

## New Hampshire Children's Health Foundation 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Evaluation – Executive Summary

**Background:** The New Hampshire Children's Health Foundation (NHCHF) was formed in 1997 as the result of the merger between Blue Cross/Blue Shield of New Hampshire and Matthew Thornton Health Plan. NHCHF's mission is to improve the health and wellness of New Hampshire's population, with a focus on its most vulnerable children. As NHCHF approaches its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, its leadership decided to reflect on the foundation's history and inform its future through an evaluation of **NHCHF's influence and impact over time**, its grantmaking practices, and how it can increase its impact and influence to benefit the health and wellness of New Hampshire children.

**Methods:** Starting in June of 2021, evaluation consultants Hope Worden Kenefick, MSW, PhD and Dawn Baxter, MBA employed a mixed methods approach using several data sources, including: a review of existing documentation (e.g., NHCHF annual reports, e-newsletters, and press releases); an online survey of 32 grantees funded since 2015 (53.3% response rate); and semi-structured interviews with four groups, including grantees (28 individuals from 20 different organizations), key informants (18 organization leaders and/or advocates in various areas of children's health, including seven past or present NHCHF board members), partners (six individuals from three foundations that have co-funded initiatives with NHCHF over time), and current and past NHCHF staff. Quantitative data were analyzed in Excel and SPSS and qualitative data were analyzed to identify common and divergent themes and illustrative quotes and examples. The full report of findings details the methodology, data limitations, and findings. Below, a summary of major findings is offered and followed by recommended next steps.

**NHCHF's influence and impact over time:** As of December 31, 2021, NHCHF has paid out \$16,469,771 in total awards and field investments. While making a direct link between its investments and specific improvements in outcomes is difficult due to confounding variables, evaluation participants believe NHCHF has influenced the health and wellness of children in the following ways:

- **NHCHF has contributed to important outcomes in the field.** NHCHF has funded the implementation of evidence-based strategies and evaluation of a number of promising projects (e.g., Early Sprouts, Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team (ACERT), Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), Meals4Kids mobile market in Rochester, NH). Thus, data exist to illustrate the effectiveness of some NHCHF-supported interventions at achieving desired outcomes.
- **NHCHF has contributed to significant policy and legislative wins**, particularly in the areas of childhood trauma and access to health coverage, including garnering state support for CHIP, the Family Resource Centers, childcare scholarships, and home visiting.
- **NHCHF has contributed to important system changes**, such as ACERT, which is seen as a ground-breaking change in how law enforcement responds to family violence and HEAL, which has led regional planning commissions across NH to work collaboratively with their public health colleagues and routinely consider the implications of their work on the health of communities.
- **NHCHF has aided in building capacity and infrastructure:** For example, NHCHF-supported Early Sprouts training of hundreds of childcare and Head Start workers across NH enabled them to integrate strategies to support healthy eating among young children. NHCHF's joint support of New Futures facilitated training of advocates at the local level who, with the experts at the "advocacy hub," can be mobilized to support legislative action and policy change.
- **NHCHF has supported lasting collaborative relationships.** NHCHF funding has been integral to building collaborative relationships that have been sustained beyond the life of the funded projects. These enduring relationships serve as an informal infrastructure that enhances the ability of organizations to improve children's health and wellness across all five priority areas.

**How and why NHCHF is effective:** NHCHF is respected and viewed as effective because:

- **NHCHF is knowledgeable, responsive, and innovative and willing to take risks.** NHCHF understands the complex health needs of NH children and families and makes strategic use of its dollars by being solution-driven and innovative, and by identifying both where it can be impactful and the right partners on the ground to advance its priorities. While ensuring its financial security, NHCHF takes risks on lesser-known organizations and promising ideas and acts quickly in a crisis. NHCHF funds initiatives that other state funders don't prioritize. Interviewees believe that without NHCHF, funding to address food insecurity would decrease significantly, oral health might receive no support, and the mapping and plotting of recreational opportunities under HEAL would have been impossible.
- **NHCHF is skilled at and supports leveraging.** NHCHF leverages its funding to bring additional resources to NH, both directly and via grantees. For example, in its early days, NHCHF provided the state match for CHIP, resulting in millions of dollars in insurance coverage for NH children. Later, it helped attract funds from the Convergence Partnership and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for HEAL. Most (93.8%) grantees surveyed reported they too leveraged NHCHF funding; having in-state support is critical to securing out-of-state funding.
- **NHCHF is a neutral convener.** NHCHF facilitates learning and planning by convening researchers, advocates, and community-based program staff with common interests to learn from one another and experts in the field. It links grantees to others doing similar or complimentary work and engages stakeholders to co-invest in and work collaboratively on shared priorities. By being seen as neutral and non-political, NHCHF has been effective at convening diverse stakeholders, advancing its priorities, and cultivating champions on both sides of the state legislature.
- **NHCHF increases the knowledge-base and raises awareness of important issues.** NHCHF support of the NH Fiscal Policy Institute and other research and evaluation efforts, evidence-based practices, and pilot-testing of promising models has increased the knowledge base about how to address intractable issues impacting children's health. NHCHF was credited with raising awareness of children's health issues among state-level partners and legislators. Its role in promoting advocacy was, in particular, seen as an important strategy to that end.
- **NHCHF has an "out-sized" impact** because it contributes to important partnerships, leveraging of resources, and support for data collection and advocacy. The work of the NH Fiscal Policy Institute and New Futures plays a critical cross-cutting role in policy and systems change in NHCHF's strategic priorities of childhood trauma and access to medical coverage.

**NHCHF grant-making practices:** Evaluation participants provided the following insights about NHCHF's grantmaking practices, including communication about funding opportunities, its application process, financial transactions, and reporting.

- **While clear and comparable to other funders, NHCHF's application requirements could be simplified to encourage more submissions.** While the funding priorities and opportunities are clear and the application process is relatively easy and comparable to other funders, including its online system for proposal and report submissions, grantees with limited proposal-writing resources may prioritize submissions to foundations that can make larger awards. The utility of the logic model was questioned and described as a possible obstacle for some applicants.
- **Financial transactions and communication with grantees work well.** It's relatively easy for grantees to access funds and to get information they may need from NHCHF. Those who had been contacted by the foundation reported that the exchanges have been meaningful.
- **Opportunities may exist to simplify the board's involvement in application review.** Based upon their own experience over time, some of NHCHF's funding partners questioned whether NHCHF

has a need to simplify its application review process and/or decrease the burden it places on board members.

- ***Although NHCHF reporting requirements are relatively easy, it may want to consider its evaluation needs and the capacity of smaller grantee organizations.*** NHCHF's funding partners have spent considerable time discussing the demands evaluation puts on already over-worked and under-resourced organizations and concluded that foundations should minimize what they require by deciding what they most need to know and why. Because smaller grantees may lack evaluation expertise and staffing, they believe foundations should be prepared to pay for evaluation support or provide technical assistance directly. While they suggested it may be worthwhile for NHCHF to consider whether it places onerous demands on grantees related to evaluation, an internal NHCHF participant indicated that grantees are only asked to report on the outcomes identified in their workplans. If NHCHF asks for a more extensive evaluation of a model, the foundation will pay for the evaluation to take place.
- ***NHCHF's approach is highly valued.*** All three NHCHF staff were described as partners with considerable skills, knowledge, and expertise. The trust grantees have in the program director in particular supports transparency and problem-solving when projects aren't going as planned. Whether one-on-one or in larger convenings, NHCHF's engagement with grantees and partners is appreciated.

**Increasing NHCHF's impact and influence moving forward:** Because most of the evaluation participants are not privy to internal deliberations at NHCHF, they offered questions and issues for NHCHF to consider as possible ways of increasing its impact and influence to benefit the health of NH children.

#### **Philanthropic philosophical considerations related to NHCHF giving:**

- What is the foundation's stand with regard to trust-based philanthropy versus the desire for information about the impact and effectiveness of funded projects and what are the implications for evaluation and reporting?
- Grantees generally prefer unrestricted funding/operating support versus project-specific support. While NHCHF provides some operating support to grantees, the majority of grants support specific projects. What is the right balance of project-specific vs. unrestricted support for NHCHF's grantmaking?
- With regard to its five priorities, how narrow and deep versus shallow and wide does NHCHF endeavor to go in its giving and what are the implications for its ability to influence policy, systems, and environmental changes and the number of children and families it benefits?
- What is the right balance between NHCHF's strategic vs. responsive grantmaking and what are the implications for its influence of policy and systems change, ability to take chances on newcomers and interesting ideas, and the resources and effort involved in ongoing grantmaking and reporting?
- While NHCHF's priorities were informed by focus groups and interviews, there are currently no plans for conducting such assessment in the future. Going forward, how responsive should NHCHF be to community-identified funding needs (versus what it believes it should be funding)? What would be the impact of regular needs assessment on the foundation and community partners and how disruptive would evolving priorities be to NHCHF communications with prospective grantees, progress being made on NHCHF's existing priorities, and the foundation's ability to inform best practices?
- Should NHCHF fund initiatives that should be the responsibility of the state, what are the risks and possible benefits, and what would NHCHF's exit strategy be if needed?

- How far upstream should NHCHF go in addressing the underlying causes of poor health (i.e., Social Determinants of Health) among children and poverty, and advocating for a livable wage and/or child tax credits?

**NHCHF's existing priorities:**

- How will NHCHF evaluate progress and determine whether and when to eliminate a priority?
- Is there a niche within each of the priority areas where it makes the most sense for NHCHF to focus to have impact and make the best use of its limited resources?
- What are NHCHF's expectations in terms of the policy, systems, and/or environmental change it will create in the priority areas going forward given the resources to support such strategies?
- With regard to its focus on childhood trauma, what should NHCHF's role be in addressing the impact of the pandemic on the behavioral health of all children, expanding the behavioral health workforce, and improving Medicaid reimbursement for behavioral health services?
- With regard to its focus on oral health, what should NHCHF's role be in improving Medicaid coverage for dental services?
- Should NHCHF support education about available public programs and application assistance to increase access to benefits like SNAP, housing subsidies, or childcare scholarships?

**Emerging issues and needs:**

- What is most critical for NHCHF to support in the pandemic/post-pandemic context and what would be the implications for funding of its existing priorities?
- Will NHCHF re-think its priorities to address the likely consequences of climate change particularly related to increased food and housing insecurity?
- What is NHCHF's role in addressing poverty and social determinants of health, especially childcare and housing?
- Regarding demographic shifts in NH and health and racial equity, is NHCHF being equitable in where/how it invests to address children's health? What will it do to address racial equity moving forward? Are the board and staff representative of the state's demographics?

**Other questions that may affect the dollars available to support children's health:**

- What are the implications of American Recovery Act funds for the issues NHCHF supports and how might the foundation influence where and how ARA money is spent in NH?
- How environmentally and socially responsible are NHCHF's investment strategies?
- How much should a foundation like NHCHF invest in public relations and making itself more visible? What are the reasons for doing it and the implications for its ability to fund and/or leverage support for its priorities?

**Capacity/succession planning**

- What can/should NHCHF do with regard to succession planning? What should its model for grantmaking and administration be in 5 or 10 years and what should it do now to get there?
- What can NHCHF do to address the lack of redundancy in staff functions and how a sudden loss of a staff member would create vulnerability for the organization?

**Recommendations:** NHCHF should take note of what the evaluation identified as working well and what has been effective to date when thinking strategically about how it will invest in improving children's health moving forward. With regard to its grantmaking, NHCHF should examine whether its application and reporting requirements, and in particular the logic model should be modified. Additionally, NHCHF

should determine whether the application review process is burdensome for the board and modify the process as appropriate. Finally, the NHCHF board and staff should review the philosophical questions, and those related to the organization's priorities, emerging issues, and capacity and succession planning, and first determine which have already been addressed and/or are not relevant, and then prioritize the others. Thereafter, the prioritized questions should serve as the basis for a facilitated session in which the board and staff plan strategically for the foundation's future.