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Sillerman Reflection Paper

I applied to the Sillerman Summer Internship Program with the hope of gaining a better understanding of how philanthropic organizations influence change. Thanks to the guidance and financial support from the program, I secured an internship at the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation (BCBSMA Foundation). The Foundation's mission "to expand access to health care for vulnerable and low-income people in the Commonwealth" resonates with my own interest in state-based access and quality of care issues.

Over the summer I worked at the intersection of the Foundation's grantmaking, evaluation, and policy agendas as a Grantmaking and Evaluation Intern. In this role, I saw how critical philanthropy can be for non-profits that work tirelessly to affect policy change and improve the care of MA residents.

During the first few weeks at my internship, I was able to participate in two site visits for the Strengthening Voices for Access (SVA) grantees. The SVA grant area provides general operating support for non-profits that work on expanding access to healthcare. These visits helped me understand how general support could translate into policy action and how these non-profits operated efficiently with limited resources.

I was also able to further my understanding of the funder-grantee relationship by participating in a Learning Community for the current Fostering Effective Integration (FEI) grantees. These grantees are focused on behavioral health and primary care integration (BHI). Grantees expressed an interest in better understanding how to measure their impact so that they could evaluate their programs and build the evidence base in support of BHI. Based on this feedback, the Foundation put together a learning session to discuss data management with these organizations. This event helped me understand that funders can be conveners. In addition to financial support, they can provide technical support and foster relationships between groups conducting similar work. Overall, these methods make both the health care community stronger and broaden the impact an individual organization can have.

On the evaluation side of things, I learned that foundations can act as collectors and disseminators of information. I worked on developing an internal brief to discuss metrics grantees could use to evaluate their impact on health insurance churn (movement of individuals between types of insurance coverage or within a program (such as Medicaid and uninsurance)). The Foundation is still considering both what types of churn data they may ask future Connecting Consumers with Care (CCC) grantees to collect and how this information may be used. By collecting this data, the Foundation could contribute to the literature on the impact of

outreach and enrollment assistors on churn as well as promote the sharing of strategies to reduce churn among CCC grantees. This information could also be used to inform policymakers and the broader community. I was able to see the results of an evaluation as I helped manage the release of the Making Health Care Affordable Final Evaluation. The report showed me how foundations, grantees, and external evaluators can interface to produce research results of value to the community.

Research like this can contribute to policy. The Foundation also conducts policy work through both their policy team and the Massachusetts Medicaid Policy Institute. I helped the policy team scan for organizations working at the intersection of social equity and health. This information will help the Foundation understand existing relationships and policy work as they dive into a new grantmaking and policy area.

Overall, my summer with the Foundation helped me hone my writing and analytical skills as well as gave me a better understanding of how philanthropic organizations make funding decisions and disseminate information that in turn impact policy. I learned a lot from each of the Foundation's staff members and know that my deeper understanding of foundations and the Massachusetts health care community will help me at my future job. I am deeply grateful to both the Foundation and the Sillerman Center for this opportunity. I had a wonderful summer experience and look forward to continuing my internship this fall.