



Social Determinants of Health Lessons Learned, Challenges, and Barriers: A Resource for Health Centers, Vol. 2



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2	
Authors		2
Contributors		2
Funding & Support		2
INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW OF LEARNING COLLABORATIVE	3	
The Importance of SDOH Screening and Data Collection		3
PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT	4	
Execution of the Learning Collaborative & Participant Engagement		4
EXPRESSED BARRIERS & PROPOSED SOLUTIONS	6	
Cultural Appropriateness		6
Staff Buy-In		7
Operationalizing Screening		7
Data Utilization		7
Quality Improvement		8
Partnership/Resources		8
RESULTS	9	
Session Feedback		9
PREFACE TO YEAR 3	12	
APPENDIX A	14	

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INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW OF LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

Special and vulnerable populations (SVPs)^{1,2} often face additional barriers to care, many of which are compounded by social determinants. Screening for Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) allows health centers to identify the factors influencing disparities in patient health outcomes. Screening for SDOH is the first step towards addressing these disparities and understanding how to collect and utilize screening data is a crucial second step.

From August to September 2021, AAPCHO, HOP, MHP Salud, and NHCHC hosted the “Screening Methods and Strategies for Using Data on Outreach and Enabling Services to Address Social Determinants of Health” Learning Collaborative for health centers serving special and vulnerable populations to explore effective strategies to screen for SDOH and build effective practices to utilize SDOH screening data to address SDOH through the provision of outreach and enabling services (e.g., non-clinical services that facilitate access to care such as eligibility assistance, case management, and transportation).

The content of this publication will include information from lessons learned, challenges, barriers, and impact stories shared from the four (4) sessions of the Learning Collaborative, interwoven with information gleaned from research.

The Importance of SDOH Screening and Data Collection

Health centers across the United States provide care to over 30 million patients across approximately 14,500 service delivery sites, most of whom are uninsured or publicly insured.^{3,4} Acknowledging the role of the conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play, or the Social Determinants of Health,⁵ is vital to strengthening the capacity to improve health outcomes for underserved and marginalized communities, and thus, advance health equity.⁶ Addressing the impacts of SDOH on SVPs begins with screening and data collection to identify key barriers to care and create opportunities to facilitate better service delivery.

The application of data from SDOH screenings is not limited to quantifying health outcomes and disparities. Data about enabling service utilization allows health centers to appropriately staff sites in order to meet patients’ needs; monitoring Medicaid reimbursement policy can help health centers plan for necessary funding in order to continue providing high quality care; tracking patient and provider satisfaction can help improve the quality of care and service provision to increase value-based payment; standardizing data collection methods and creating avenues for cross-sectoral data sharing helps facilitate community-based resources and solutions to reduce the impact of social determinants on health outcomes for SVPs. Throughout this Learning Collaborative, NTTAP faculty sought to provide guidance on some of the ways health centers can use the data collected when screening for

¹ <https://www.nachc.org/health-center-issues/special-populations/>

² <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives>

³ <https://www.nachc.org/about/about-our-health-centers/>

⁴ <https://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/2021-Snapshot.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/>

⁶ https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/publichealthservices/pdf/ten_essential_services_and_sdo.pdf

SDOH to facilitate change, not just in health outcomes, but in the conditions influencing those outcomes.

PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT

Execution of the Learning Collaborative & Participant Engagement

NTTAP faculty worked together in the method of a Learning Collaborative to increase the number of health centers that receive training and technical assistance on screening and documenting SDOH. In the second year, session content emphasized the role of data collection, analysis, and utilization to address SDOH. Similar to the previous year, an in-depth Learning Collaborative followed an introductory webinar. To learn more about our first-year learnings and key takeaways, access the report at: <https://bit.ly/SDOH-Lessons-Learned-Vol1>.

Timeline

Applications to participate in the Learning Collaborative were accepted throughout the month of July 2021. Priority acceptance was given to Year 1 participants, who received a special invitation to apply. Learning Collaborative sessions took place on a biweekly schedule as follows:

- Session 1: Wednesday, August 4, 2021
- Session 2: Wednesday, August 18, 2021
- Session 3: Wednesday, September 1, 2021
- Session 4: Wednesday, September 8, 2021

Evaluation data were collected following each session, and an overall evaluation survey was shared following Session 4. A follow-up evaluation survey was conducted in January 2022.

Participants & Engagement

A total of 51 unique organizations applied to participate in the Learning Collaborative. **Table 1** shows the participants who attended at least one Learning Collaborative session, along with their provided funding streams.

Table 1. Participating Organizations by Group. Funding defined below.

Group, Staff Lead	Organization Name	Funding Stream*
Group 1: Sakura Miyazaki, AAPCHO	Belmont County Health Department	Not 330 funded
	Family Health Centers of San Diego	330(e), (h), (i)
	East Liberty Family Health	330(e), (i)
	Neighborhood Resilience Project	Not 330 funded
	Charter Oak Health Center	330(e), (h), (i)
	Community Health Centers of South Florida, Inc.	330(e), (g), (h)

Group 2: Beleny Reese, HOP	HealthSource of Ohio	330(e)
	Hill Pharmaceuticals	Not 330 funded
	Hunter Health Clinic, Inc.	330(e), (h)
	Keystone Health	330(e)
	Kodiak Health Center	Not 330 funded
	Lone Star Circle of Care	330(e)
	Marias Healthcare Services, Inc.	330(e)
Group 3: Hansel Ibarra, MHP Salud	Charles Drew Health Center, Inc.	330(e), (h), (i)
	Norwalk Community Health Center	330(e)
	Partnership Health Center	330(e)
	Ryan Health	330(e)
Group 4: Brett Poe NHCHC	Ohio Department of Health	Not 330 funded
	One Health	330(e)
	Pillars Community Health	330(e), (h)
	Pittsburgh Mercy	Not 330 funded
	Primary Care Health Services, Inc.	330(e), (h), (i)
	Star Community Health	Not 330 funded
	Unity Care NW	330(e), (h)

**Funding streams from HRSA are defined as follows: Community Health Center Programs, funded under Section 330 of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. §254b)⁷ Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) Programs, funded under section 330(h); Migrant Health Center (MHC) Programs, funded under section 330(g); and Public Housing Primary Care (PHPC) Programs, funded under section 330(i). Participants self-identified funding in the application process. Funding streams were self-reported upon application to the Learning Collaborative. Additional participants were admitted based on populations served as space and interest allowed regardless of source funding.*

Change Map Completion

As with the previous year, the Change Map Model guided session content and participant engagement between sessions. Before each session, summaries of participant responses to the guiding questions for each section were entered into the corresponding segment of the Change Map and shared on screen during subsequent sessions for discussion, elaboration, and feedback. Completed Change Maps can be found in **Appendix A**. The variation across the Change Map

⁷ <https://bphc.hrsa.gov/programrequirements>

process and its completion is again reflective of the stages of implementation that health centers and organizations were in at each stage of the Learning Collaborative (**Figure 1**).

Figure 1. The number of participants who completed each stage of the Change Map



EXPRESSED BARRIERS & PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Throughout the four sessions, NTTAP faculty and participants identified challenges to successful SDOH screenings. Each session captured specific promising practices and/or barriers for participants, and group discussions allowed participants to engage in peer learning to create and/or improve strategies. Below are some of the barriers and proposed solutions for participants identified through the learning collaborative.

Cultural Appropriateness

Participants identified the cultural appropriateness of their SDOH screening workflows and resources as a barrier. Participants discussed different stages of their workflow with respect to cultural appropriateness, such as SDOH questions, workflow feedback, and workforce education. A significant concern for health centers was the cultural sensitivity of SDOH questionnaires and the staff who asked the questions. Although most health centers patients come from underserved communities, some health centers expressed that the processes in place were not appropriately aligned with community needs.

During the learning collaborative sessions, the NTTAP faculty and participants discussed topics related to cultural appropriateness such as the five rights framework for SDOH screening, cultural humility, and trauma-informed care. Expanding on cultural appropriateness, participants in group discussions expressed the need to build trust with patients and community members to identify useful next steps and resources. Some participants shared their promising practices to address cultural

appropriateness. For example, one health center shared that they continuously involve the board (which includes patients) and another health center shared training programs implemented to address topics such as implicit bias and trauma-informed care. Through these session presentations and discussions, participants included different solutions in the change map to address cultural appropriateness. Common solutions for participants included utilizing the staff from shared backgrounds with the patient community as drivers for screening and leveraging connections with patients (e.g., the board, advisory committees) for feedback.

Staff Buy-In

Buy-in at the leadership level and from frontline staff for the development of SDOH screening was generally high among participants. Hesitation was conveyed by a few individuals who reminded us all about the short-staffed situations many health centers face, while others underlined the scarcity of funds. These concerns were addressed throughout the four-part learning collaborative.

Participants were introduced to the benefits of screening for SDOH data. It was discovered that many of the questions that fall under SDOH screening were questions already being asked by the staff. Collecting SDOH data adds value to the “other” work already being done by the team that isn't usually captured. The SDOH data can be used to support annual health center UDS reporting as well as reimbursement.

The community health worker (CHW) was offered as a culturally appropriate method to reach special and vulnerable populations. CHWs are often from the same communities they serve, giving them a unique understanding of these communities. With the proper training and supervision, CHWs can assist with screening for SDOH data. A combination of clinical and non-clinical staff can alleviate the burden of gathering the data.

Operationalizing Screening

Participants showed varying levels of readiness when it came to operationalizing an SDOH screening process. Some organizations found themselves already implementing a social needs screening tool but wanted to sharpen their skills and learn how other organizations might be doing things differently. The rest were either starting the journey or on their way to incorporating the screening and collecting of data. Common hiccups that arose were the possibility of duplicate or unnecessary questions, when to approach the patient to gather the information, and who will be collecting the information and evaluating it.

Health centers voiced their successes, struggles, and worries, which allowed others to take note and offer support. A potential solution described included creating an advisory team that would allow for input from all staff levels. The organization would identify a project champion at each level who would report back to the team. The project champions would meet with their level staff and look for potential implementation challenges and devise ways to overcome those challenges. This would facilitate the questions' effectiveness, ensuring there are not duplicate or unnecessary questions. The team would also be in charge of establishing, standardizing, and reviewing the structure for standardized screening.

Data Utilization

A common reason for the uncertainty around screening for SDOH factors was the lack of awareness/context for comparing data at the local, regional, and national levels and how to leverage the results. Throughout group discussions and the NTTAP teachings, health centers learned how to utilize the SDOH factors to better understand a patient's needs. Return-on-investment (ROI) was offered to the participants as a reliable tool for demonstrating value in gathering SDOH factors. ROI empowers users to leverage data to improve health equity at the individual, community, and systems

levels. ROI results provide a great “snapshot” of information to share with both stakeholders and the community to demonstrate social and fiscal responsibility.

This data along with the success stories shared by health centers, can aid in bringing awareness and federal funding to the community. With the results at hand, health centers can better advocate for the people they serve. Once gathered, SDOH data can be used to look at the macro perspective of the community, making the process of finding commonalities among community members much easier.

Quality Improvement

Another barrier for successful SDOH screening for participants was the difficulties of utilizing the data and measuring the success of its outcomes. Several health centers expressed concern if the collected data was leading patients to referrals that addressed the impacted SDOH factors, especially when the SDOH data is not tied to referral tracking systems. Furthermore, participants overwhelmingly agreed that the resources themselves are limited and unavailable for patients. Especially since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through group discussions: participants shared promising practices, resources, and their contact information to connect after the completion of the four sessions. Overall, participants expressed a need to develop evaluation measures for quality improvement in SDOH screening and referrals. A common evaluation method suggested for the technical aspect was utilizing a Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle to develop feedback loops for referrals and SDOH data integration for referrals. Participants were interested in establishing regular meetings for brainstorming sessions and to eventually standardize quarterly evaluation of SDOH data. For those facing challenges with limited resources, participants proposed surveys for patients to review the usefulness of the resources and establish an advisory team to improve the referral process. Through these types of evaluation measures, participants hope to identify specific referrals or referral types that are limited or underutilized for patients.

Partnership/Resources

Following up on the previously listed challenge of quality improvement and referrals, the NTTAP faculty and participants did a deeper dive into the challenges of limited referrals. Even if participants improve SDOH screenings, internal referral processes and identifying the types of referrals that are limited, may leave health center and service provider staff feeling frustrated that they could not help patients get the actual services. Health centers further expressed the need for culturally appropriate resources to help patients navigate referrals.

As participants shared resources and contact information during the learning collaborative, they all explored identifying partnership opportunities at an organizational-level to expand the breadth of available referrals. Participants reflected on the importance of establishing and strengthening relationships with internal and external partners. Through these partnerships, participants have a larger view into the patients and the resources by interviewing the partners to identify their barriers that exist outside of the purview of the participants. One participant discussed how partners themselves could support the health centers by providing referrals, translations, and follow-ups for patients. Another participant reflected on the importance of strengthening relationships with internal partners, such as the IT department, to facilitate SDOH screening and data collection. Overall, there was a general consensus that although partnerships are difficult to establish when there are other competing priorities, they increase efficiency and effectiveness in the long-term by providing meaningful and culturally tailored services.

RESULTS

Session Feedback

Feedback from individual sessions demonstrated consistent participant satisfaction and confidence in the ability to apply session information to their daily work. We believe that due to the nature of sharing existing practices within the limitations of individual environments, the assessment of gains in knowledge per session were evaluated slightly lower, however a full series evaluation administered after the completion of the Learning Collaborative overall showed an increase in impact across all evaluation domains compared to session-by-session averages. Details of session and overall scoring are seen in **Table 2**.

Sessions	Satisfaction	Confidence	Knowledge Gained
Session 1	4.12	3.70	3.12
Session 2	4.21	3.63	3.32
Session 3	3.75	3.20	3.10
Session 4	4.00	3.93	3.33
TOTAL SESSION AVERAGES	4.02	3.62	3.22
OVERALL EVALUATION	4.5	4.1	3.9

IMPACT OF LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

In the overall evaluation, participants stated where they felt their organizations were in their practices of SDOH screening and in the provision of enabling services. After participating in the Learning Collaborative, 75 percent of respondents said their organizations were “halfway down the road” or “close to the finish line” in both practices (**Figures 2, 3**).

Figure 2. Organizations’ current standings with screening for SDOH

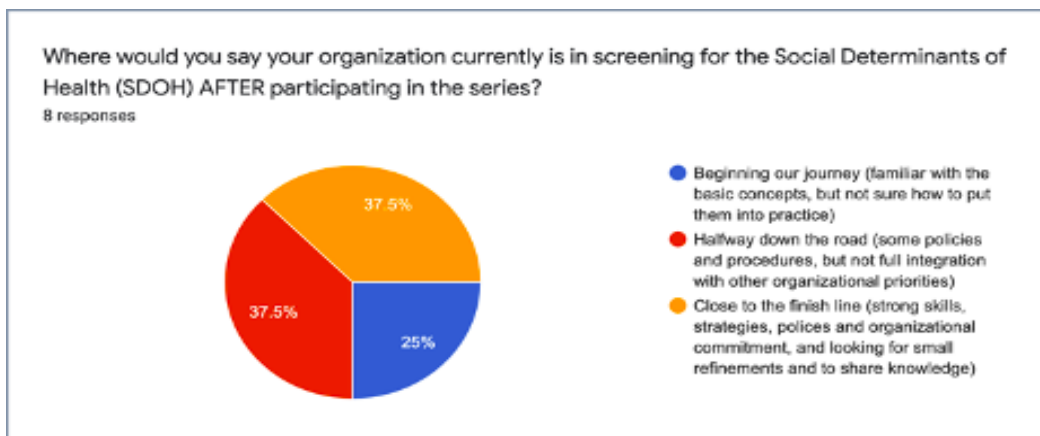
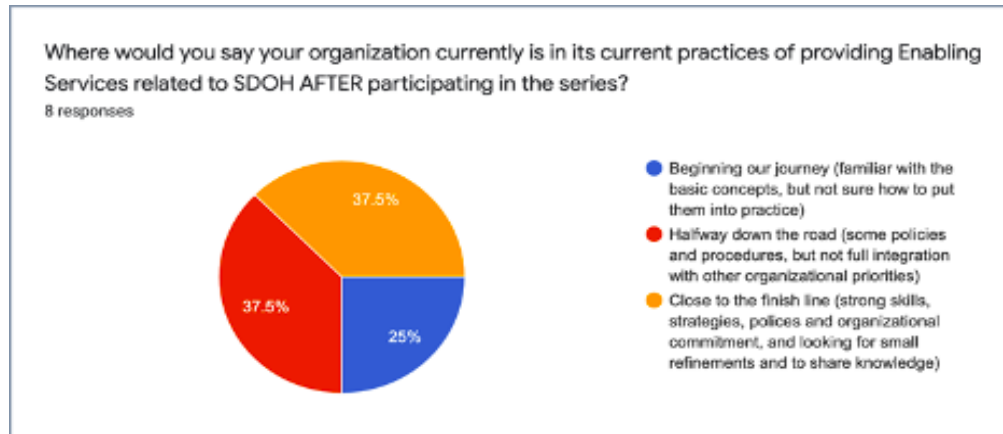


Figure 3. Organizations' current practices with screening for ES

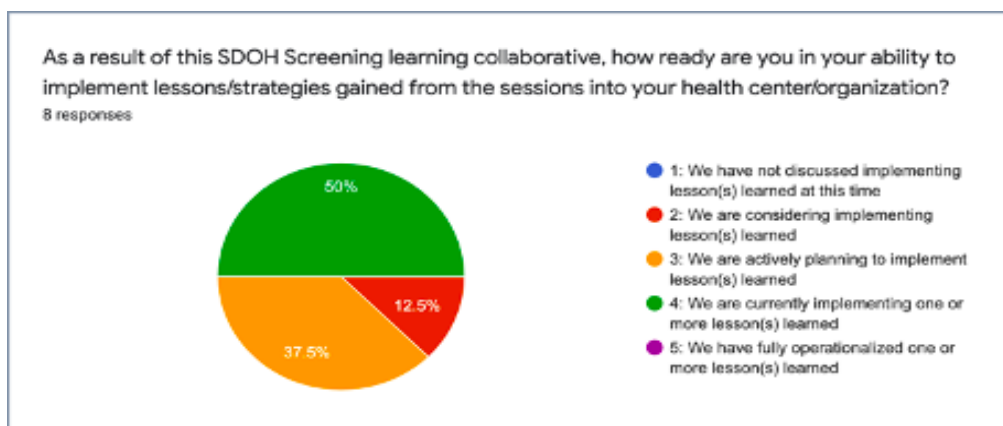


Seventy-five percent of respondents also stated that participating in the Learning Collaborative had a moderate to major impact on the implementation of screening for SDOH and data collection at their organizations (**Figure 4**). As a result of participating in the Learning Collaborative, about 88 percent of respondents reported that their organizations were either actively planning or have already implemented one or more lessons learned (**Figure 5**).

Figure 4. Impact from Learning Collaborative on screening & data collection



Figure 5. Readiness of implementation after SDOH Screening Learning Collaborative



The average self-evaluated score of knowledge of standardized SDOH screening practices after participating in the Learning Collaborative was 7.9 out of 10, and the average score of knowledge of standardized Enabling Services data collection was 7.5, with 75 percent self-evaluating with a score of 8 or higher. Prior to participating in the Learning Collaborative, the average self-evaluation of both knowledge areas was 5.5 and 4.6, respectively.

PARTICIPANT PROGRESS: THREE-MONTH FOLLOW-UP

In a three-month follow-up with six total participants, about 83 percent of respondents said their organizations were “halfway down the road” or “close to the finish line” in both the practice of SDOH screening and in the provision of enabling services (**Figures 6, 7**).

Figure 6. Three-month follow-up for SDOH screenings

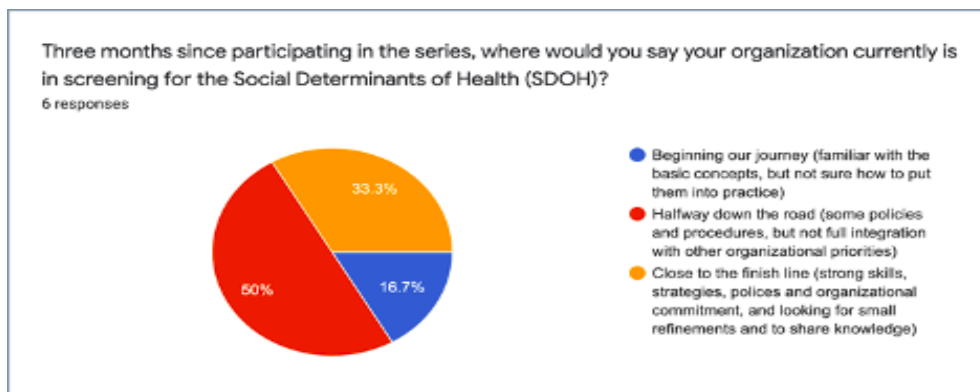
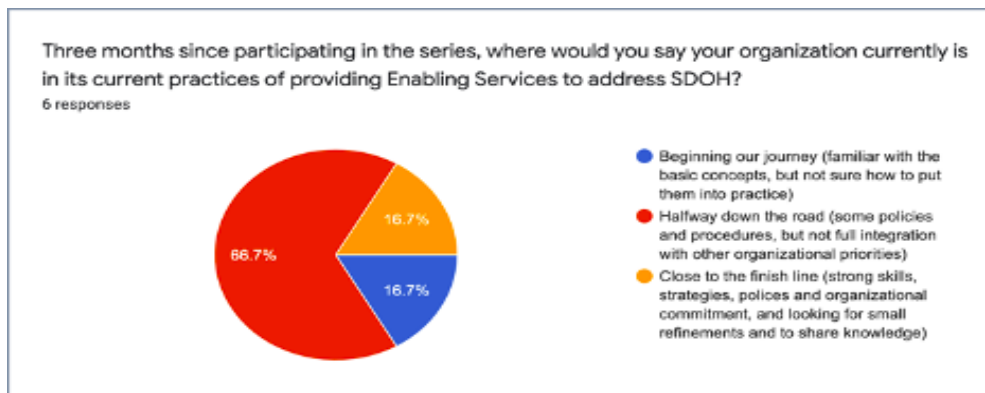


Figure 7. Three-month follow-up for ES practices



About one-third of respondents said they were considering implementing lessons learned from the Learning Collaborative, and another one-third were either actively planning or have already implemented one or more lessons learned. The final third of respondents reported that they had not yet discussed implementation of lessons learned at the time of response (**Figure 8**). It should be noted that the overall evaluation received a total of eight participant responses, while the three-month follow-up evaluation received six.

Figure 8. Readiness in implementation of lessons from SDOH screening Learning Collaborative



QUALITATIVE RESPONSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In open responses, participants reported that it was helpful to hear from others that sites were not alone in their struggles to effectively integrate SDOH screening into daily practice. It was also noted that it was beneficial to hear from experts as well as others' experiences with visual examples of processes to help talk and think through challenges and offer potential solutions. Feedback to inform the planning of year 3 of this Learning Collaborative include aiming to engage more team members in real time, and to increase the length and depth of breakout discussions when possible.

In response to the development and progress of programs implemented during the Learning Collaborative, one site indicated that they had now implemented a new SDOH screening tool but were still working as a team to gather enough data to determine how to address emerging concerns. (See **Figure J, Appendix A** for description of proposed implementation for Keystone Health). Similarly, another organizational participant has since incorporated PRAPARE screening into registration, and patients are referred to Community Health Workers as needs are identified. Another participant noted that while multiple rounds of pilots have been launched (**Figure L, Appendix A - Primary Care Health Services**), the process has since halted to work on some components that need extra attention.

Additional feedback across sites highlighted the importance to consider staff buy-in and retention to continue to make progress and should be planned for and addressed periodically. Specifically noting that "gaining and sustaining sufficient staff buy-in is an ongoing process," therefore considering breaking processes down into incremental steps can help prevent potentially overwhelming both staff members and patients. More detailed steps and action plans of all 18 completed Change Maps of participating sites can be found in **Appendix A**.

PREFACE TO YEAR 3

Implementation of the "Screening Methods and Strategies for Using Data on Outreach and Enabling Services to Address SDOH" Learning Collaborative highlighted many valuable takeaways for both participants and NTTAP faculty. In order to continue to improve the access to and quality of care for special and vulnerable populations and move closer to health equity, health centers must work to identify the barriers to care in order to intervene and remove them. Enabling Services provision and screening for SDOH are two crucial elements to this intervention. Data collected from providing these services gives health centers a powerful tool to address their patients' needs in a sustainable way. However, standardizing data collection processes can present a significant challenge. Given each

health center's unique position in the community, patient population, access to resources (e.g., human, financial, technological), workflow, etc., there are any number of variables that can challenge the process of standardization across the health center and even at the individual patient level.

As a result, a lesson learned after guiding participants through the Change Map Model process and listening to each health center's carefully planned strategy is that there is no One-Size-Fits-All approach to developing and implementing a standardized SDOH screening process. Social risk data, no matter how it is collected, is useful at various levels of health center operation and implementation. What is most important is that the health center understands the utility of the data and can work to create a standard process to collect data that will ultimately allow them to better advocate for and serve their patients' or clients' needs.



Issue & Need

ACT



Overall Goal

Contributor(s): Lucinda Balsome

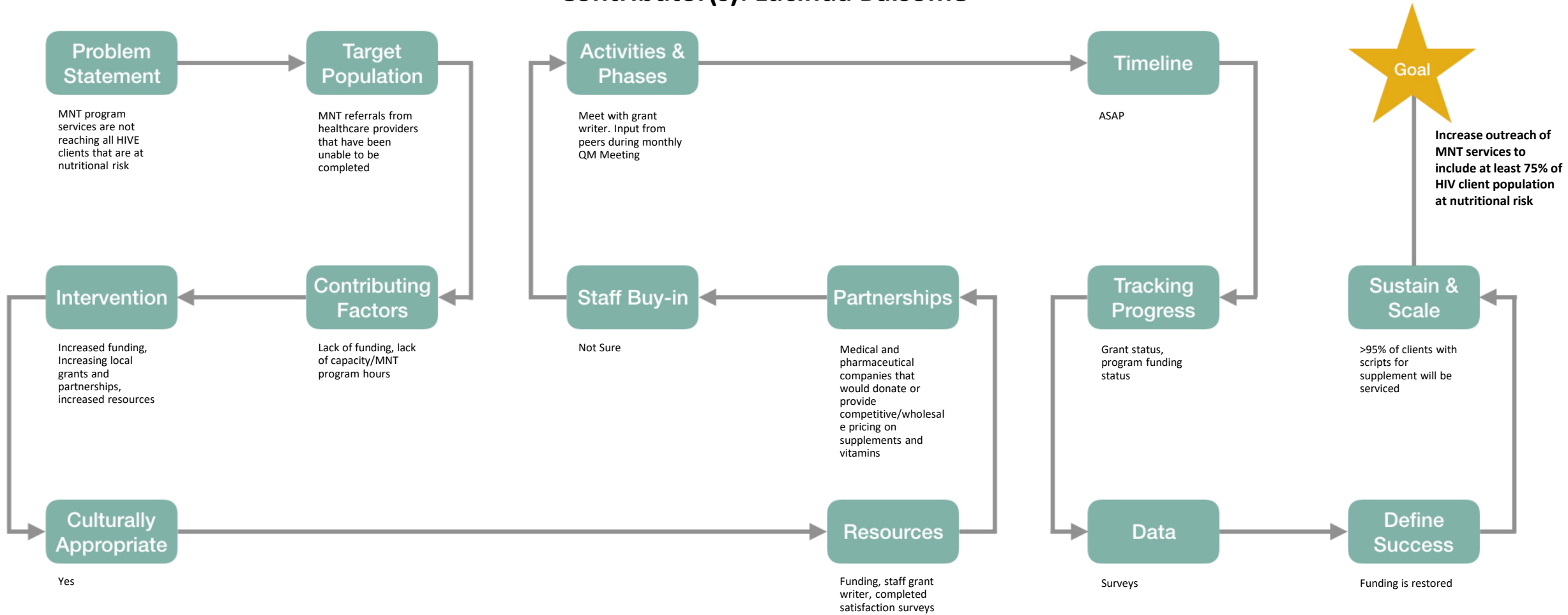


Figure A. Final Change Map from ACT



Contributor(s): Kellie Haney, Linda Mehl

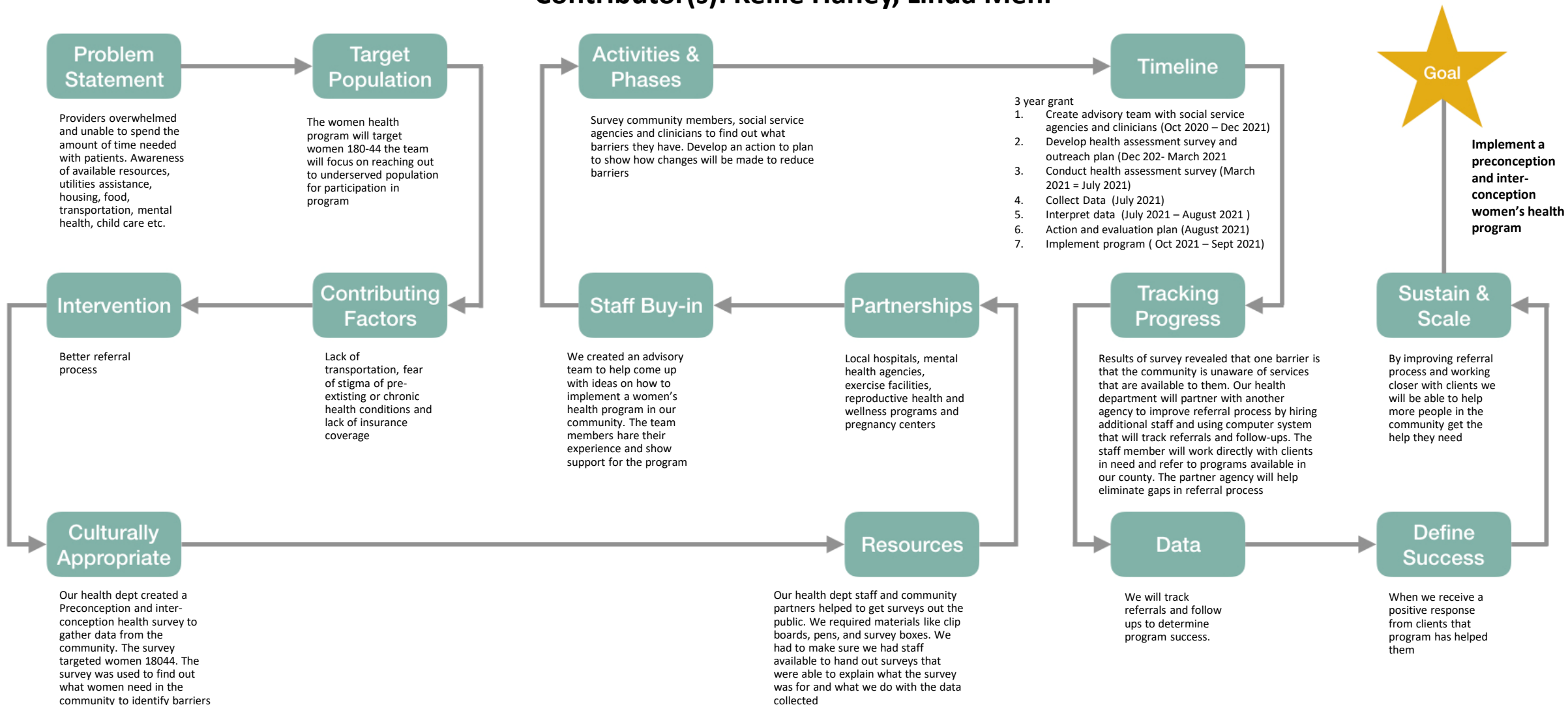


Figure B. Final Change Map from Belmont County Health Dept.



Contributor(s): Samantha Wall

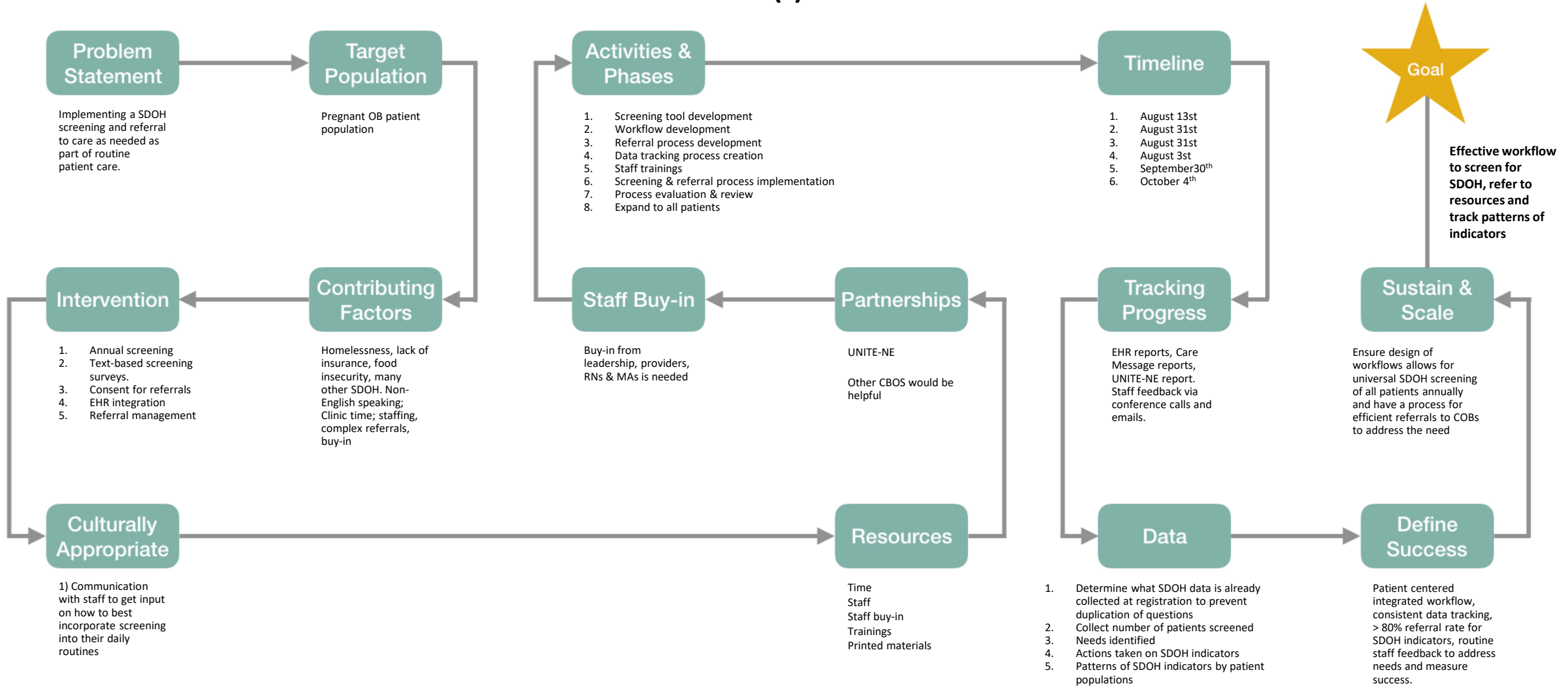


Figure C. Final Change Map from Charles Drew Health Center



Issue & Need

Community Health of South Florida Inc.

Overall Goal



Contributor(s): Eunice Hines

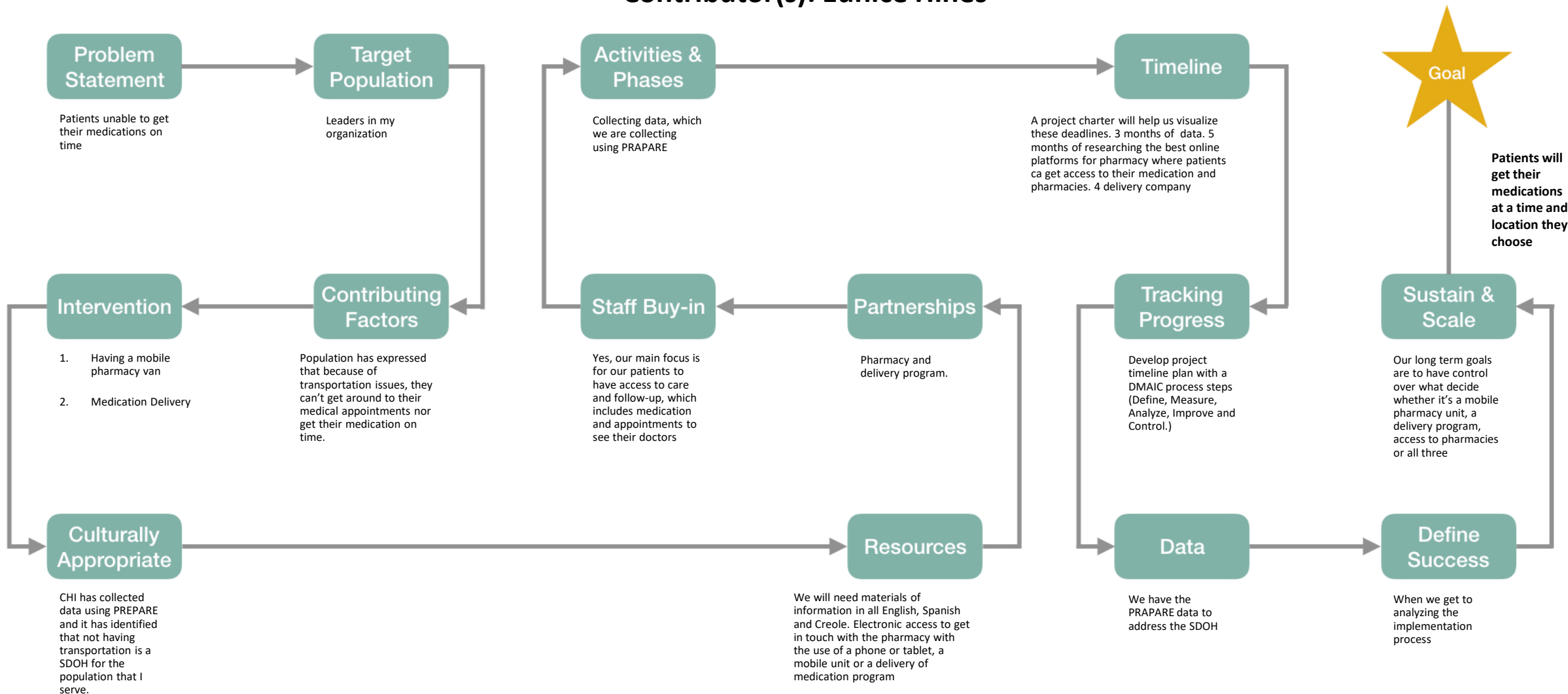


Figure D. Final Change Map from Community Health of South Florida, Inc.



Issue & Need

East Liberty Family Health Care Center

Overall Goal



Contributor(s): Sidney Harper, Stephanie Esdaile, Kristen Hillebrand

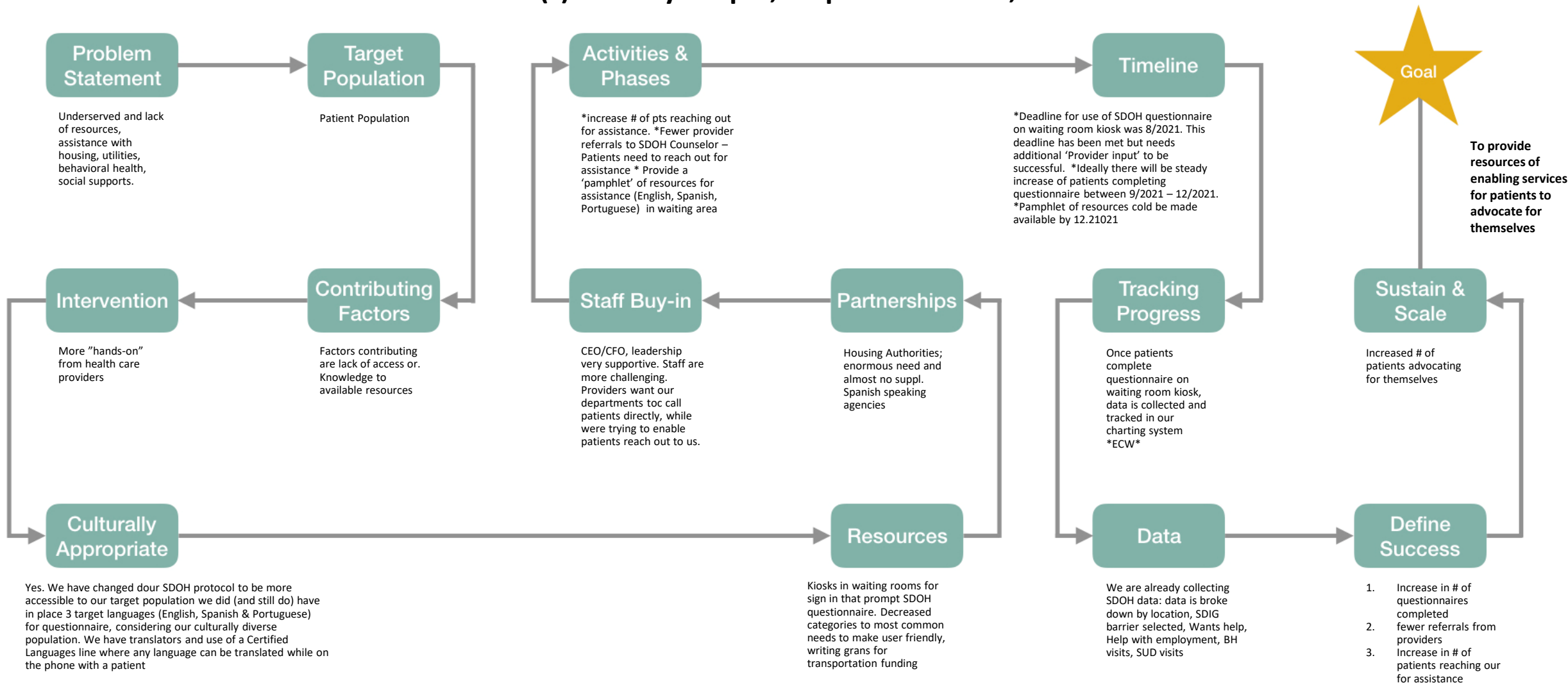


Figure E. Final Change Map from East Liberty Family Health Care Center



Issue & Need

Family Health Centers of San Diego

Overall Goal



Contributor(s): Sandra D'Alonzo, Freddy Sanchez

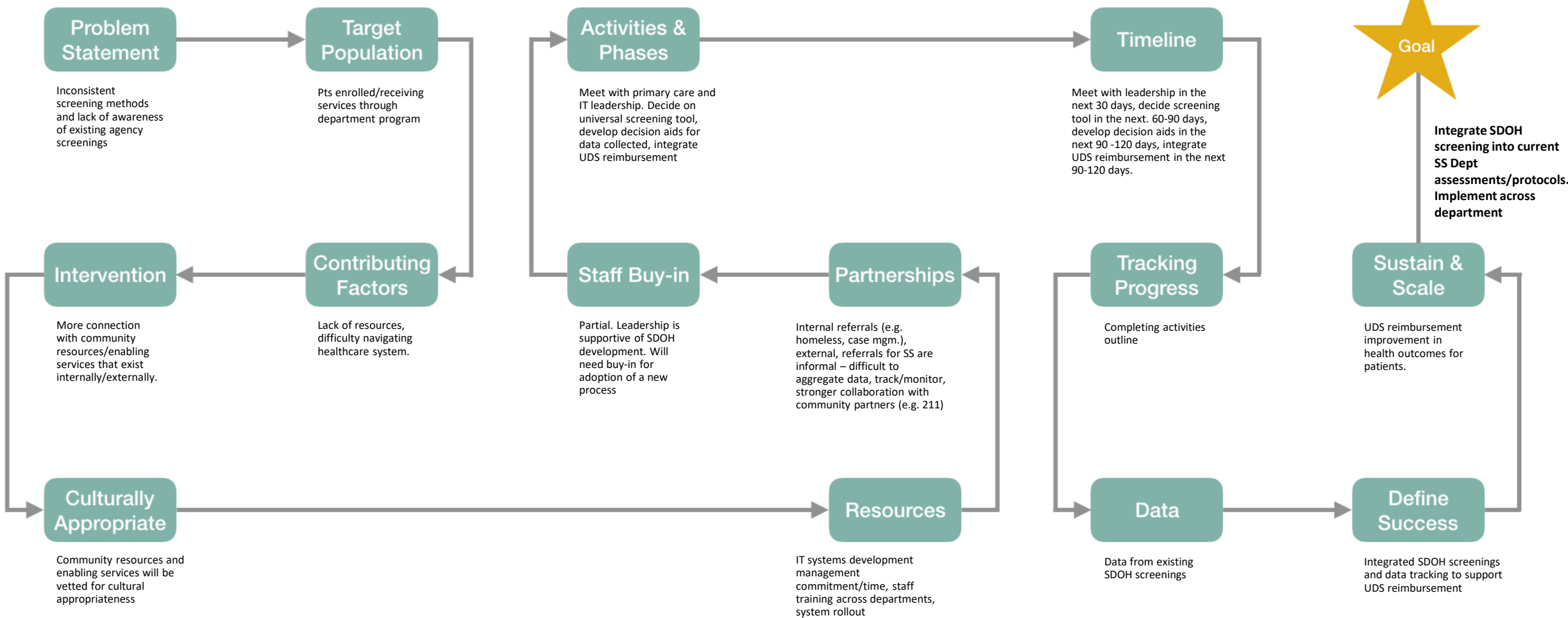


Figure F. Final Change Map from Family Health Centers of San Diego



Contributor(s): Jean Patrick, Logan Graham, Ellen Reilag

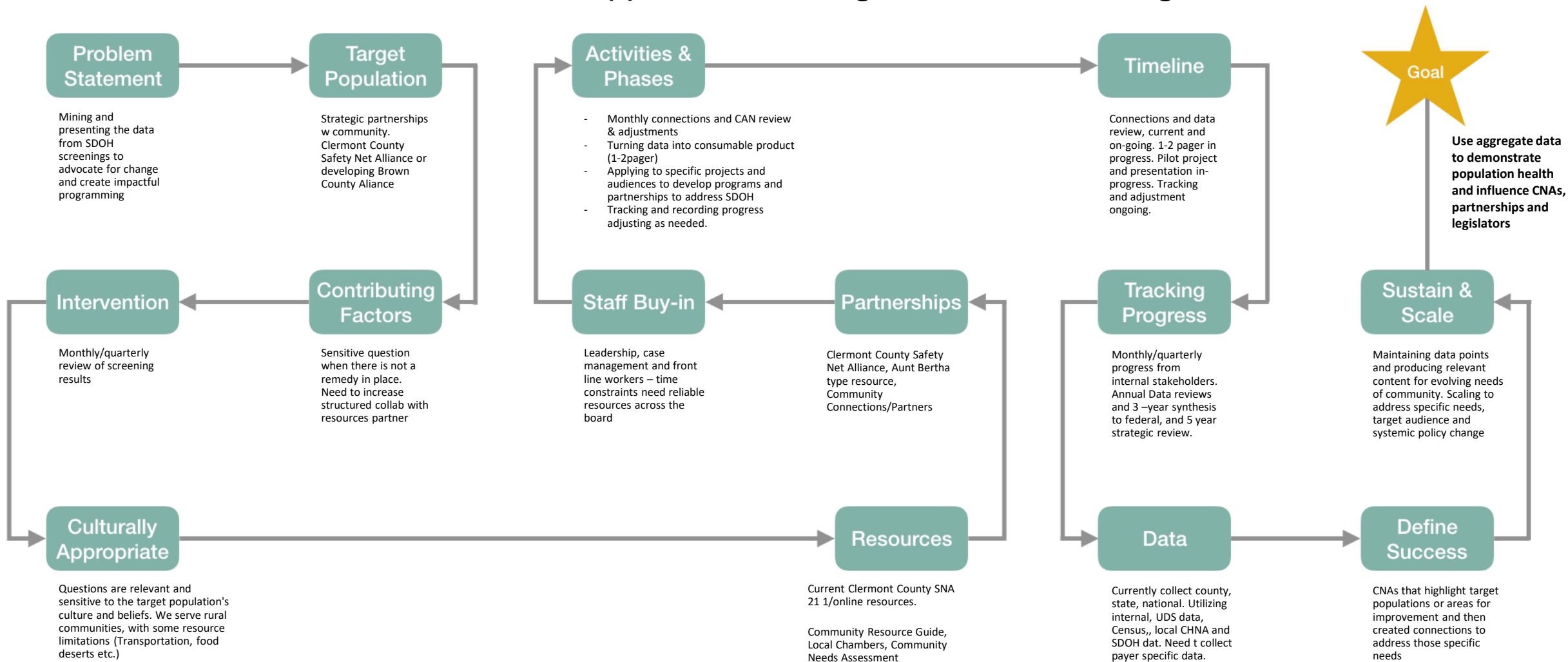


Figure G. Final Change Map from Health Source of Ohio



Contributor(s): Marilyn Belt, Annette Watson

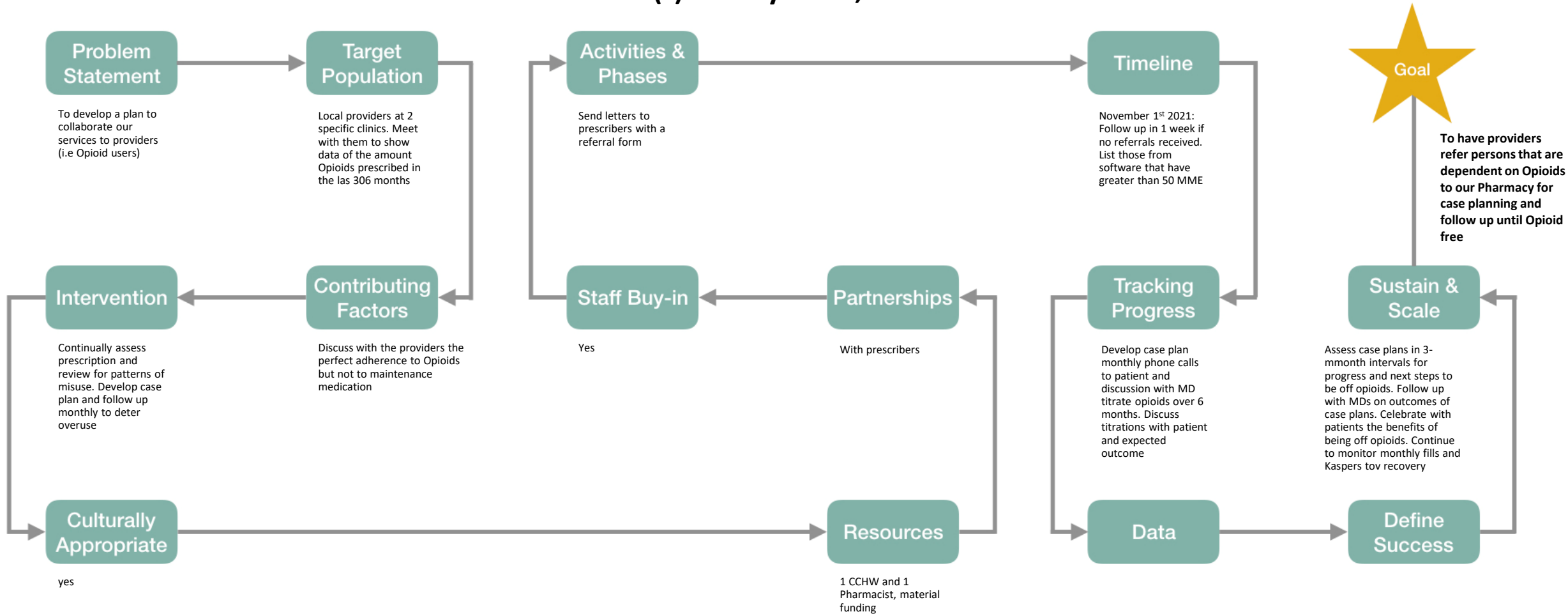


Figure H. Final Change Map from Hill Pharmaceuticals, LLC



Issue & Need

Hunter Health



Overall Goal

Contributor(s): Tara Nolen

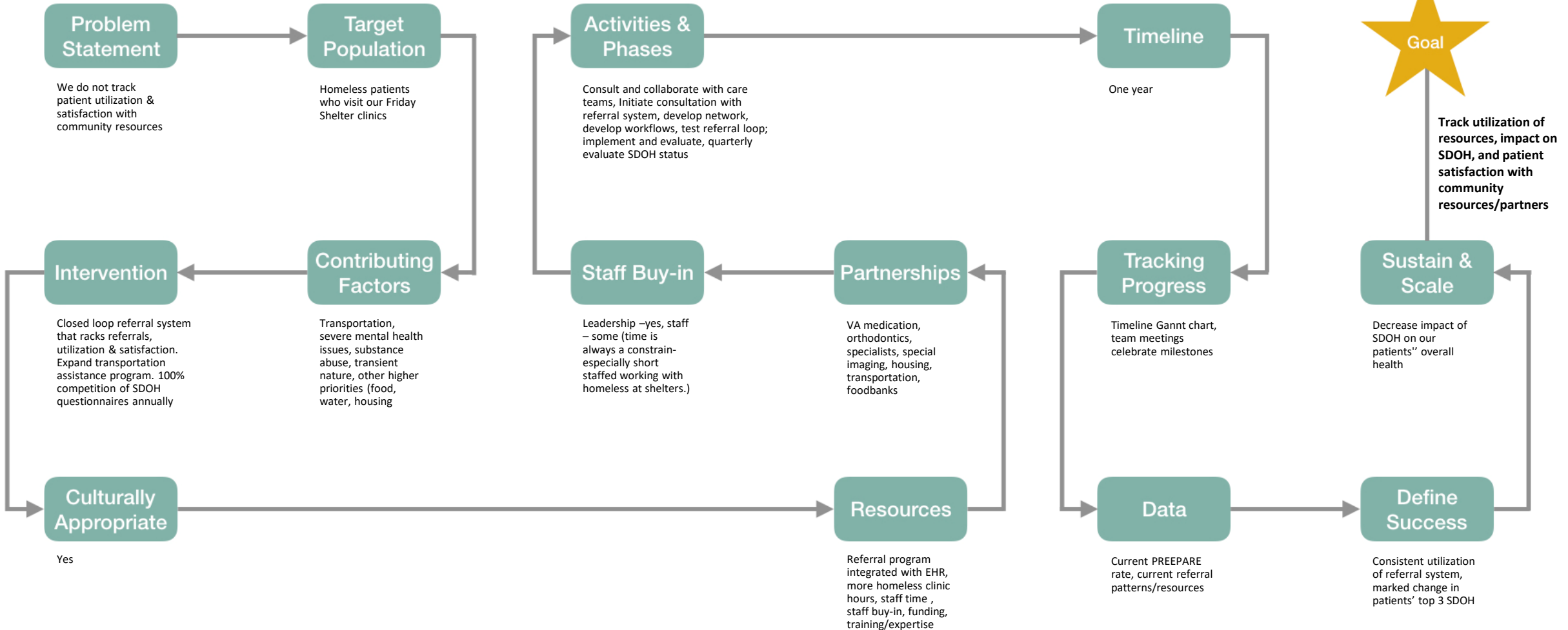


Figure I. Final Change Map from Hunter Health



Issue & Need

Keystone Health



Overall Goal

Contributor(s): Erin Harris

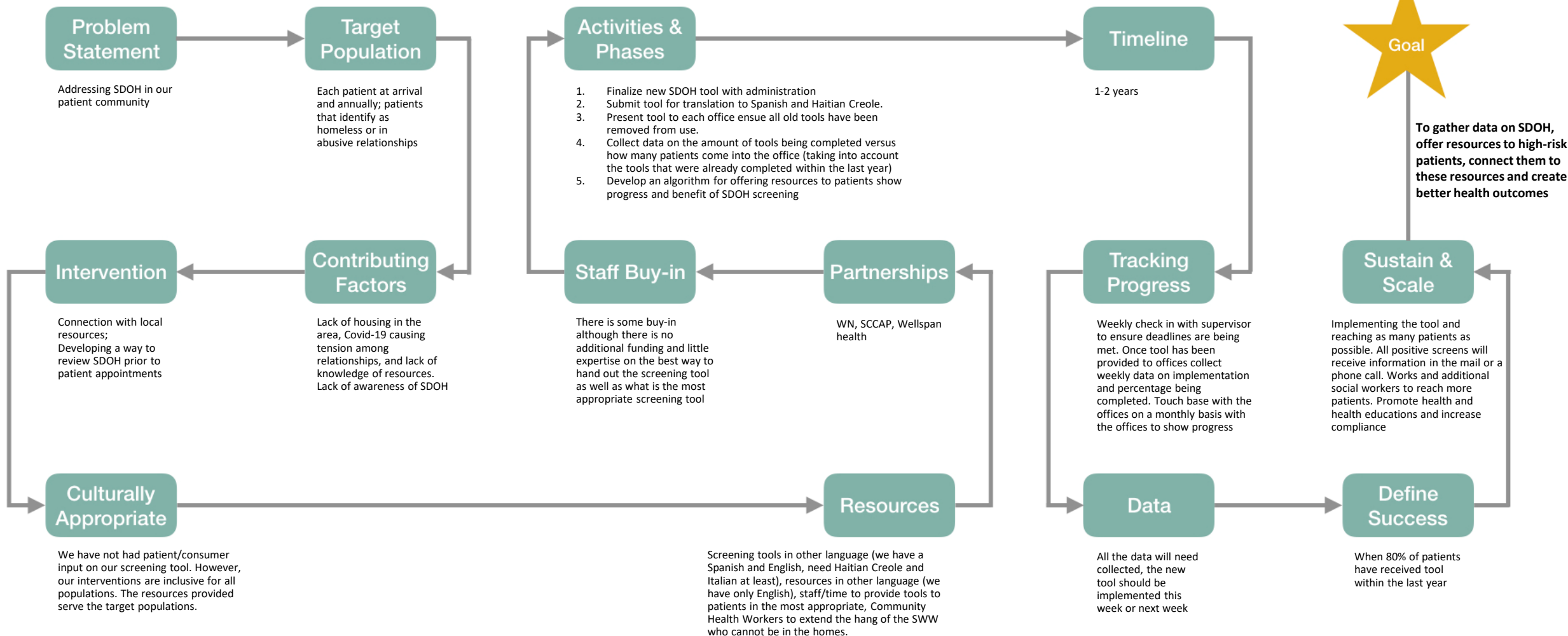


Figure J. Final Change Map from Keystone Health



Contributor(s): Bisrat Tesfagiorgis

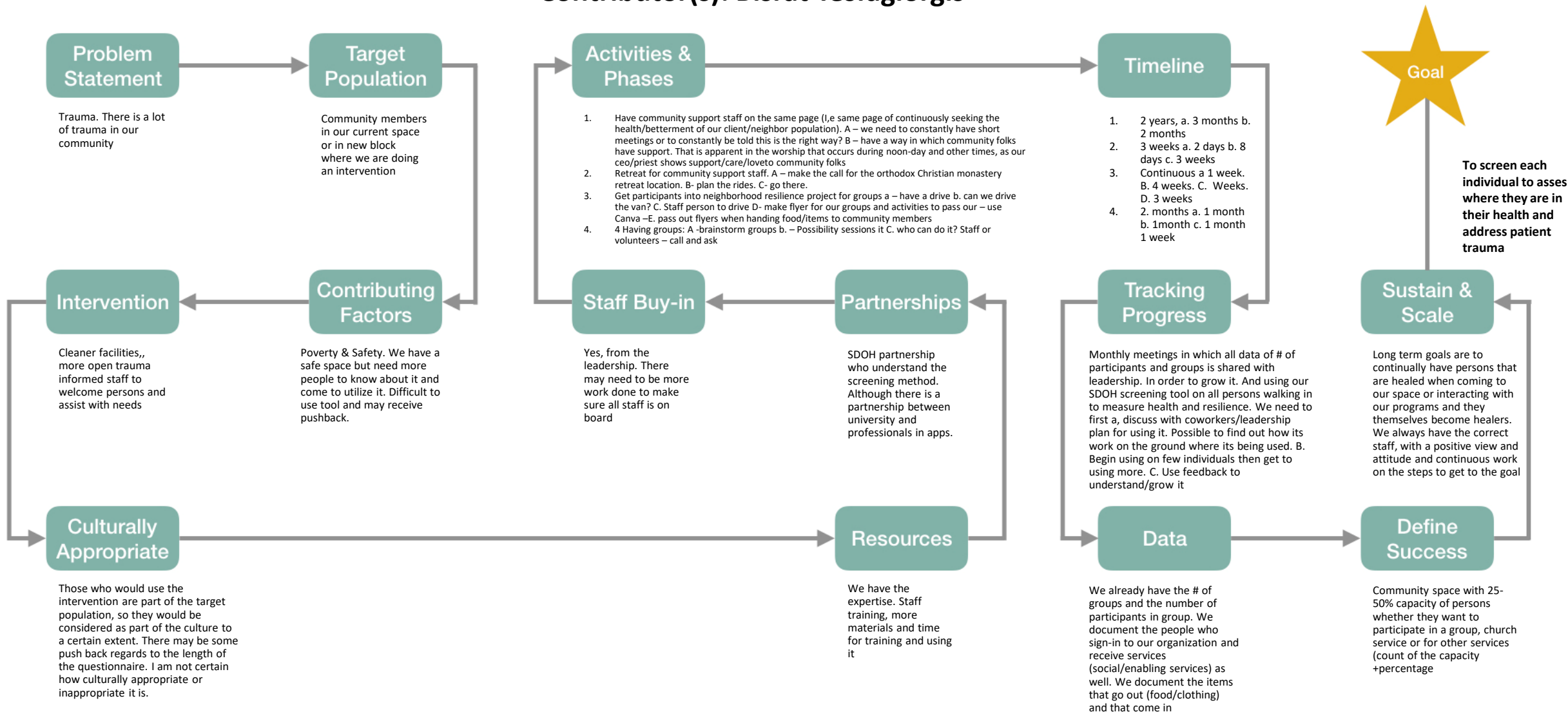


Figure K. Final Change Map from Neighborhood Resilience Project



Issue & Need

Primary Care Health Services

Overall Goal

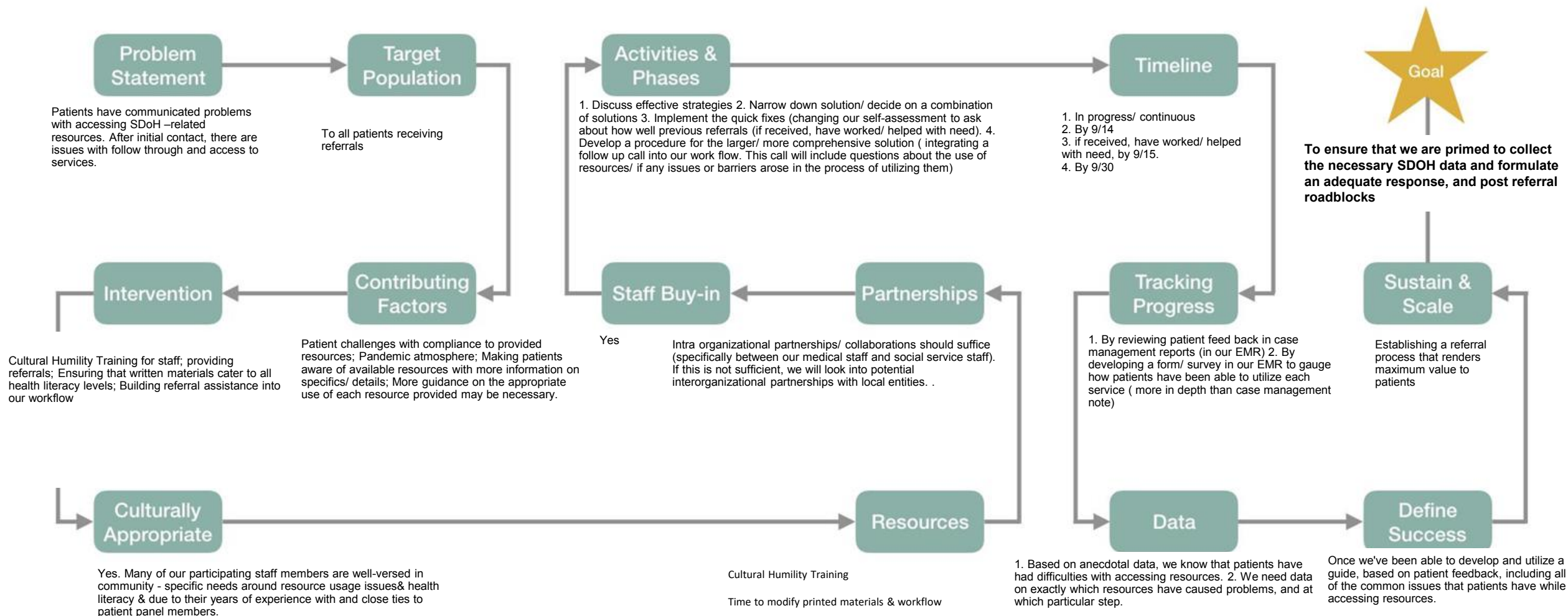


Figure L. Final Change Map from Primary Care Health Services



Issue & Need

Partnership Health Center Missoula

Overall Goal



Contributor(s): Jennifer Means, Zachary Clare – Salzler, Laurie Francis, Rebecca Goe

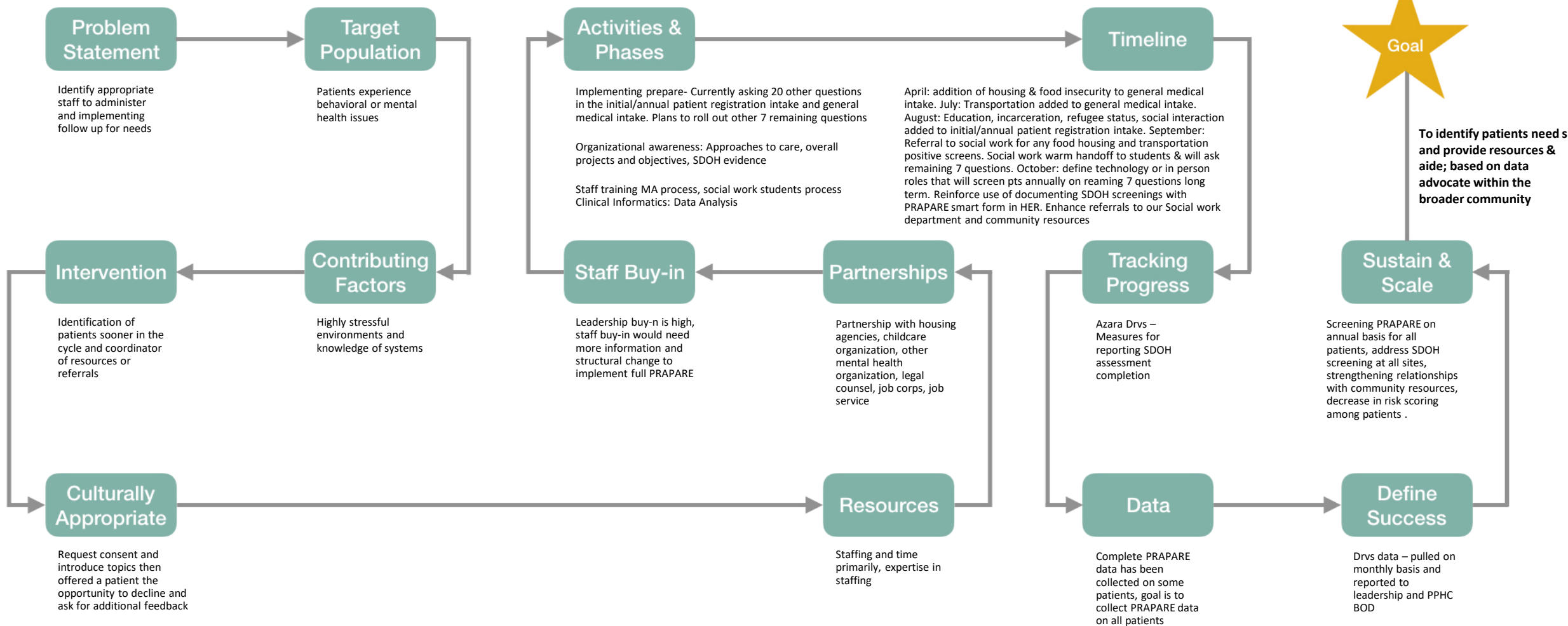


Figure M. Final Change Map from OHC Missoula



Contributor(s): Linda Stevens, Claudia Valenzuela, Ryan Alderman

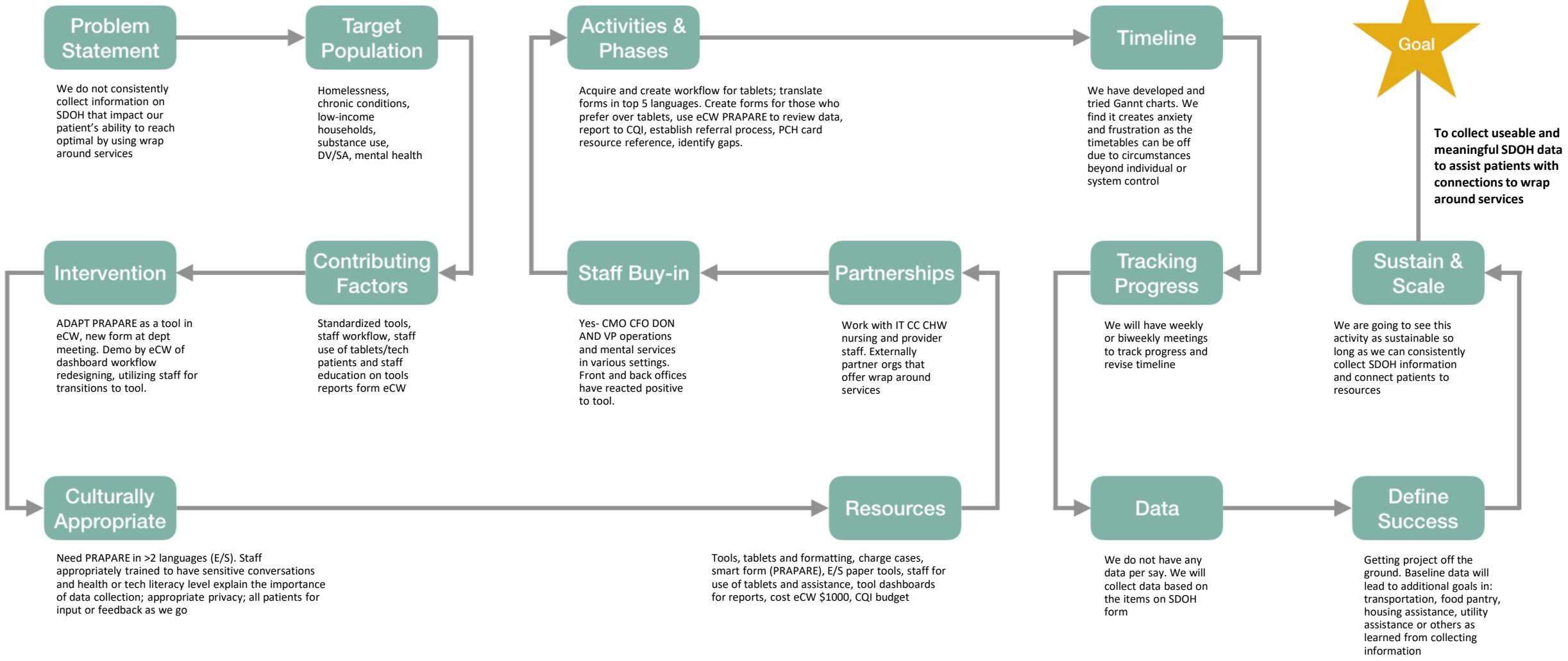


Figure N. Final Change Map from Pillars Community Health



Contributor(s): Sarah Kidwell, Michael Turk

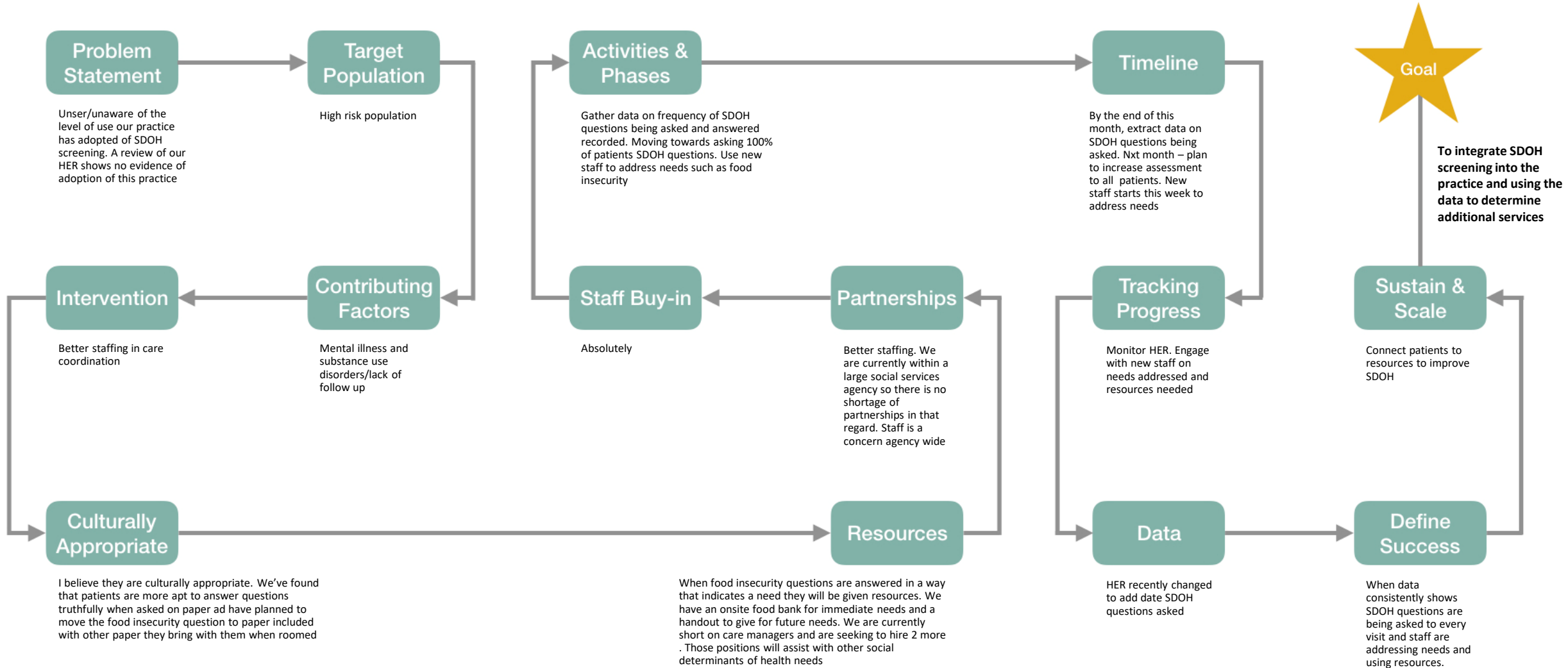


Figure O. Final Change Map from Pittsburgh Mercy



Issue & Need

Ryan Health



Overall Goal

Contributor(s): Amie Marie Irvine, Ethan Bernhardt

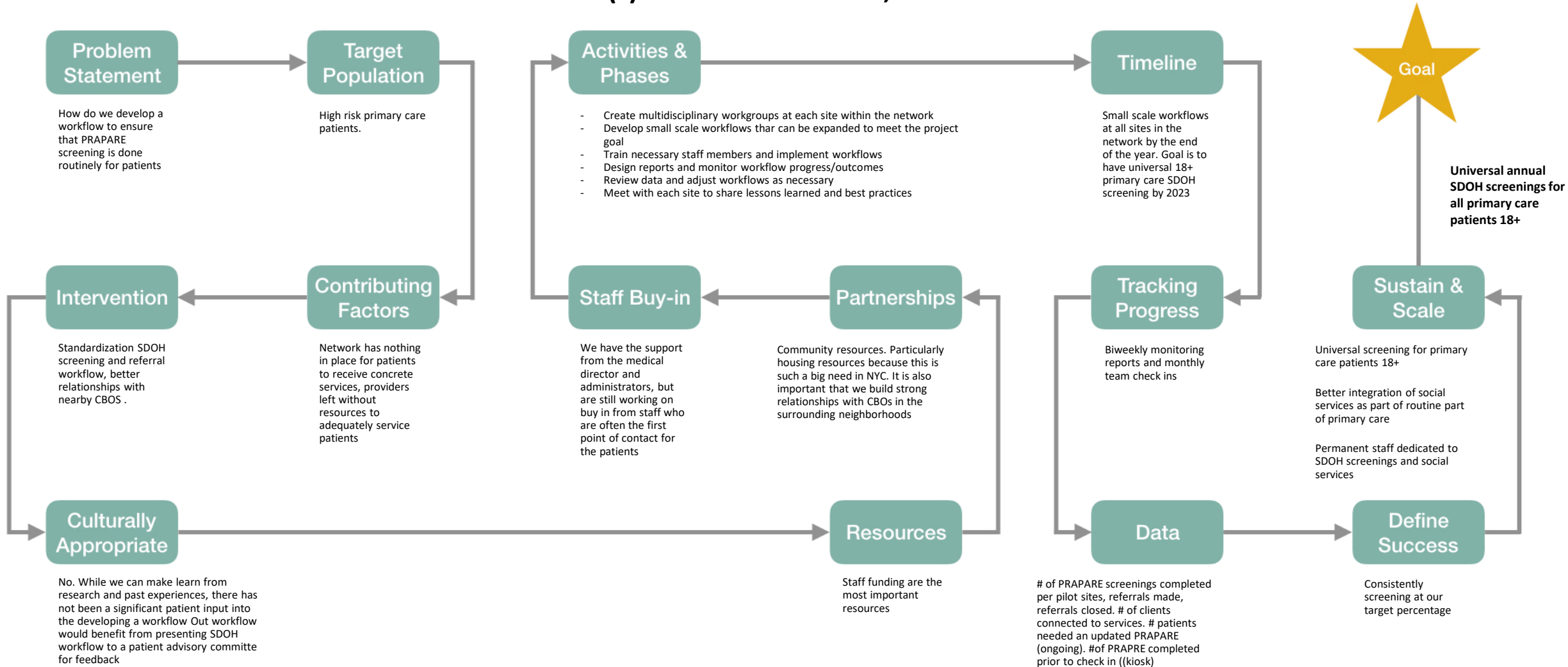


Figure P. Final Change Map from Ryan Health



Contributor(s): Katie Stephens, Breanna Beach Duffy

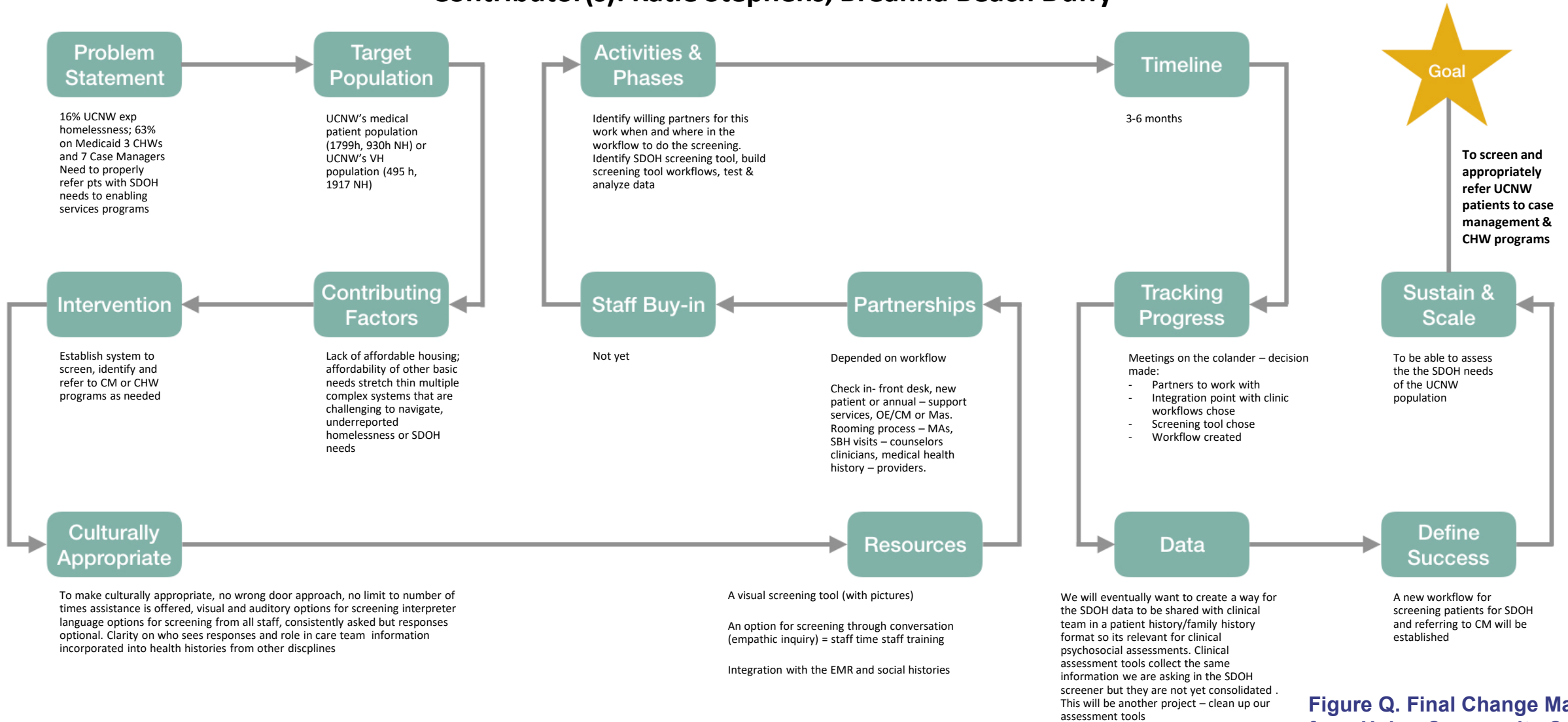


Figure Q. Final Change Map from Union Community Care



Issue & Need

Union Community Care

Overall Goal



Contributor(s): Sarah Schwartz

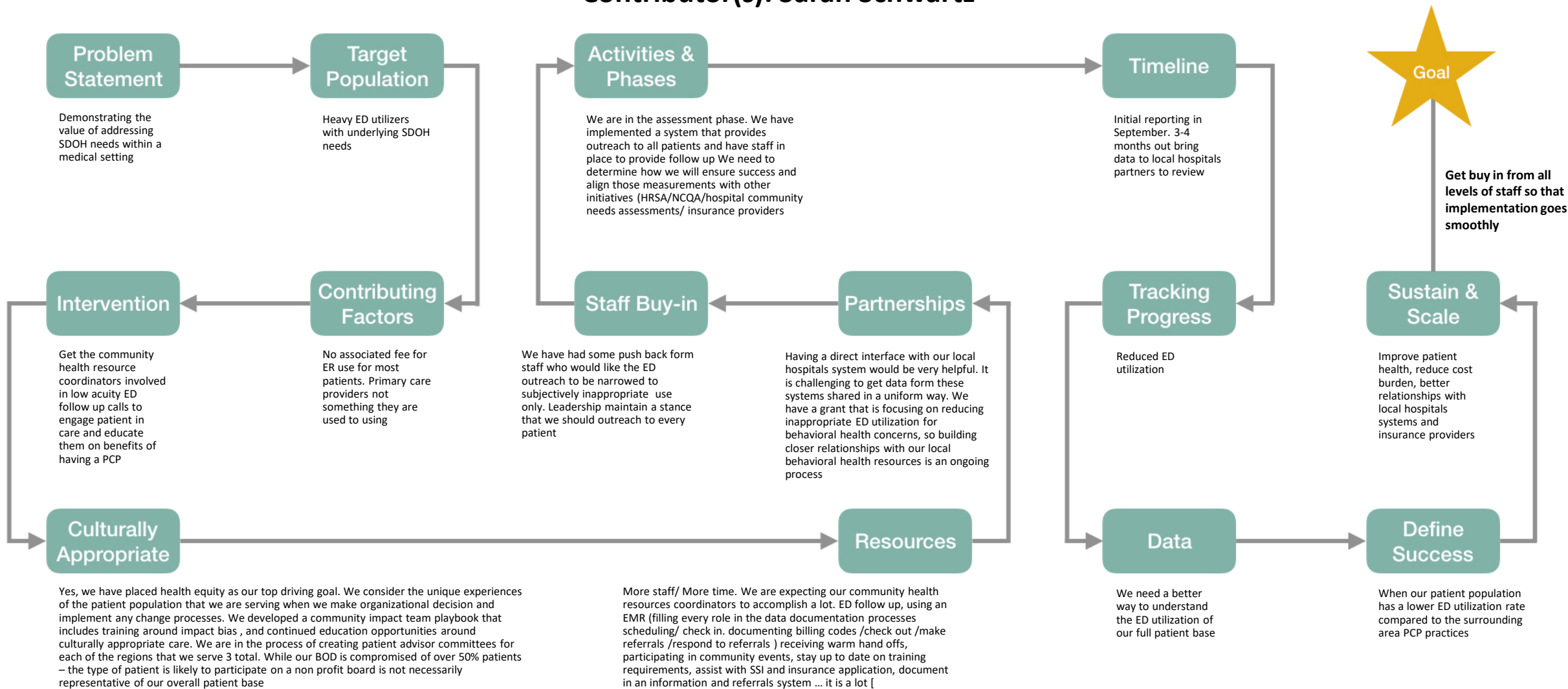


Figure R. Final Change Map from Unity Community Care