Population Health

SUMMARY: The concept of population health is reshaping approaches to health in the United States. Population health looks beyond delivering health services to patients and instead pushes healthcare providers to adopt a more systemic approach to identifying and influencing the determinants of community health. Managing population health will require new techniques to identify community health risks and the most effective, efficient community-health interventions.

Forecasts

- The population health paradigm will increasingly shape the future of health, wellness, and healthcare in the United States. However, the potential for the paradigm to drive change will be tempered by inertia and incumbent interests in the healthcare system.
- The systems perspective of population health will bring new areas and disciplines into the health arena. The social determinants of health concept will place new emphasis on how social and economic practices impact public health. Awareness of the geographical determinants of health will elevate the relevance of health issues in urban planning, transportation, and real estate.
- Management of population health will require the collection and integration of health data. A key factor in public cooperation with new health-data collection practices will be shielding the data from potentially punitive or discriminatory uses.

Key Uncertainties

Future modifications to the Affordable Care Act

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Deployment of policies designed to address socioeconomic inequality

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Ability to motivate individuals to change unhealthy behaviors and habits

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Speed of healthcare innovation and the rate of dissemination of successful new practices

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Boundaries of health populations, with individuals potentially being categorized in multiple or overlapping health populations

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Supporting Trends

- **Association health plans.** Policies are changing to enable associations to offer healthcare plans to their members.
- **Rising support for single-payer healthcare.** More Americans support the concept of single-payer healthcare.
- **Infectious to chronic disease.** Globally, infectious diseases are being eclipsed by chronic diseases as a primary source of the burden of disease.
- **Using behavioral economics.** Insights from behavioral economics are increasingly being applied in the real world to shape consumer choices.
- **Price transparency regulations.** New regulations and reforms are requiring healthcare providers to offer more price transparency and uniformity in their healthcare offerings.
- **Telemedicine growth.** Telemedicine is growing, with smartphones and biomedical wearables offering an increasingly sophisticated infrastructure for remote consultations and diagnostics.
- **Healthcare analytics.** Data analytics is being deployed in healthcare to cut healthcare costs and improve patient outcomes.

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Related Drivers of Change

- Healthcare Disruption
- Aging World
- Who Owns the Data?
- 21st-Century Guilds
- American Inequality

Notable Data Points

TAKE YOUR MEDICINE

Each year,
medication nonadherence in the United States contributes to an estimated 125,000 deaths
and costs the U.S. health system $289 billion.

Source: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/upshot/answer-to-better-health-care-behavioral-economics.html

ADDRESSING THE DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

According to a Humana study,
a group with better access to social services had an 11 percent reduction in healthcare costs
compared to a control group.

Source: https://www.johnlocke.org/research/telemedicine/

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Strategic Insights

- The spread of the population health paradigm is relevant to all associations, not just those in the healthcare sector. Population health seeks to address factors that contribute to unhealthy lifestyles. Associations should identify how they or their industries negatively affect the health of their workforce and broader populations, and seek potential solutions. Associations may have special insight into the industry-specific health issues and challenges their members may face.
- Associations can play a role in ensuring that increased health surveillance does not have negative impacts on their industries or the public. One approach to safeguarding privacy would be advocacy of strict separation between the institutions that collect data and the institutions that use that data to prevent individually identifiable information from dissemination.
- Under the population health paradigm, traditional management challenges gain an additional dimension as health issues. Challenges could include addressing unhealthy conditions in the industry, such as overwork and employee stress, work-life balance issues, or hostile work environments. Associations have an important role to play in educating their membership as these workforce issues become part of what defines a "healthy workplace."
- The population health paradigm has the potential to expand notions of "harm" beyond the bounds of current legal practice. Greater health surveillance and data collection will provide clearer evidence of the broader determinants of health, as well as the factors that are contributing to the human burden of disease. Associations should monitor activist lawsuits to map how the boundaries of corporate liability are changing and whether such change is relevant to association members.

Timing

- **Stage:** Gradual growth
- **Speed:** Slow

Potential Alternative Futures

- **Equitable health:** The focus on population health leads to greater focus on inequality as a driver of poor health outcomes.
- **Nudging healthy lifestyles:** Efforts to proactively improve population health lead to wider implementation of reward and incentive systems promoting healthy lifestyles.
- **A dangerous embrace:** The health system adopts population health but narrows the concept to focus on cost containment, ignoring the wider social determinants of health.
- **Single-payer prevails:** Momentum for a single-payer system in the United States grows, shifting the focus of population health to the nation as a whole.

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Take Action

- **Define how population health ties to mission.** This expansive concept reframes healthcare and public health priorities and invites new professions and industries into this work. Populations could be as macro as global regions or nations or as micro as specific communities or sectors within an industry. Healthcare associations may fall naturally into applying their expertise outwardly to large-scale wellness and prevention interventions; other associations may need to help members see the connection between their expertise and society's overall health and well-being.
- **Determine who and how many members work in population health.** Typical member censuses can be slow to identify pioneers and innovators, and associations may have scattered pockets of emergent interest across their membership. Leaders can take affirmative steps to identify, organize, and connect these members within specialized communities and help them grow their knowledge and skills and attract others into this work.
- **Innovate business models to disrupt money flows.** Early leaders in population health struggle to overcome today's patient-focused, fee-for-service reimbursement models. Innovators take risks to apply their expertise in new service delivery models, such as web-based and consumer/retail businesses settings. Spotlight their against-the-odds successes to inspire others to take the risk and believe they can earn their living in new ways.
- **Reach out to new collaborators and partners.** Population health strategies require a holistic, collaborative approach. You may discover new potential partners, including technology companies, government agencies—particularly those providing social services—and nonprofits and foundations advocating for social change. Associations already moving into population health report they are making thrilling connections where they might once have been dismissed.
- **Shift your profession's preparatory and continuing education focus.** Many healthcare clinicians were traditionally trained to diagnose and treat individual patients rather than direct their efforts toward systems intervention to achieve population health. Professions that do address wellness and prevention may only touch lightly upon the need and could do more to prepare members to translate or expand their expertise into new arenas.

Keyword Search

To continue researching this change driver, use these search terms:
population health, population health management, value-based reimbursement, social determinants of health, accountable care organizations

Who Will Be Affected

Many professions and businesses in healthcare (hospitals, practitioners, health technologies) are already testing the potential and connecting with government and public interest groups (social services, public health, urban planning). They may be perceived as pioneers in these fields. All associations and their business partners have a stake in some specific population's health; the issue is determining whether these needs are a mission priority.

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- tools for applying insights from the research in your association;
- guidance in performing environmental scans; and
- opportunities to engage with peers around the research.

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