Executive Summary
Changes in Health Care Financing and Organization

For 25 years, Changes in Health Care Financing and Organization (HCFO) has supported investigator-initiated research to provide public- and private-sector decision-makers with timely information on the impact of reforms in the health care delivery and payment systems on access, quality, and cost.

Launched in 1989 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the national program has been among the nation's largest sources of private funding for policy-related health services research. From 1989 to early October 2014, under HCFO, RWJF awarded grants totaling $82.1 million for 333 health policy research projects.

Read the full report.
Learn more about the program here.

CONTEXT

In the 1980s, before the program began, health care costs were on a steady rise. In response, both the public and private sectors experimented with new strategies for organizing and financing health care aimed at controlling costs. Perhaps most notable was the rapid expansion of health maintenance and managed-care organizations.

Many of these strategies entailed significant changes in the health care system. But what impact did they have on the quality of and access to care, as well as its cost? Private and public payers for health services—such as employers, unions, insurance companies, Medicare, and Medicaid—had limited capacity to answer that key question.

THE PROGRAM

HCFO requests proposals from investigators and funds research projects that:

- Examine challenges and trends in health care financing and organization, with a focus on their impact on cost, quality, and access
• Evaluate specific new policies and approaches in health care financing and organization that have the potential to improve access to more-affordable and higher-quality health services

The program awards five to 20 new grants each year in two categories:

• **Small grants**, for research projects requiring approximately $100,000 or less and expected to take 12 months or less—typically analyses and case studies of the early impact of a new intervention

• **Large grants**, for research projects requiring more than $100,000 and expected to take longer than 12 months, usually up to three years

Researchers can apply for grants at any time, and program staff and outside reviewers evaluate proposals on a rolling basis. Selection criteria include the significance, uniqueness, and methodology of the proposed research and the applicant’s experience and qualifications.

**KEY RESULTS**

HCFO staff reported these results to RWJF:

• **From 1989 to early October 2014, under HCFO, RWJF awarded 333 grants for research projects that totaled $82.1 million.** Of those:
  — 91 were for small research projects: grants totaled $6.9 million
  — 242 were for large research projects: grants totaled $75.2 million
  
  Of those, 12 projects were active as of early October 2014.

• **Most grantees disseminated their findings in peer-reviewed journal articles.**

• **The funded projects produced findings relevant to policymakers and health care practitioners.** HCFO staff:
  — Conducted face-to-face meetings and briefings to inform public- and private-sector decision-makers of research results that could affect health care cost, quality, and access.
  — Also reached policymakers through a range of products disseminated on the program website or by email, including:
    • Findings Briefs
    • Study Snapshots
    • Policy Briefs
    • Newsletters
    • Research Headlines
WINDING DOWN THE PROGRAM

In early 2014, RWJF announced an overall restructuring of its grantmaking to focus on building a Culture of Health. This included phasing out a number of long-running initiatives, HCFO among them.

The decision reflected no dissatisfaction with the program or its management, says Brian C. Quinn, PhD, assistant vice president for research, evaluation, and learning. Rather, RWJF aims to create a broader program to include research not only on health care but on the social determinants of health, such as poverty, education, and housing.

HCFO is scheduled to end in February 2015. Meanwhile RWJF was preparing to issue a call for proposals from organizations interested in managing the new research program, expected to begin in March 2015. While more broadly focused than HCFO, RWJF expected the new program to continue to emphasize investigator-initiated projects and open solicitations.

Program Management

National Program Office: AcademyHealth
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