



## THE HERO RESEARCH AGENDA – 2015

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HERO research agenda reflects the research issues most important to HERO members. This group, representing over 100 organizations nationwide interested in improving the health of the U.S. workforce, meets annually to review key employee health management (EHM) research completed over the preceding twelve months, discuss emerging industry trends, and share their thoughts on important research topics that should be studied in the future. The results of that meeting are reviewed by the HERO Research Advisory Group, a subcommittee of the HERO Research Committee comprised of outstanding leaders in research, business and education with many years of experience in the field. Based on their expert review, HERO leadership finalizes the agenda that will guide HERO's research priorities in the coming year.

The 2015 HERO Research Agenda focuses on the following priorities (listed in alphabetical order):

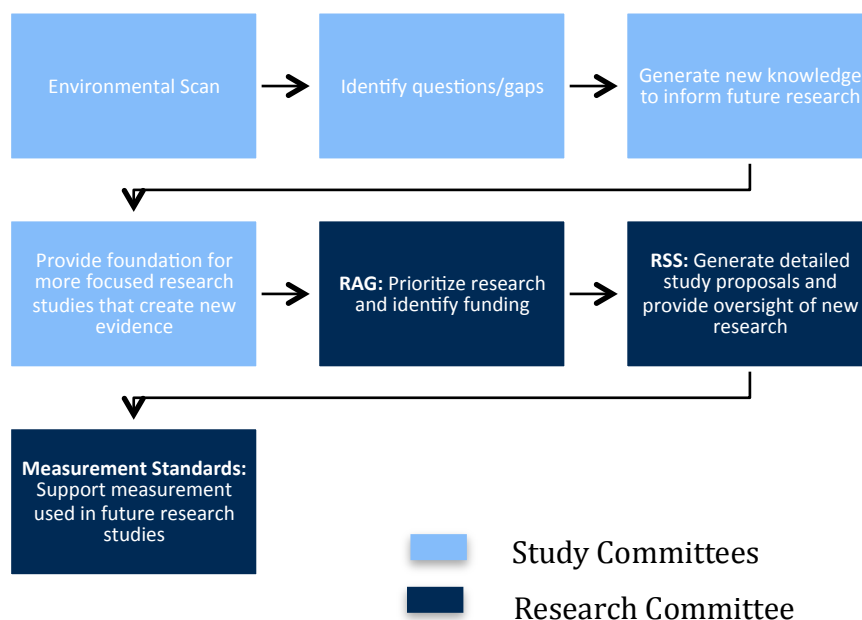
- **Culture of Health:** Research that guides organizations in creating and sustaining healthy culture in the workplace.
- **Employer-Community Collaboration in Improving Population Health:** Studying community-based projects where employers partner with communities in pursuit of the goal of improving the overall health of that population.
- **Engagement:** Research to define meaningful engagement and to identify the factors that create and sustain individual engagement.
- **Health and Business Results:** Developing a broad understanding of the impact of improving health in the workplace on business results.
- **Health and Performance:** Research on the relationship between workforce health and employee performance and productivity.
- **HERO Scorecard:** Research focused on validating and mining the data collected in the *HERO Best Practices Scorecard in Collaboration with Mercer* for the purposes of identifying EHM best practices.
- **Incentives:** Research on the design, application and effectiveness of incentives in employee health management programs.
- **Sustainability:** Identifying best practices for sustaining health management programs over time.
- **Technology:** Best practice application of how technology supports engagement in health strategies and improved outcomes.
- **Well-being:** Define and provide the context for well-being within EHM programs.

## WHY HERO IS QUALIFIED

HERO was formed by a group of forward thinking employers and other stakeholders in 1996 to do important research in the field of health promotion. Over the years, HERO has earned a reputation as an important contributor to the field of health management research. The first HERO research project, which was funded by 19 organizations with a common interest in knowing more about the impact of health risks on health care costs, culminated in the publication of a series of peer-reviewed articles beginning in 1998. Known as the HERO Study, this landmark research was foundational to the understanding of the linkage between the presence of health risks in a population and the excess medical cost they drive. Since then, HERO has continued to support and inform the application of research to EHM best practices through the work of HERO study committees, industry collaboration and consensus work groups, and formal research studies. HERO members include well-respected industry thought leaders and researchers as well as many of the most innovative employers and EHM vendor suppliers. Many of HERO's research projects are published in peer-reviewed industry journals, but key findings are shared well in advance with HERO members. A complete list of HERO research publications, white papers, and resources is available at the HERO website ([hero-health.org](http://hero-health.org)).

## ACCOMPLISHING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

The successful execution the HERO Research Agenda depends on the active participation of HERO members in study committees as well as available funding, data and other resources to support formal research studies. HERO's research agenda and projects are primarily volunteer-led and membership driven through the infrastructure of its study committees and the Research Committee. The HERO Research Committee, led by the Research Chair and Vice-Chair, is comprised of three subcommittees: the Research Advisory Group (RAG), the Measurement Standards Subcommittee (MSS), and the Research Study Subcommittee (RSS). The role and structure of the groups is captured in the flow diagram below. The study committees often set the foundation for HERO research projects by helping members understand what is already known about a given topic and by identifying knowledge and research gaps. This work provides the foundation for identifying opportunities for focused formal research studies. The RAG establishes HERO's research agenda and priorities while the RSS provides guidance and oversight of new research studies. The MSS provides data from the HERO Scorecard to inform new research and also establishes standards for measurement in the PHM field.



## ACTIVITIES SUPPORTING THE RESEARCH AGENDA

- **Culture of Health:** HERO has conducted an industry scan of the knowledge base in this area and the initial work was published in a peer-reviewed journal. Subsequent to that research, HERO established a study committee to look deeper into the subject. The work of the committee is currently focused on identifying the key elements of culture and the research supporting those elements.
- **Employer-Community Collaboration in Improving Population Health:** HERO established a study committee to document the value for employer involvement in community health initiatives, identify the activities that make the most sense for employer involvement, and determine how best to facilitate collaboration. Several projects have been supported with funding by the Institute of Medicine and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, with reports available on the HERO website.
- **Engagement:** A study committee is currently being formed to address this priority.
- **Health and Business Results:** HERO is collaborating with HealthNEXT to conduct a study on the financial performance of companies with high HERO Scorecard scores. This study will rely on funding from the HERO Research Partners Fund. Members also expressed interest in the development of strong case studies and a synthesis of the research in easy-to-understand business language, all with the goal of supporting the business case for health management. These deliverables are being developed by the Health, Productivity, and Performance (HPP) study committee.
- **Health and Performance:** HERO formed the Health, Productivity, and Performance (HPP) Study Committee to document the link between employee health and productivity and performance outcomes. The study committee has conducted a survey of business leaders regarding their attitudes about the HPP connection with final study findings available on the HERO website.
- **HERO Scorecard:** A study was conducted to validate the Scorecard v3 and results, which demonstrated the predictive validity of Scorecard scores on health care cost trends, were published in a peer-reviewed journal. HERO launched version 4 of the Scorecard in 2014 and publishes ongoing research using the Scorecard database in an annual report, which is available on the HERO website.
- **Incentives:** HERO is currently working with HERO members to finalize a study proposal and secure data to study the associations between incentive design and type, company culture of health, and population-level biometric health outcomes. This study will rely on funding from the HERO Research Partners fund.
- **Sustainability:** This topic has been pursued in the past by the culture study committee, but HERO is considering more focused work on this area in the future. Potential aspects to consider include contributors to EHM program sustainability as well as how EHM programs contribute to workforce and business sustainability.
- **Technology:** This is a new research priority for 2015. A work group under the HPP study committee is currently fielding an employer survey on the use of wearable tracking devices to support EHM programs. Future initiatives may address the use of remote monitoring devices, mobile technology apps, and telemedicine/telecoaching in EHM.
- **Well-being:** This is a new research priority for 2015. A work group under the HPP study committee is currently developing a list of health-related drivers of productivity and performance, which may indirectly contribute to a future study committee's work.

## AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE *HERO RESEARCH PARTNERS*

Our success in accomplishing this ambitious research agenda depends on funding support from various sources including HERO member organizations, other employers interested in EHM research and, where relevant, grants from foundations and government agencies.

Based on our considerable experience in facilitating research, we anticipate carrying out projects supported by four different funding models:

1. A single organization funding research projects of interest to it;
2. Two or more organizations collaborating to fund projects of mutual interest;
3. A group of organizations coming together to create a funding pool to support research projects they agree upon;
4. Grants secured to fund projects.

HERO is pursuing all of these options to facilitate research that aligns with the HERO research agenda. The option of bringing several organizations together to combine financial resources to fund multiple research projects is important to HERO as we plan near-term research projects. We have created a collaboration called "*HERO Research Partners*" to help HERO move research forward and are currently seeking organizations interested in becoming partners.

We invite you to join the *HERO Research Partners* by contributing \$10,000 to help fund our research agenda. As a HERO Research Partner, your organization will have a voice in determining the projects to pursue, along with the opportunity to be involved, at your option, in authoring manuscripts resulting from these projects. Members of the HERO Research Partners will be listed on the HERO website. Our first HERO Research Partners project was recently accepted for publication in the Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine. This study assessed the validity of the HERO Scorecard by comparing employers' health management best-practice scores with their actual medical claim trends. The study found that there was a strong correlation between employers' self-reported employee health management best practices and their actual medical claims trends, providing important evidence for the validity of this survey tool as well as evidence linking best practices with important financial outcomes.

This study of V3 of the Scorecard, made possible by the organizations contributing to the first HERO Research Partners fund, underpins the value of the HERO Scorecard database of self-reported health management program practices by more than 1,200 large, medium and small companies nationwide. We are currently seeking financial support for the next HERO Research Partners project that will address another important issue on the HERO research agenda.

Please consider this invitation to help move the science and practice of employee health management forward as a member of the HERO Research Partners. Contact Jerry Noyce at [jerry.noyce@the-hero.org](mailto:jerry.noyce@the-hero.org) to discuss participation in the HERO Research Partners.