

Request for Proposals

Empowering Health Care Consumers in New York State

Applicants must first complete an online inquiry form. The online inquiry form and instructions will be available in the [Grant Seekers/Open](#)

[RFP section](#) of the NYSHHealth website beginning April 18, 2016. The deadline for the online inquiry form is

Tuesday, May 17, 2016, at 1 p.m. Selected applicants will be invited to submit full proposals, with a deadline of **Monday, August 8, 2016, at 1 p.m.**

I. About the Foundation

The New York State Health Foundation (NYSHHealth) is a private foundation dedicated to improving the health of all New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable. To achieve meaningful impact, the Foundation makes grants, informs health care policy and practice, and spreads effective programs that work to improve New York's health system. Most of the Foundation's grantmaking is focused on two priority areas: building healthy communities and empowering health care consumers.

II. Background

New Yorkers often find the health care system incredibly complex to understand and navigate. Information about prices and quality is opaque. The system is often unresponsive to consumers' needs and preferences, and patients are not engaged in shared decision-making with their health care providers. Patients are sometimes denied access to their own health care information. Even when people are well, the system is daunting and confusing. In times of sickness or crisis, the hurdles can be overwhelming, and the consequences on health and financial security can be huge. Too often, consumers and patients are marginalized, rather than placed at the center of the health care system and treated as its most important customers. Instead, the interests of providers, payers, and other organized stakeholders take precedence over the patient in many cases.

III. New York State Health Foundation Perspective

NYSHHealth has launched a new priority area—[Empowering Health Care Consumers](#)—to address these obstacles. NYSHHealth seeks to amplify the voice of the health care consumer and increase the information and tools available so that patients have more influence over their health and health care. Specifically, the Foundation seeks to increase consumer choice, control, and convenience.

Deadlines:

Inquiry Form: May 17, 2016, at 1 p.m.

Full Proposal: August 8, 2016, at 1 p.m.
Selected Applicants Only

Choice:

Patients want and should have adequate choices for both health plans and health care providers. New York, especially downstate, does have a relatively large number of health plans to choose from. However, even these choices can come with obstacles, such as inadequate access to specialists or pharmaceuticals, overly restrictive networks, or few alternatives to high-deductible health plans.

Patients should also have an adequate level of choice as to where they can get their care. Competition may be diminished by the current trend of hospitals acquiring competing hospitals and physician practices, as well as health plan consolidation. Further market consolidation could limit patient choice and have a lasting impact on New Yorkers' health care options and costs. Multiple studies of provider consolidation outside of New York reveal that it often leads to higher prices without improvements in quality of care. There is an opportunity to further explore the consolidation landscape and trends in New York; identify State-specific strategies to enhance competition; and recommend how best to curb the negative consequences of consolidation.

Control:

Patients want more control of their care but lack the information necessary to do so. In particular, the health care system is not transparent in terms of prices and insurance rules. Patients rarely know in advance what they will have to pay for a service, and prices vary widely across providers. Even the most motivated and savvy consumers shopping for pricing can face hidden or unexpected charges. In New York State, the most frequent complaints to the Attorney General's Health Care Bureau are related to unexpected costs and improper denial of benefits. Common complaints include consumers not being able to access the benefits or services they thought they had; improper bills by out-of-network providers; balance billing; and improper denials of coverage and for benefits. Beyond these formal complaints, many consumers are not aware of existing protections or resources for assistance, complaint, or appeal. More robust mechanisms for consumer assistance—including a centralized approach to intake complaints and assist consumers—can help to identify and address systemic, repeated issues.

Patients also lack meaningful information about quality of care and the ability to choose providers based on quality. New York State holds great repositories of quality data, but few are for public consumption. Publicly available information about quality is often technical and clinically rigorous, but is not understandable or useful to a typical consumer. Opportunities abound for the system to evolve and include performance metrics and quality measures that reflect what matters to patients. New payment methods emphasize patient experience measures, creating incentives for health care systems to be more attentive to patient needs and navigation. Health care systems will face more pressure to participate in quality data and rating systems, such as The Leapfrog Group's Safety Score, to which few New York hospitals currently submit data.

Patients also need greater access to their own personal health information. Misinterpretation of important patient protections, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), can sometimes end up depriving patients and their caregivers of information to which they are entitled. More provider systems are starting patient portals that provide access to information, such as laboratory results, but they vary in quality. Few systems provide patients with other information tools such as patient visit summaries; access to their own physicians' notes and full medical records; and shared decision-making tools that can be used in partnership with providers to make treatment choices that reflect patients' own needs and preferences.

Convenience:

The complexity of the health care system makes it hard to understand and navigate. Health care systems are growing larger and more mysterious to the health care consumer. Patients need to be able to better use the

system, communicate their concerns to decision-makers, and meet their own responsibilities without undue burden. Newly insured patients in particular need to understand how their insurance works (e.g., premiums, deductibles, co-pays) and how the health care delivery system functions (e.g., finding a doctor, reducing reliance on emergency rooms for regular care, participating in disease self-management).

Most consumers will never become health care experts, nor should they. Providing simple, easy-to-use help can empower patients and improve convenience and access to care. Additionally, few post-enrollment resources exist to help newly insured New Yorkers, causing many people to simply return to the Marketplace or enrollment assistors for help. A more robust mechanism is needed, including a centralized approach to fielding complaints, helping consumers, and identifying and addressing systemic, repeated issues.

IV. The Funding Opportunity

To empower New York's health care consumers, NYSHealth is issuing this Request for Proposals to help the Foundation identify opportunities in New York State, support new grantees in this work, and encourage creative thinking in this area. NYSHealth seeks to ensure that consumers have the tools, resources, and support they need to make informed decisions about their health care.

The Foundation expects to support projects or analyses that relate to the issues described above. For example, successful projects and analyses may:

- Foster appropriate levels of competition and choice in both health insurance and provider options;
- Provide State-specific findings regarding consolidation or competition;
- Increase health literacy and consumer activation;
- Improve patients' ability to navigate the health system with fewer burdens;
- Encourage clearer pricing and disclosure of prices by providers;
- Develop price and quality comparison tools;
- Promote public policies that encourage transparency;
- Make existing relevant data more accessible to consumers, reporters, or policymakers;
- Equip patients with access to their own personal health information;
- Encourage patients to be active partners in their care;
- Develop and share quality measures that matter to consumers;
- Increase information-seeking behavior by consumers; and
- Improve or establish effective systems for consumer protection.

[View related projects previously funded by NYSHealth.](#)

V. Eligibility and Funding

The Foundation expects grantees to be geographically diverse, as well as to represent a range of expertise and capacities. Applicants do not have to be based in New York State; however, the project or analysis must be specific to New York.

Applicants may apply for a grant of up to \$400,000. Projects will be assessed for the appropriateness of budget to the proposed scope of work and timeline. Funds requested must be commensurate with the work proposed. Budget will be an important factor in selecting the most competitive proposals.

Project durations may vary. Some competitive projects can be completed more quickly and result in impact sooner than others. Larger, more ambitious projects may take longer to complete.

VI. Review Criteria

The Foundation encourages New York-specific projects that are creative, have broad impact or geographic breadth, enlist key partners, address critical knowledge gaps, advance the needs of vulnerable populations, and demonstrate financial and/or policy leverage. If applicable, submissions should explain what public policy the project will affect or complement and the how organization will collaborate with either local or State government if applicable.

The most competitive proposals will broadly address an issue and/or affect a large number of organizations and people beyond the applicant's own organization and the people it serves.

Letters of inquiry are all reviewed internally by Foundation staff, who then invite selected applicants to submit a full proposal for review. Full proposals will be assessed by both Foundation staff and a panel of external reviewers who possess a diverse set of expertise.

VII. Application Process

Step 1: All applicants are required to complete an online inquiry form. The deadline for the online inquiry form is May 17, 2016, at 1 p.m.

Note: The online inquiry form will open on April 18, 2016.

Step 2: After reviewing all inquiry forms, NYSHealth staff members will then advise applicants on whether to submit a full proposal. Selected applicants will be e-mailed specific submission instructions. The deadline for the full proposal is August 8, 2016, at 1 p.m.

For additional information on this funding opportunity and the application process, please consult [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Programmatic questions regarding projects or study ideas should be addressed to:
Program Officer Amy Shefrin at Shefrin@nyshealth.org or 212-584-7673, or
Program Assistant Jessie Kavanagh at Kavanagh@nyshealth.org or 212-584-7686.

Technical questions regarding the online application system should be e-mailed to grantsmanagement@nyshealth.org.