid program began to implement the NY Health Equity Reform (NYHER). This policy establishes a system that addresses eligible Medicaid members' housing insecurity, food insecurity, and transportation needs. Key new organizations in this system – regional Social Care Networks (SCN) Lead Entities - are tasked with coordinating how Medicaid members are screened for health-related social needs (HRSN), determined (in)eligible, referred to contracted community-based organizations, and provided with appropriate services. With SCNs launching in January 2025, the evidence base for the policy's impact has not yet accumulated. The goal of the proposed project is to enable the PI's preliminary work to inform development of a series of innovative R01 applications, while providing data-driven recommendations for SCNs and Medicaid policymakers in real time.

Specifically, we will conduct participatory research to understand how SCN operations can facilitate access to social services in Medicaid, via the following aims:

Aim 1: Identify idiosyncratic structures and processes in setting up SCNs across Lead Entities. We will conduct a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with SCN leaders.

Aim 2: Identify bottlenecks and develop strategies to optimize efficiency of SCN operations. We will use queueing modeling, discrete event simulation and statistical models for parameter estimation to understand how changes in model components can lead to (in)efficiency.

Aim 3: Examine associations between member characteristics and measures of need and access to social services. We will model outcomes measuring need and access in logistic/OLS regression using detailed data from WeLinkCare SCN.

Our interdisciplinary project fosters a novel collaboration between health policy, social work and operations research faculty as well as practitioners working on the front lines of the NYHER implementation. As such, our team is ideally suited to examine operational (in)efficiencies that can impact access to social services under the NYHER and to inform further policymaking and practice changes.

As a flagship university of the SUNY system, Stony Brook University should be the public university of choice for the State-University Partnership Learning Network (SUPLN), a national network that works collaboratively to support evidence-based state health policy and practice with a focus on transforming Medicaid-based health care. New York State's Medicaid program currently does not participate in SUPLN. The PI's vision is that her participatory and action-oriented research on Medicaid policy in New York can foster a productive and mutually beneficial partnership between Stony Brook University and the state Medicaid program, with its eventual participation in the national SUPLN.