



MassHealth DSRIP TA Shared Learning Event: ACO and CP Peer to Peer Domain Discussion Groups Summary Memo

On November 19th, 2020 the Massachusetts (MA) DSRIP Technical Assistance (TA) Program hosted a shared learning event for MassHealth Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs) and Community Partners (CPs). This event consisted of a brief kick-off event at which MassHealth staff shared their thoughts on priorities for Year 4 ACO and CP TA Card spending. A summary of PCDI priorities is [available here](#). The kick-off event was followed by a series of TA Domain Peer-to-Peer Discussion Groups, in which ACOs and CPs could speak with small groups of colleagues about their experiences conducting TA Projects in specific TA Domains and ask questions of one another. At the end of the day, MassHealth and Abt Associates staff held office hours for ACOs and CPs.



A total of 29 attendees, representing 14 CPs and 6 ACOs, participated in 9 TA Domain Discussion Groups. Discussion Groups consisted of an average of 6 attendees each, and a moderator from Abt Associates facilitated each conversation. Many attendees joined more than one Discussion Group. A summary of frequently raised topics, common challenges, strategies for success, and suggestions for future improvements raised in the Domain Discussion Groups is included below.

14 CPs



Frequently Raised Topics

Across the 9 Domain Discussion Groups, four key topic areas emerged:

- 1) **TA Project implementation and outcomes.** ACOs and CPs discussed the details of completed projects and shared ideas for future projects. Challenges and successful strategies for effectively leveraging the MA DSRIP TA Program shared during discussion groups are highlighted in the next section of this document.
- 2) **TA Vendor recommendations.** ACOs and CPs described experiences working with specific TA Vendors. They also provided recommendations of TA Vendors with specific expertise.
- 3) **Collaboration opportunities.** ACOs and CPs learned about one another's priorities and identified possible opportunities for collaboration. Both ACOs and CPs expressed interest in partnering on joint TA Projects and hoped to foster more long term collaboration.
- 4) **TA Program resources.** ACOs and CPs gained a better understanding of the resources available to them on the [TA Marketplace](#) (the MA DSRIP TA Program website) including [TA Project Descriptions by domain](#), [Off the Shelf TA Projects](#), and the [TA Vendor Catalog](#).

Common Challenges:

ACOs and CPs faced challenges using their TA Card funds. A number of participants, especially from CPs, commented that it was "harder than anticipated to spend money." Among those that had completed projects, common challenges emerged:

- **TA Vendor selection:** Due to the high number of TA Vendors in each domain, it was sometimes difficult for ACOs and CPs to determine which TA Vendors had the most appropriate expertise to address their TA Project needs.

- **TA Vendor understanding of the MassHealth DSRIP Program:** Some CPs reported that TA Vendor responses to requests for information felt too generic and lacked customization. TA Vendors sometimes seemed unfamiliar with the details of the MassHealth DSRIP program such as the role of CPs or the financial relationship between ACOs and MassHealth.
- **Project management:** Both ACOs and CPs found managing TA Projects was an unexpected challenge. While some TA Vendors included staff and resources for TA Project management, others relied on ACO and CP staff to serve that role, which required more time than many had allotted.
- **Application of key findings:** Some ACOs and CPs described difficulty applying tools or findings from TA Projects that were more technical in nature. ACOs and CPs found it was sometimes difficult to know how to make the most of TA Project deliverables after the end of the TA Vendor engagement. Others described the struggle to disseminate learnings from their TA Projects more broadly throughout their organizations.
- **Staff turnover:** Staff turnover at both TA Vendors and at ACOs and CPs was a challenge. Staff turnover at TA Vendors made it more difficult to stick to the original project scope of work and timeline. Staff turnover at ACOs and CPs made it difficult to translate results of TA Projects into institutional knowledge.



Successful Strategies:

ACOs and CPs shared a number of strategies and lessons learned that have helped them engage TA Vendors and carry out successful TA Projects:

- **Hold TA Vendor “try-outs”:** One ACO described how they had interviewed multiple TA Vendors before selecting one to execute the TA project. They suggested looking beyond the TA Vendor profiles on the TA Marketplace website, to “do your homework” and also review a TA Vendor organization’s website.
- **Engage key internal stakeholders:** An ACO explained that they had elicited input from internal stakeholders and subject matter experts (SME) in the process of deciding how to use their TA Card dollars and select their TA Vendor. Stakeholder and SME input provided concrete direction that led to successful TA Project implementation.
 - For example, one ACO formed a “Population Health Management Committee” which makes decisions about which projects to prioritize. The committee reviews past projects, the list of TA vendors and a budget and works collectively to decide which projects to pursue. Projects without this input lacked direction and were harder to manage.
- **Request multiple project management options:** One ACO recommended asking TA Vendors to provide various options for project management in order to assess the impact on the project budget and level of effort from the ACO team. The TA Vendor provided one scope of work and budget with the TA Vendor managing the project and a separate scope of work and budget in which the ACO would manage the project. Another participant suggested clarifying early on in a TA engagement which organization and individual would be responsible for each task and sub-task. MassHealth has revised the SOW template to incorporate this feedback.
- **Invite TA Vendors** to provide details about all stages of a proposed TA Project: One CP found it helpful to ask potential TA Vendors to describe their whole approach, from design to the final deliverable. They asked TA Vendors to provide details of their project planning and management, in addition to deliverable development. They also requested that the TA Vendor interview key CP stakeholders prior to finalizing the scope of work, to ensure a feasible approach and useful end product.
- **Partner with other organizations:** A small group of CPs were working together with a single vendor. Representatives of these organizations that participated in the shared learning event spoke very highly of this arrangement. They described that they felt that they were able to share expertise and resources and they worked collectively to prioritize projects.



Recommendations and Future Opportunities for the TA Program:

ACOs and CPs made some suggestions of ways to further enhance the TA Program or create more chances for ACOs and CPs to share with one another.

- **Share findings from TA Projects:** TA Vendors are collaborating with ACOs and CPs to develop resources and identify best practices through the TA projects. ACOs and CPs suggested disseminating lessons learned and project deliverables to the broader ACO and CP community. This could also assist ACOs and CPs with identifying organizations or TA Vendors to work with to replicate projects and deliverables for their own organization. MassHealth and Abt Associates are working to share this information with ACOs and CPs in 2021.
- **Create additional opportunities for ACOs and CPs to share with each other:** ACOs and CPs valued the opportunity to share their experiences and ask questions of one another. Some suggested regularly scheduled discussion groups would be a helpful way to continue to do this. Others suggested more informal mechanisms such as an email listserv. In particular, CPs shared that better coordination between ACOs and CPs may help address longer term sustainability after the end of the DSRIP program.

Additional Resources

The [MassHealth DSRIP TA website](#) includes a number of resources for ACOs and CPs as they consider TA Projects in Year 4 including the [TA Project summaries](#), [Off the Shelf projects](#) and [vendor profiles](#). If you are interested in learning more about a specific TA Project or Vendor or being introduced to the ACO or CP that completed a specific project to learn more please contact us at MA_DSRIP_TA@abtassoc.com.