

Joy Tapper to Step Down from Leading the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership

After nearly 17 years as the leader of the Milwaukee Health Care Partnership (MHCP), Joy Tapper's last official day as executive director is Sept. 15. Tapper has been the only executive director since MHCP's inception in 2007, having come to the role with significant experience as an executive leader at the Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare system. Over the years, Tapper's leadership helped MHCP navigate through an ever-changing health care landscape. Tapper recently met with WHA Senior Vice President of Public Policy Joanne Alig to talk about her work at the Partnership.

MHCP is a public/private consortium dedicated to improving health for low-income underserved populations in Milwaukee County. It is credited with being unique in the country in bringing together leaders from the local health systems, health centers and local and state governments. The shared mission is to improve access to health care by advancing adequate and affordable health insurance, increasing availability of health care services, enhancing care coordination and addressing targeted community health needs.

"When new leaders come to Milwaukee, they are often surprised and sometimes even a little skeptical that we really do engage in and are successful at this collective work," Tapper noted.

According to Tapper, how MCHP got started is really one of its key success factors. It was initiated by health system CEOs who felt that they should come together to better serve vulnerable populations. "While individual organization efforts were well-intentioned, they were also fragmented," she said. "There was a recognition that we need to be strategic in caring for low-income and vulnerable populations."

Tapper also recognized WHA's role in the formation of MCHP, and the participation by key WHA senior leaders in its ongoing work. Tapper has also been instrumental in working with WHA on important shared priorities like advocating for reimbursement for care coordination, access to care, coverage and enrollment, and availability of behavioral health services.

"Few have had as large and lasting an impact on Milwaukee health care as Joy," said WHA President and CEO Eric Borgerding. "She has been in the trenches getting her hands dirty, doing the hard work, putting out fires, managing the unexpected while also having the vision to help see and shape the future and steer us around pitfalls. And she's done it all with the patience and calm that has endeared her to so many. Thank you, Joy, for being such a tremendous partner and friend to your appreciative colleagues at WHA."

Tapper is proud of MHCP's many accomplishments over the years that have helped individuals access health care and improve community health. This includes a recognition in 2016 by then U.S. President Obama for the most success among 20 metropolitan areas across the country in signing up individuals in exchange marketplace coverage.

Under Tapper's leadership, MCHP implemented an ED to Medical Home program, which has screened and connected thousands of individuals who were receiving care in the emergency room to primary, behavioral, or oral health services and resulted in a reduction of 40% in subsequent utilization of the emergency room. The group also helped create a program for the uninsured to



Joy Tapper

access specialty care services. Among many accomplishments, Tapper also mentions work to strengthen and build capacity for federally qualified health centers providing services in low-income communities, facilitating a cross-sector Community Health Needs Assessment, implementing a patient focused housing screening and navigation program, helping coordinate the COVID response among and between health care providers and public health agencies, and the creation of the new joint venture Milwaukee Mental Health Emergency Center that is just celebrating its one-year anniversary.

While all of this happened under her leadership and she is proud of the outcomes, Tapper is quick to deflect credit, saying instead that “credit for success should be attributed to the member organizations who remain committed to the work.”

Tapper noted that most people who come to health care do so out of an interest in doing good for their communities and the individuals they interact with. She reflected that, “the Partnership has allowed me to link my values with my knowledge and experience in health care, and it has been very rewarding to get to work with bright, committed individuals around a shared purpose that is bigger than our own individual or organization-specific missions.”

Tapper won’t use the word ‘retirement’ because she sees her work as a vocation. Instead, she will look to advance other social causes and says, “I won’t retire from work in the community.”

In addition, she and her husband Bill are looking forward to visiting their three adult children, welcoming their first grandchild in early 2024, spending more time with friends, and travelling.

Tapper is turning over the MHCP leadership role to Ann Christiansen, who most recently served as vice president, Community Health-Wisconsin at Advocate Health. Tapper said she is confident that Christiansen has the energy, commitment, knowledge, and expertise to take MHCP to the next level.

When asked if she had any advice for the next executive director, Tapper said, “Relationships matter, be patient because this work doesn’t happen quickly, lead from your values and commitment to community health, lean into all of the expertise around you, and remember that the leaders in the member organizations are very talented so leverage their knowledge and dedication to advancing the health of our community.”



Joy Tapper (third from left) joined lawmakers and hospital members to see Gov. Walker sign 2017 AB 871 (a Medicaid ED Care Coordination Program) into law on April 16, 2018.

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