



New Era of Health Reporting for National Public Radio

Health and health care reporting by National Public Radio: 1999–2002 and website project

SUMMARY

Between 1999 and 2002, National Public Radio (NPR), a not-for-profit radio network that produces and distributes programming to affiliated stations nationwide, reorganized and increased the size of its Health Unit, produced more than 500 health-related stories and expanded health-related coverage on its [website](#).

The Project

During the period of this grant, NPR reorganized its Health Unit into three key health areas:

- Behavioral and Social Health—including disease prevention, public health, bioterrorism, mental health, substance abuse, aging and disability.
- Health Care and Health Policy—including Medicare and other legislation at the federal and state levels and market-based health system changes.
- The Practice of Medicine—including clinical practice issues, biomedical research, end-of-life care and quality measurement.

Between 1999 and 2002, the unit expanded from a staff of four full-time and three part-time positions to six full-time and five part-time staff.

Key Results

NPR reported the following accomplishments for the project:

- Health Unit staff produced or directed the development of 576 health-related stories, accounting for 44 hours of programming.

Stories appeared on NPR newsmagazines, *Morning Edition*, *All Things Considered* and *Weekend Edition*. The Health Unit advised and contributed to other NPR programs as well, including *Talk of the Nation* and *Weekly Edition*, and gave

expertise and guidance to the rest of the network—in particular its National Desk and Science Desk.

Additional stories included political coverage of health care and health-related legislative issues—for example welfare reform issues—and coverage of tobacco-related legal issues.

In the grant's third year, the Health Unit began collaborating with NPR's Business Unit to cover health-business stories. The terrorist attack in New York City on September 11, 2001 spurred comprehensive reporting and analysis concerning bioterrorism threats and national preparedness. Because of this event, NPR focused more on health-system preparedness for bioterrorism than had been anticipated.

- NPR expanded the health and health-related news and feature information it provided on the Internet. Visitors to NPR's [website](#) can now search an archive of NPR stories broadcast over the last seven years, listen to full reports, view summary print versions of the stories and access links to related information on other websites. Many topics offer story-related text, documents and/or streaming video.
- In 2002, NPR launched an interactive site, [Housing First](#), centered on stories about housing for people with special needs, including health-related needs, which had aired on its newsmagazines.

Topics covered included the shortage of housing in New York City and elsewhere for people with AIDS, the multi-year battle of a disabled Kansas woman who refused to be either institutionalized or homeless and an innovative program in Boston for grandparents raising their children's offspring.

Funding

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) supported this project through a grant of \$3,266,006.

NPR's coverage of national issues (including health-related issues) is also supported by a number of other funders who provide unrestricted support, including:

- [Annenberg Foundation](#)
- [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)
- [Kresge Foundation](#)
- [Charles Steward Mott Foundation](#)
- [Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation](#) (for international health reporting)
- [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#) (for coverage of children, youth and families)
- [Retirement Research Foundation](#) (for aging and retirement reporting)

CONTEXT

RWJF has supported health reporting on NPR since 1986, in an effort to inform the network's influential audience. (See [Program Results Report](#) on ID#s 010888, 012507, 012782, 016404, 024065 and 019315.)

In addition, it has provided support to three community radio projects [Radio Bilingue (ID#s 019868, 021202 and 027092), National Native News (ID#s 016690, 026995 and 027962) and High Plains News Service (see [Program Results Report](#) on ID#s 020928 and 022514) that reach specific ethnic or geographic audiences.

RWJF has also funded coverage of health care issues by local public radio stations and their partners under the [Sound Partners for Community Health](#) national program.

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AFTERWARD

In November 2002, RWJF renewed its support of NPR's health-related reporting with a three-year, \$3,230,749 grant (ID# 045293).

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Grant ID# 30972

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Current as of date of the report; as provided by the grantee organization; not verified by RWJF; items not available from RWJF.)

Grantee Websites

An archive of NPR's stories (including its health and health related stories) may be accessed at www.npr.org. Visitors to the site can hear stories in their entirety, and may purchase stories and series in transcript, CD or cassette format. In addition, NPR offers some of its programs for purchase in downloadable form directly over the Internet through Audible.com.