



TIPS FOR OBTAINING FUNDING FOR PRIMARY CARE RESEARCH

Primary care research is critical to strengthening the nation's primary care system. Thus, sustainable funding to support primary care research is needed to continue to make improvements in the delivery of primary care. AHRQ's National Center for Excellence in Primary Care Research (NCEPCR) virtually convened a group of stakeholders in March 2025 to gather their insights about how to maintain a broad portfolio of primary care research funding. NCEPCR and Abt Global developed this resource, based on the information shared by the stakeholders.

This resource includes the following sections:

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National Center
for Excellence in
Primary Care Research

Diversify Funding Sources for Investigator-Led Research

Seeking funding from a broad range of sources will help research teams sustain their primary care research. This includes applying for funding from a variety of organizations that typically support healthcare research, as well as building partnerships with non-traditional funders.

Potential Funding Sources:

- **National Research Funding Entities and Federal Agencies.** The [Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute \(PCORI\)](#) funds patient-centered comparative clinical effectiveness research on a wide range of clinical topics and care settings, including primary care. Health research funding will still be available from across federal agencies, including [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#), [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), and [Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services \(CMS\)](#). Federal funding opportunities are posted on [grants.gov](#) and the [NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts](#). Both have options to subscribe to e-mail updates: [grants.gov subscriptions](#) and [NIH Guide subscriptions](#).
- **Foundations.** Many national and state-level foundations have missions that are well aligned with improving primary care, and some currently fund primary care research-related work. An additional benefit of foundation funding is fewer restrictions on the type of research that can be conducted compared with Federal funding. A [community foundation locator](#) is available to identify smaller, accredited foundations in your area. A non-exhaustive list of foundations that fund health-related grants includes:

[ABIM Foundation](#)

[Gates Foundation](#)

[American Nurses Foundation](#)

[Hearst Foundations](#)

[Arnold Ventures](#)

[New York Health Foundation](#)

[California Health Care Foundation](#)

[NIHCM Foundation](#)

[Commonwealth Fund](#)

[Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#)

[Elevance Health Foundation](#)

[Physicians Foundation](#)

- **Associations.** Many disease-focused associations fund research and can be a good source to support aligned work, such as the [American Diabetes Association](#), [American Heart Association](#), and [American Cancer Society](#). Professional associations (for example the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), and the [American Association of Physician Associates](#)) also offer funding opportunities.
- **Local and State Government.** State and local governments offer opportunities for primary care research funding, and opportunities to partner with tribal communities to support primary care should not be overlooked.
 - Some states use some of their budget surpluses to support research. One example is in Texas, where they have created the [Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas \(CPRIT\)](#) and they are currently thinking about creating something similar for dementia using state budget surplus funding.
- **Pharmaceutical Companies, Health Insurers, or Other Private Industry.** Pharmaceutical companies have a growing interest in chronic disease and primary care and can therefore be a good source of funding, as can health insurers and other private industry (for example, see [Boehringer IngelheimUS](#)). While researchers understandably may have concerns about undue influence or pressure on specific outcomes from private industry funders, stakeholders with this type of funding did not experience these issues.
 - Stakeholders offered examples of private industry funders for their research ranging from the National Football League and a glucose monitoring device company.

Other Approaches for Supporting Primary Care Research-Related Work

Many organizations share goals with primary care research aims related to implementation science (i.e., the study of strategies to facilitate the uptake of evidence-based interventions into practice) and monitoring and evaluation (i.e., the tracking and demonstration of progress over time and identification of areas in need of improvement). Below we list types of organizations that could be good sources of funding for primary care research-related efforts or expertise.

Potential Funding Sources:

- **Healthcare Systems.** Healthcare systems may fund research or projects related to their learning health system aims to improve quality and safety of care for patients, or to evaluate their internal quality improvement or other initiatives.
- **Health Plans.** Health plans may fund primary care quality improvement projects or evaluations of specific programs addressing key priority areas, such as behavioral health (for example, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts). In addition, health plans might pay research groups for direct services, such as practice facilitation or practice coaching.
- **University Endowments.** Universities can often tap into their endowments to support research infrastructure or provide bridge funding between grants to maintain staff and other essential research support services.
- **Local Partnerships and Collaborative Funding Arrangements.** Partnering with other groups to pool funding is another model to support research.
 - For example, several rural hospitals fundraised from hospital systems across their state to fund an initiative through a non-profit subsidiary of the state hospital association.
 - Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) can be great research partners for universities. FQHCs and universities often have complementary resources that can lead to a successful research partnership.
- **State Government.** State governments may be able to fund primary care research as part of state programming or community initiatives.
 - For example, some states funded initiatives in primary care to address opioid prescribing or improve access to medications for opioid use disorder through funding the State received as part of the [CDC Overdose Data to Action \(OD2A\)](#) grants.
- **Tribal Communities.** Many tribal organizations operate primary care services, and some tribal communities have generated substantial funds from business enterprises to support these services, including potential research activities.
 - For example, there has been some work in Alaska that uses tribal community funds to conduct research on primary care.

Suggestions and Considerations

Broadening a primary care research funding portfolio will take time and effort and will require taking on new skills and activities. Below we provide some suggestions and considerations as you approach this effort.

- **Leverage Current Connections.** Ask your current partners, colleagues, and funders to suggest and connect you with other organizations that could be interested in funding your research.
- **Develop New Relationships.** Build relationships with foundations, philanthropists, and other potential funders in your state, local area, or area of focus – even if they have not funded research in the past. Consider partnerships beyond the academic setting. Think specifically about the impact your work has on the community and how this aligns with the mission and goals of other organizations.
- **Monitor State and Local Legislative Priorities and Budgets.** Be ready to apply for funding opportunities when they are released. Understand state and local budgets and be aware of any budget surpluses. Build relationships with state and local representatives that support healthcare initiatives, primary care, and research.
- **Expand What Your Team Offers.** Consider offering direct services (such as practice facilitation and QI coaching) that you can charge for in addition to your research activities.
- **Consider Ways to Mitigate High Indirect Cost Rates.** For example, consider partnering with a 501c3 non-profit status organization so the indirect costs can be lower than at a university or research center.
- **Align with Current Funding Priorities.** Consider ways your work aligns with current federal, state, and local priorities and can help to support their agenda.
- **Share and Promote the Value of Your Work.** Translating research and effectively conveying its impact for different audiences is necessary to expand awareness of its value and build financial support. Strategies to do this effectively include:
 - Use storytelling techniques to tell the story of how your research has benefited individuals and the public. Providing real world examples of how your work affects the lives of individuals is likely to be more compelling to non-research audiences than statistically significant findings.
 - Estimate the value of your work in quantitative terms, if possible. For example, this could be the number of negative health outcomes avoided, number of lives saved, or monetary return on investment (ROI) in terms of dollars saved because of reduced effort. To show an enduring impact, think about how your intervention can become self-sustaining. ROI can be a particularly helpful metric for funding discussions with foundation and industry boards and health plans leaders.
 - Tailor communication materials for different audiences. Different audiences (e.g., policymakers, philanthropists, state government officials) each have different interests and needs. Consider each audience's point of view and needs, and tailor messages and materials to be compelling for them.
 - For example, try to fully understand policy implications so you can make a clear connection between your research and what it will achieve in a practical sense for policymakers.

- Translate research into concise and easily understandable messages and useable formats. Use plain language and avoid research jargon when developing materials so they are accessible to multiple audiences with different (non-research) backgrounds. Use data visualizations to share complex information in compelling and easy to understand formats. Create concise materials that provide an overview of the work and its value.
 - For example, create formatted one-page documents that share the impact of a single research project using concise text and visually compelling graphics.

Additional Resources

Several other resources may be helpful for research teams seeking funding:

- AcademyHealth recently shared the blog [Navigating a Seismic Shift: How Researchers Can Secure New Funding Options](#) (April 2025), which shares helpful information.
 - Although only available for AcademyHealth members, this blog links to the webinar [Securing Funds – Strategies for Researchers](#) and a [resource guide](#) for adapting to the current funding landscape.
- AHRQ’s [Finding Sustainable Funding for Primary Care Extension Programs](#) resource (from 2023) was developed specifically for primary care extension programs, but has a lot of information that may be relevant and useful for primary care researchers more broadly.
- AcademyHealth’s [Four Key Components to Obtaining Funding for Your Research](#) is a helpful overview from 2021.
- [NAPCRG](#) has resources to support primary care researchers, including meetings, webinars, [research capacity building and training programs](#), and a [National Family Medicine Strategic Plan for Research](#).

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