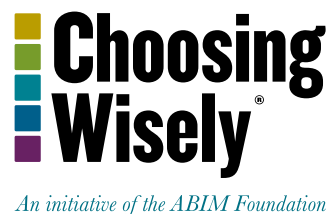
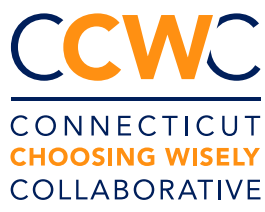




The Connecticut Choosing Wisely® Collaborative:
2014–2020
Impacts and Insights



Overview

The **Connecticut *Choosing Wisely*® Collaborative** (also known as “the Collaborative” and CCWC) was a diverse multi-stakeholder group committed to the widespread adoption of the ***Choosing Wisely*** campaign in Connecticut. The Collaborative, which launched in January 2014 and sunsetted in September 2020, focused on raising awareness and accelerating the adoption of the *Choosing Wisely* campaign statewide. The *Choosing Wisely* campaign promotes conversations between patients and healthcare providers about the overuse of medical care, tests, and treatments with a focus on providing high-value care.



The Collaborative sponsored programs and worked in partnership with local organizations to bring the message, resources, and tools of the *Choosing Wisely* campaign to patients, consultants, consumer groups, employers, payers, providers, health systems, government officials, academic institutions, and policy makers. The campaign originated through the collaboration of **Consumer Reports** and the **American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) Foundation**. CCWC members viewed *Choosing Wisely* as a springboard to support efforts across Connecticut to improve healthcare quality, advance health equity, reduce patient risk, and lower healthcare costs.

The Collaborative consisted of a committed group of Connecticut-based stakeholders that mirrored the types of organizations they intended to reach: Consumer groups, payers, consultants, employers, providers, health systems, academic institutions, government officials, and policy makers. Supported by modest annual monetary and in-kind contributions by its member

organizations and a grant to support its health equity work, the CCWC relied on leadership and member participation. The Collaborative provided a unique opportunity to bring people together from different types of organizations and focus jointly on reducing low-value care and promoting high-quality healthcare in Connecticut. It was seen as a true collaborative with a flat organizational structure, no hidden agendas, and joint, transparent goals.

Each year, the Collaborative assessed its purpose and progress toward its goals. In 2020, facing the Covid-19 pandemic, which rapidly shifted the demands of many involved in the Collaborative, the CCWC again paused to reflect on its work. In doing so and realizing they had met their goals, the decision was made to wind down. The purpose of this report is to highlight CCWC's accomplishments, share lessons learned, and provide recommendations to others engaged in collaborative work. This report is based on key informant interviews with 20 colleagues who were involved in and influential in either the CCWC or the national *Choosing Wisely* campaign.

"It was exciting to participate in the Collaborative, and you were proud to be part of this. We had champions coming to this process from different perspectives and thought leaders that helped contribute on personal, professional, and organizational levels."

Mollie Melbourne

Former member of the CCWC and President and CEO of Southwest Community Health Center

Nancy Yedlin, Vice President at the **Donaghue Foundation**, initially led the Collaborative; she contributed a tremendous amount of time, insight, energy, and drive, motivating others to follow in her footsteps. Multiple recent and past members of CCWC spoke to the fact that Nancy's leadership, keen insight, and passion were among the key drivers to the Collaborative's initial and continued success. As Patricia Baker, past President and CEO of the **Connecticut Health Foundation** said, "Nancy's passion became the glue that kept us going."

The CCWC likely had success for five additional reasons:

- ▶ The Collaborative included a very innovative and influential group of leaders, sending a message statewide about the CCWC's importance in the health arena.
- ▶ Collaborative members trusted and respected each other, allowing a spark to be lit in moving the Collaborative forward in a thoughtful step-by-step process.
- ▶ The Connecticut Health Foundation provided funding to the Collaborative specifically to devote to health equity issues, enabling the CCWC to make a meaningful, visible impact in this area.
- ▶ The *Choosing Wisely* campaign provided a framework to talk about and identify the differences between low-value and high-value care that supported both practitioners and patients.
- ▶ The CCWC created a governance structure that required all members to commit to an established memorandum of understanding and make a modest financial or in-kind commitment.

"The CCWC was successful because it consistently was in step with the spirit and culture of the Choosing Wisely campaign. They had a laser focus on both the patient and the clinician."

Daniel Wolfson

Executive Vice President and COO of the ABIM Foundation



CCWC Activities, Impacts, and Accomplishments

The CCWC accomplished its goals by focusing attention on common themes that could benefit from the *Choosing Wisely* messages and tools, including the promotion of health equity and improving communications amongst patients, providers, payers and employers. As the CCWC discovered, these themes also resonated at the national level. The next section will highlight accomplishments related to each of those themes.

Health Equity

"The CCWC was the first group to really push the idea that *Choosing Wisely* could be used to address health equity," said Kelly Rand, Program Officer at the ABIM Foundation. This link between health equity and the campaign was further ignited on a national level when the CCWC began to share its work with others, through the ABIM Foundation networks, including safety net providers.

Initially, the need for health equity, with a focus on communities of color, was not a specific goal that the CCWC had intended to address. However, with a goal of improving healthcare quality across Connecticut and a collaborative with an open forum for input, health equity-related issues came up early and were deemed critically important; this required an expanded focus. Some members of the Collaborative had deep concerns, as did other *Choosing Wisely* colleagues around the country, that *Choosing Wisely* could be used to deny care to people of color and those who historically had received low-value healthcare, had forgone healthcare, and/or had not received needed healthcare. As Patricia Baker said, "Health equity became part of the Collaborative's agenda, and that was an accomplishment. The Collaborative agreed to take it on and even embraced it."

NOTED ACCOMPLISHMENT: Leveraging Choosing Wisely as a Tool for Achieving Health Equity.

In 2015 and 2016, the CCWC conducted focus groups with providers, health navigators, and patients to move forward with its goal of leveraging *Choosing Wisely* to advance health equity. The equity work was supported by a grant from the Connecticut Health Foundation and Collaborative funds. The focus of the project was to test the use of *Choosing Wisely* materials in two Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Findings revealed that both patients and providers saw *Choosing Wisely* as an opportunity to promote engagement and communication at the point of care and that they were enthusiastic to use the campaign's materials. However, they also suggested that modifications were needed to address cultural, linguistic, literacy, and healthcare delivery barriers, which highlighted the need for systemic changes. To build on the opportunities and barriers that this project identified, the CCWC convened a multi-stakeholder **Call to Action** summit in 2017.

"We were teaching folks in the community and they had a change of attitude. 'I can push back? I can ask questions?' This impact was very real. They learned that they could speak their minds."

Victor Villagra

Associate Director of the Health Disparities Institute at UConn Health and a CCWC member



Patients and Providers

"One of the biggest accomplishments that I saw in this work was the change in the provider and patient encounter," said Ken Lalime, CEO of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut and a CCWC member. "Through *Choosing Wisely* we were able to give patients a platform to have conversations with their provider that they didn't have before." This statement refers to patients in Connecticut using the campaign's **"5 Questions" wallet card**.



Through the work of the CCWC distributing the wallet card, patients were prompted to ask questions about healthcare risks, alternative options, and cost – and, as a result, become better informed about their treatment choices.

NOTED ACCOMPLISHMENT: Changing conversations at Yale New Haven Health.

"*Choosing Wisely* is a national campaign, but the CCWC promoted it locally and helped us make a local impact," said Dr. Scott Sussman, the physician executive director of clinical redesign at Yale New Haven Health. "We saw *Choosing Wisely* as a way to promote appropriate utilization. Just last week I had a patient ask, 'Why do I need another test? I just had one last week.' We have patients who are insured commercially or through the state, so they weren't thinking about it from a cost perspective, but more about necessity and risk – and that's a real impact."

Payers and Employers

"Implementing *Choosing Wisely* at the state level was creative and one of the most dramatic impacts of the CCWC," said Tim Elwell, President and CEO of **Qualidigm** and one of the co-chairs of the CCWC. The Connecticut Office of the State Comptroller, a CCWC member, was able to leverage its relationships with providers and health insurance companies to spread the application of *Choosing Wisely*. Through its work with **Stanson Health** and three Connecticut healthcare systems, the state of Connecticut tested the use of Stanson's clinical support tool within clinical practice; the goal was to test how the *Choosing Wisely* recommendations were being used in real time. While there have been challenges along the way, including implementation costs, interpreting analytics, and integrating the technology in the clinical workflow, the value of using the *Choosing Wisely* algorithms have begun to demonstrate promising results. As Sandra Czunas, Principal Health Care Analyst of the **Connecticut Office of the State Comptroller** and CCWC member said, "*Choosing Wisely* helped us look at data differently to better understand what constitutes waste while identifying high performing providers."

The CCWC also worked to implement *Choosing Wisely* at the employer level, including with employers affiliated with the **Connecticut Business Group on Health**. One challenge, however, as former CCWC members pointed out, is that *Choosing Wisely* is not a campaign in which employers and payers see an immediate benefit – and they therefore may soon move onto something else.

"I think that most organizations might leave a campaign like Choosing Wisely up to Human Resources teams that don't fully understand it and aren't as passionate about it. It's important to involve a senior executive who understands it and can champion it."

Paul Grady

Benefits consultant and member of the CCWC and the Connecticut Business Group on Health

NOTED ACCOMPLISHMENT: Spreading *Choosing Wisely* at Ability Beyond.

Ability Beyond is an organization that assists over 3,000 individuals per year, many with developmental and accompanying physical disabilities, to live full and rewarding lives via job training and residential programs. CCWC had success in reaching their 1,200 employees and subsequently their clients, likely because they had a high-level executive who championed wellness and advocated for reducing waste and overuse in healthcare. As Lori Pasqualini, Vice President, CFO, and CAO of Ability Beyond and CCWC member said, "We were moving toward all-around wellness strategies at our organization, and the *Choosing Wisely* campaign supported that. We were also looking into making sure people didn't get tests or procedures they didn't need, and we were doing education on that. Maybe that's why we had success with our staff and our beneficiaries using the *Choosing Wisely* wallet cards at their doctor's appointments."

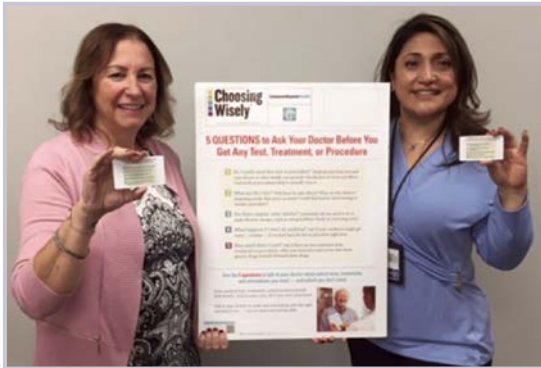
Learning and Implementation

"One of the areas where we were most successful as a collaborative was in promoting the *Choosing Wisely* campaign and materials," Tim Elwell said. "We were able to act as a connector with other organizations that expressed interest, didn't know anything about the campaign but wanted to be involved, or even those who were simply curious as to who else was involved." To do this, the CCWC continually implemented learning opportunities across Connecticut which included:

- ▶ Leading *Choosing Wisely* breakout sessions at three Better Health Conferences.



- ▶ Convening a statewide “Call to Action” summit on health equity.
- ▶ Producing and hosting a three-part webinar series aimed at health care providers.
- ▶ Participating in the Consumer Reports Patient Activist program.



- ▶ Presenting at numerous conferences, meetings, panels, and webinars, with audiences including the [Connecticut Hospital Association](#), [Connecticut Partners for Health](#), the [Connecticut Chapter of the American College of Physicians](#), [Community Health Center Association of Connecticut](#), [Quinnipiac Medical School](#), and statewide medical associations.



- ▶ Sponsoring a project on antibiotic use conducted by four students from the [UConn Urban Service Track Program](#).
- ▶ Hosting *Choosing Wisely* Champions Dinners and meeting with senior leadership groups within Connecticut hospitals to share ‘trench warfare’ tactics on how to successfully implement the campaign in various practice and clinic settings.

National Impact

Choosing Wisely began as a national campaign and subsequently expanded internationally, with 25 countries now participating. In the early years of the CCWC, the collaborative members spent much of their efforts educating clinicians, providers, patients, their families, and others about the campaign. In later years, as Daniel Wolfson of the ABIM Foundation said, “The CCWC got tailwind from the *Choosing Wisely* movement. People immediately understood what the Collaborative was about. There was a thirst to join the effort, and CCWC allowed a vehicle for that.” Although the CCWC’s efforts were locally focused, the Collaborative also had national impact. This included:

- ▶ Contributing to early conversations about the fact that healthcare costs for patients frequently include expenses related to childcare, transportation and missing work.
- ▶ Leading the way on incorporating *Choosing Wisely* into health equity conversations.
- ▶ Elevating the issue of trust between healthcare providers and patients so that conversations about healthcare overuse and costs of care can occur.
- ▶ Demonstrating how a non-incorporated, largely volunteer multi-stakeholder collaborative guided by clear, shared principles, governance, and goals could form, work, and make an impact.
- ▶ Sharing challenges, accomplishments, goals, and lessons learned with *Choosing Wisely* colleagues nationwide.

Recommendations

Over time the CCWC was able to identify factors that led to its successes and was able to reflect on what strategies it might have used to better overcome barriers and challenges. In the spirit of sharing accomplishments, goals, challenges, and lessons learned, the lists below contain recommendations from the recent and past CCWC members who participated in the key informant interviews for this report. It is hoped that these recommendations will be useful to others leading and participating in collaborative work aimed at improving the quality of healthcare.

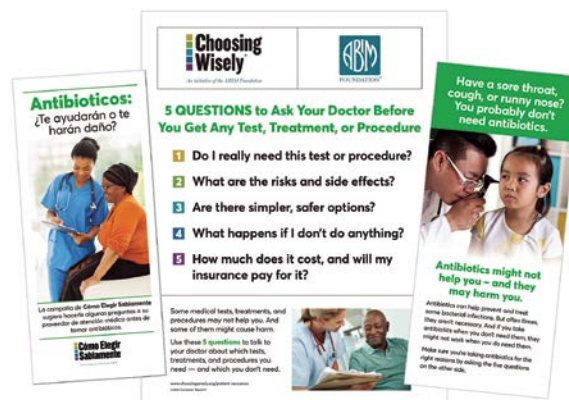
Factors that contributed to the success of the CCWC, and that the CCWC recommends to others:

- ▶ **Create a Framework:** Write governing and anchoring documents, including principles that all collaborative members can embrace, agree upon, and reference.
- ▶ **Require Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs):** Ensure that all collaborative members are fully committed by signing MOUs.
- ▶ **Identify a Fiscal Administrator:** Provide clarity, responsibility, and policies for financial management as part of the overall governance of an all-volunteer organization.
- ▶ **Assert Trust, Respect, and Confidence:** Be bold; try and test innovative methods and models.
- ▶ **Convene Gatherings:** Bring people together from across the region to share stories, lessons learned, and inspiration. Provide free food!
- ▶ **Consciously Reflect:** Discuss and strategically determine the best uses of time and energy for both immediate and long-term impact. Define success and establish an end goal.
- ▶ **Confront Barriers:** Use *Choosing Wisely* as a tool to proactively promote health equity and health literacy to increase access to high-value services to patients and communities.
- ▶ **Provide a Platform:** Use the campaign to aid in better patient/provider communication. Patients and providers are passionate about their healthcare, and *Choosing Wisely* offers an opportunity to discuss what works. Distribute the campaign’s wallet cards and posters.
- ▶ **Be Relevant:** Demonstrate how *Choosing Wisely* can help organizations achieve their goals, including improving quality, reducing costs, and engaging patients.

Factors that could have increased CCWC’s impact, and that the CCWC recommends to others:

- ▶ **Fund and Hardwire Implementation:** Dedicate funding so that hospitals, health systems, and payers can better commit to this work long-term.
- ▶ **Hire Staff:** Provide paid leadership and support staff to ensure consistent accountability and dedicated time to this work.
- ▶ **Continue Outreach:** Strive to invite and include additional organizations into this work, specifically including additional health plans and providers.
- ▶ **Quantify Learnings:** Measure impact to help promote additional buy in.
- ▶ **Commit to Change:** Advocate best practices for policy and behavior change that enhance communication between patients and providers and reduce low value care.

As the CCWC began discussing the sunseting of the Collaborative, Laura Morris, Director of Consumer Engagement from the Connecticut Office of Health Strategy and a CCWC member and co-chair, keenly observed that “in this case, the Collaborative sunseting really is a testament to how well the member organizations have been able to move the *Choosing Wisely* campaign – and the ideas behind it – into the center of the work they do and more generally into the healthcare landscape in Connecticut. The individuals and organizations that built the Collaborative have continued to work together to further the mission of the campaign and other projects that aim to improve healthcare quality, advance health equity, and lower healthcare costs.”



Acknowledgements

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The following organizations were members of the Connecticut *Choosing Wisely* Collaborative at varying points in time between 2014 and 2020.

- Access Health CT
- Community Health Center Association of Connecticut
- Community Health Network of CT
- Connecticut Business Group on Health
- Connecticut Center for Primary Care
- Connecticut Health Foundation
- Connecticut Office of the State Comptroller
- Connecticut State Office of Health Strategy
- Connecticut State Office of the Healthcare Advocate
- Donaghue Foundation
- Health Disparities Institute at the University of Connecticut
- National Physicians Alliance, Connecticut Chapter
- Qualidigm
- Universal Healthcare Foundation of Connecticut
- UConn Health

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For more information about the Connecticut *Choosing Wisely* Collaborative, please visit ChoosingWiselyCT.org until December 20, 2021.



For more information about the *Choosing Wisely* campaign, please visit ChoosingWisely.org.