



Role of Technical Assistance in U.S. Labor and Health Sector Collaboration to Address Precarious Work

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What was the issue?

Precarious employment (PE) is a critical public health issue, as it is related to poor health outcomes for workers and their families. Defined as employment that is insecure, unstable and uncertain, characteristics of PE often include, but are not limited to, a lack of benefits, unpredictable work schedules, low wages, hazardous conditions and unprotected labor rights. Public health professionals have demonstrated interest in gaining the knowledge and skills needed to address the complexities of PE, its root causes and consequences. However, there is an absence of public health interventions centered on policy, systems and environmental (PSE) change to address PE. This knowledge gap can be supported by technical assistance (TA) from labor organizations, whose direct interaction with workers, and skillset, could prove useful in collaboration with health organizations to implement effective PSE interventions.

This study examines perceptions of the role of technical assistance from both labor and health organizations.

What did University of Illinois Chicago researchers do and how was it done?

The Healthy Work Collaborative (HWC), a learning initiative facilitated by the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) Center for Healthy Work, positioned members of health organizations to understand and tackle PE by receiving TA from labor organizations. This study used an exploratory qualitative design to investigate the perception of TA amongst representatives from labor and health organizations. Initially, representatives from labor organizations (“TA providers”) were invited to semi-structured interviews to discuss the perceived role of TA and their readiness to fulfill the role before participating in HWC sessions. Following the HWC, TA providers were interviewed to discuss results of provider-participant engagement and understanding of their role in the HWC. Representatives from health organizations (“participants”) were interviewed three months after the HWC to discuss the experience of provider-participant engagement, as well as opportunities for future engagement and application of HWC activities. The HWC consisted of activities aimed to:



1

**Develop participants
understanding of precarious
work and root causes**



2

**Identify entities to promote social
change and ways to communicate
with these groups**



3

Create a plan for action

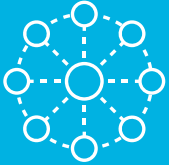
What did UIC researchers find?

Findings are organized under three categories:



Expectations for TA: Providers' Perspectives Pre-HWC

Initial interviews found that providers perceived their role as “labor experts,” with their direct engagement with workers making them a valuable asset to participants. Providers described their role as primarily instructional, offering resources to workers to address their questions and concerns. While providers felt readiness to fulfill this role, a lack of readiness to address precarious work evolved as a common theme. Many providers cited their existing relationship with UIC researchers as their motivation to participate in the HWC.



Role and Impacts of TA: Providers' and Participants' Perspectives Post-HWC

The engagement between TA providers and participants initially consisted of a one-way exchange, later developing into a two-way shared problem solving and relationship building interaction. The participants described an increased understanding of precarious work because of the providers, recognizing TA as both an opportunity for education and skill-sharing. Providers interpreted their role as “content and experience sharing” with an opportunity to provide support around interventions and the desire to tackle drivers of precarious work. Participants noted the relevance of the skills and content to their respective organizations. The engagement transitioned into a two-way exchange, demonstrating a shared learning experience, the basis for potential future partnerships and opportunities to collaborate.



Unique Features of HWC Provider–Participant Engagement

Providers and participants emphasized the benefit of HWC, noting it as a networking and learning opportunity. However, both noted that time limited their ability to fully interact and complete activities. Relatedly, labor representatives also mentioned the need for an ongoing process to share knowledge with participants. Providers stressed the importance of diversity within the collaborative to cultivate expansive conversations. Following the HWC sessions, a few providers and participants continued to meet and foster partnerships.

What does this mean and for whom?



With the complexities of precarious work, a collaborative approach between labor and health organizations is essential to establish PSE interventions that address PE. The HWC highlights the importance of leveraging existing networks and engaging diverse stakeholders to provide TA to address PE. The two way exchange of knowledge and skills between each field creates a model that provides the opportunity for engagement and networking, preparing labor and health organizations to collaboratively address precarious employment.

For more information:



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