ABSTRACT: 2018 ELAM Institutional Action Project

Project Title: Strategic Process to Inform and Design More Effective Employee Health and Wellness Programs for and Outreach to University of Michigan's Low-Wage Earners
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Collaborators and Mentors: Carol R. Bradford, MD, Preeti Malani, MD, MSJ, MS, John Z. Ayanian, MD, MPP, Kristi Jenkins, PhD

Topic Category: Research
Background, Significance of project: The University of Michigan's 11,000 low-wage earners (annual income <$45K) have the highest prevalence of health risk factors and chronic conditions, as well as highest proportion of healthcare costs as a percentage of wages, Emergency Department visits, and hospitalizations compared to higher-wage employees. Since 2009, University of Michigan (UM) has devoted significant resources to promote employee health and wellbeing through multiple programs offered by a dedicated unit (M-Healthy). To date, however, low-wage earners have low rates of engagement in current programs. Improving outreach to and engagement of low-wage earners has been identified as a priority issue by UM's Chief Health Officer and leadership team. As this need falls within my own research areas, I am spearheading a process of evaluating key health and wellness needs and priorities of low-wage UM employees, overseeing strategic planning to inform current and new programs to meet identified needs, and conducting a rigorous partnered evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs in improving outcomes.

Purpose/Objectives: To lead needs assessment and strategic planning process to improve outreach and programs for University of Michigan's (UM) low-wage earners to improve their health and wellbeing.

Methods/Approach/Evaluation strategy
Objective 1: Assess current M-healthy programs: Conducted semi-structured interviews with M-Healthy staff and reviewed M-Healthy documents and prior evaluations.
Objective 2: Identify and describe programs at other universities that can help delineate best practices: Conducted review of peer-reviewed and grey literature; interviewed program representatives.
Objective 3: Describe key demographic, socio-economic, and health characteristics and needs of UM low-wage earners: Using UM employee data bases, generated descriptive statistics, reviewed data from prior assessments.
Objective 4: Explore low-wage earner views on their key health needs and priorities and programs to meet these and to improve outreach: Conduct focus groups and interview low-wage earners in each job family with high numbers of low-wage earners.
Objective 5: Develop proposals for ways to improve outreach and current programs and new programs to meet identified needs and priorities.
Objective 6: Oversee rigorous evaluation of new initiatives put in place through this process.

Outcomes/Results:
1. Completed description of low-wage earners and assessment of current M-Healthy programs.
2. Completed landscape analysis of other universities' programs.
3. Interviewed key M-Healthy and other stakeholders.
4. Presented preliminary findings to M-Healthy Advisory Committee March 8, 2018.
5. With M-Healthy authorization and financial support, planning focus groups and interviews with wage earners from each relevant job family.

Discussion/Conclusion with Statement of Impact/Potential Impact: This work will help UM become an exemplary workplace in identifying and responding to health and wellbeing needs of its large number of low-wage workers who currently are not engaging in the extensive menu of programs being offered through M-Healthy.