

Healthy Generations

An Interview with Lance Chrisman,
Executive Director, WellPoint Foundation



EDITORS' NOTE Prior to joining the WellPoint Foundation, Lance Chrisman served as a director with Verizon Corporation in Dallas, Texas. Chrisman received his bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Huntington University. He is also an active member of his community, volunteering with numerous nonprofits, and serving on several boards and committees.

COMPANY BRIEF WellPoint Foundation (www.wellpointfoundation.org) is a private, nonprofit organization wholly funded by WellPoint, Inc. Through charitable contributions and programs, the foundation, which was established in 2000, promotes WellPoint's inherent commitment to enhance the health and well-being of individuals and families in communities that WellPoint serves. The WellPoint Foundation is among the largest corporate foundations in the United States, funding organizations and programs in the communities WellPoint, Inc. serves.

With approximately 34 million Americans nationwide covered through its affiliated health plans, WellPoint, Inc. is one of the nation's largest health benefits companies and offers leading health benefits plans as well as specialty products and services designed to provide quality and value to its customers. WellPoint primarily does business as Anthem Blue Cross, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia, or Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield. WellPoint (www.wellpoint.com) also serves customers throughout the country as UniCare.

How does the WellPoint Foundation focus its efforts and, in leading the foundation, is it important that those efforts align with WellPoint's business?

It's absolutely important it lines up. The foundation is the philanthropic arm of WellPoint, Inc., and we're inundated on a daily basis with requests from many wonderful organizations. What we have charged the foundation with doing is ensuring that we're addressing the appropriate health disparities in improving public health across the country.

Our mission from a company perspective is inherently socially responsible – we want to improve the lives of the people we serve and the health of our communities. The WellPoint Foundation's Healthy Generations program works to identify the health issues most in need of attention and the foundation directs its charitable

support toward improving health in those areas. The majority of the WellPoint Foundation's charitable giving funds programmatic activity with organizations involved in addressing one of our Healthy Generations focus areas: childhood obesity; prenatal/maternal measures; immunizations; smoking cessation; and disease states, such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes.

When you look at the issues you're addressing, there are no quick fixes. How does that affect your efforts and what metrics do you use to measure the impact?

These are major issues that we're trying to get out in front of. We utilize the majority of our resources for preventative programmatic activity. When it comes to the tracking and measurement, at its core, Healthy Generations has a single focus and that is health. So rather than pick just one health cause over many others, we have established a dynamic model that allows us to respond to the changing health needs of the country.

It's rooted in outcomes rather than activities and we've set this up to ensure that the measurement starts and that the goal line is established as the application process begins. We have designed our applications to ensure that a consistent and upfront measurement is established. We ask our organizations to give us their number one goal, how they're going to move from A to B, and then we ask for secondary goals.

Once that grant is approved, after six months, we have the organization fill out an evaluation that lets us know how they're tracking or trending with respect to the specific measurements that were set up. At that point, if they're not meeting those, we can do a course correction. Alternatively, if they are accomplishing those goals and trending well, we can evaluate if, by increasing resources, we can increase the impact even more.

At the conclusion of a grant period, we do a final evaluation to verify the actual results and how they were accomplished.

So we put a significant amount of time, resources, and focus on tracking and measurement so we can see the impact of these programs and ensure that we're utilizing the funds efficiently and creating the most effective results in the community.

How much are you engaging WellPoint employees in these efforts and how critical is it to the culture of WellPoint?

The associate engagement is a key pillar to our approach to the community. Fortunately, we have a long history of volunteerism and associate engagement in the community – it's part of our

corporate fabric. So we try to give appropriate direction with respect to our focus and the areas that we're going to be addressing, and then we try to get out of the associates' way.

From a management perspective, we try to give them some national direction and we have a couple of major national programs that we facilitate to help us do this.

One is our community service day, which is a national volunteer day. On April 28th this year, we'll give our more than 37,000 associates an opportunity to volunteer in the community. We organize over 270 community initiatives across the country on that day and engage our associate base in volunteering.

At the end of the year, we hold our associate giving campaign, where we give our associates an opportunity to make pledges to health-related nonprofits, and our foundation matches 50 cents to every dollar of their contributions.

In addition to WellPoint's programs, you'll also find our associates engaged in the community in key leadership roles 12 months of the year.

How critical has it been to have the support at the most senior levels of WellPoint?

It's absolutely critical. We've studied organizations and foundations that have had the most impact as partners in their communities. We found that there are three key benchmarks that we saw in all of the successful platforms: leadership and direction, and endorsement at the highest levels of the organization; a long-term commitment – you don't want to change focus every year; and the associate impact and tying that back to what you know best. It makes sense for us to be engaged in the health of our communities because that's what we know best.

How challenging is it during difficult times to continue that philanthropic effort?

Our board made a conscious decision to maintain our community funding because our communities need us now more than ever. But that meant we had to tighten up in our focus areas and look at our existing active foundation grants to determine if they were the right areas to be in and if they were hitting their metrics. We also looked for opportunities to encourage coalition building in the community. So while we didn't cut back, we looked to ensure that we're being as efficient as possible with the dollars so we can maintain a strong presence in the community when they need us most. ●

Lance Chrisman (left) presents a check to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America