

Persistence Lures Employers to the Table



West Michigan

Employers have critical knowledge and experience in benefit plan design, wellness programming, process improvement, and waste reduction, but getting them involved in AF4Q can be problematic.

“We have longed believed that strong and visible health care purchaser/employer engagement in Aligning Forces is a critical ingredient for success,” said Bob Parrish, project director for the West Michigan AF4Q Alliance for Health. “These are the people paying the bills and absorbing increase upon increase in health care costs. They must be the primary catalyst for the transformative work the Alliance for Health is facilitating through AF4Q.”

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To reach out to this critical group, Alliance for Health started by hosting—in partnership with Amway, one of West Michigan’s largest employers—an invitation-only event billed as a CEO summit on health care. The event was highly successful, and Parrish attributes that success to efforts to encourage turnout and a program with well-prepared and passionate speakers.

The Alliance for Health knew this summit would be only the beginning, so it made immediate plans to follow up with a meeting to do a deeper dive into what AF4Q is doing.

An employer engagement planning group composed of human resources and employee benefit directors has helped guide the group. As a result, at least four influential HR executives have committed to promoting AF4Q engagement to their respective CEOs.

But the request isn’t merely for time and talent—it’s also for treasure. The Alliance for Health, as part of a strategy to start building sustainability, also is asking for financial investment in AF4Q. And they’re getting results. This core group of committed purchaser leaders has become an advocate for AF4Q, not only within their respective organizations but also to other employers.

“This type of support is invaluable and far exceeds the influence AF4Q [alliance] staff could have in engaging other purchasers,” said Parrish.

To reach these purchasers, Parrish said, the Alliance for Health “spent countless hours honing the AF4Q message to make it concise, clear, and compelling to employers. With pared-down staff and budget woes, no one has time to read a 20-page document. We have to convey AF4Q’s many moving parts and interconnected strategies in a way that doesn’t hopelessly confuse our audience.”

Lessons Learned

- It’s challenging to secure financial investment from the purchasers over and above what they are already paying out in claims and related health care expenditures. Be persistent.
- It is absolutely necessary to cultivate and develop influential civic and community leaders who are already well known and respected by business leadership. These champions are the foundation of success.
- No matter how compelling your case for supporting AF4Q, you must be prepared for a skeptical audience.
- Clarity and conciseness are absolutely necessary. You need to make succinct explanations of AF4Q focused on “what’s in it for employers.”
- Don’t give up. Persistence is important.