Conservative Therapies for Low Back Pain Project: Request for Proposal

Background

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) and UnitedHealthcare (UHC), in collaboration with OptumLabs, are excited to offer this funding opportunity to address conservative therapies for low back pain.

The primary goal is to identify risk factors associated with the development of long-term opioid use and misuse. Factors should include the provider type seen initially and during early management for low back pain (LBP), the role of physical therapy as the initial provider type or provided during early management for LBP, and patient clinical characteristics and demographics.

The project will define the potential impact of early physical therapy and other non-opioid related strategies to address LBP, with specific attention to costs, utilization, and quality outcomes. Another goal is to identify opportunities to accelerate translation of study outcomes via practical strategies and policies that payers, providers, patients and other stakeholder channels should consider.

This funding opportunity is being offered to OptumLabs Partners, with expertise in health services research, observational studies using claims data and a particular focus on low back pain management. This project will leverage the existing OptumLabs Data Warehouse (OLDW) which includes administrative claims, EHR-derived clinical data and sociodemographic data.

OptumLabs is hosting a focus group on Conservative Therapies for Low Back Pain with primary care physicians at the AMGA Annual Conference on March 23rd. This is a qualitative research opportunity designed to surface recommendations from providers on improving back care protocols and outcomes. Results of this focus group will be shared via a written report that will be shared with OptumLabs partners on March 28th as they may be helpful in developing the observational study design.

Eligibility

Only OptumLabs partners are eligible to submit proposals. Parties not under an active master agreement with OptumLabs are eligible to participate as a collaborator on the project, but will be required to team with an OptumLabs partner who has full research status related to the use of OLDW.

Submission and Selection Process and Timeline

This funding opportunity opens on March 15, 2017. Partners considering responding to this proposal are invited to submit questions about this RFP by March 20th that OptumLabs will address via a webinar to be hosted on March 21st at 3PM ET.

Respondents' proposals must be submitted, via email, to pamela.hansen@optum.com, no later than Thursday, April 13, 2017 at 11:59pm ET.

Proposal review and award selection – a selection committee comprised of representatives from OptumLabs, American Physical Therapy Association, UHC, and Optum Physical Health will score the submissions based on the enclosed scoring rubric and selection criteria (see Appendix A). All respondents will be notified of the selection decision on or before Monday, April 24, 2017.

- Request for Proposals Open
  - Formal announcement of Request for Proposal — March 15th
  - Partner respondents submit RFP questions — March 20th
  - Overview of RFP – Q&A — March 21st
  - AMGA Focus Group results shared with partners — March 28th
  - RFP application deadline — April 13th

- Review and Selection
  - Committee member review and scoring — 4/14 – 4/20
  - Grant notification — 4/24

Study Objectives

The primary goal is to identify risk factors associated with the development of long-term opioid use and misuse. Factors should include the provider type seen initially and during early management for LBP, the role of physical therapy as the initial provider type or provided during early management for LBP, and patient clinical characteristics and demographics. Specific study objectives outlined by our sponsors, APTA and UHC include the following:

1. Identify a relevant LBP population in Commercially Ins and Medicare Advantage populations who are not using opioid pain medication prior to the index visit.
2. Perform a descriptive analysis of the LBP population to better understand the following characteristics at baseline:
   - Patient demographics and clinical characteristics
   - Entry-point provider type differences, e.g., physical therapists, primary care physicians, or orthopaedic surgeons, etc.
   - Understand the use and patient adherence to various pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic treatments including a wide range of conservative therapies
   - For LBP patients treated with opioid therapy, describe treatment characteristics including timing, prescribing provider specialty, clinical setting, and dosing of opioid therapy
   - For LBP patients treated with opioid therapy, describe the patient demographics and clinical characteristics of those who develop long-term use or misuse of opioids for pain management
3. Describe short term (6 month) and longer term (2 year) patient outcomes in the LBP population by various treatment patterns (e.g., fragmentation (# of different providers seen), duration, costs, etc.)
4. Identify the impact of provider type on short and long term costs, key markers of utilization (imaging, testing), prescription and utilization of opioid medications, risk of future chronic opioid use or opioid use disorder, and markers of LBP clinical outcomes
5. Identify other key predictors for short and long term costs, and clinical outcomes
6. Compare patient outcomes including development of long-term opioid use and misuse across various treatment patterns having adequate sample size to allow for analyses

7. Determine if important geographic differences in treatment patterns are present, opioid treatment characteristics and development of long-term opioid use and misuse
8. Suggest data-driven, potentially high impact translation opportunities emerging from the data

Study Deliverables

This research project is expected to produce the following deliverables:

- Detailed project design (completed Detailed Research Agreement –using OptumLabs DRA template)
- Study protocol
- Draft and final written report that includes key analytic findings and translation recommendations for the payer, provider, and consumer perspective
- A PowerPoint slide deck summarizing the study results to be presented at OptumLabs Research & Translation Forum on November 15, 2017
- Dissemination of study results (manuscript, conference abstracts, and presentations) jointly by OptumLabs, & research partner

Data Assets

The project must use a research view available through the OptumLabs Data Warehouse.

Role of the Project Steering Committee

The Project Steering Group is made up of representatives from the project sponsors, the APTA and UHC, and OptumLabs. The steering group provides oversight of project activities and deliverables, including:

- Selecting the grant award recipient
- Providing input and feedback on study deliverables (listed below)
- Accelerating translation opportunities

OptumLabs will facilitate monthly meetings with the project team and steering group once the project is initiated in order to enable timely feedback of work in progress and preliminary outcomes.

Project Timelines

The sponsors are seeking project proposals that can be feasibly completed within 6 months of contract execution, with estimated completion by December 2017. Project completion means delivery of a PowerPoint slide deck and final written report summarizing the study results. OptumLabs holds its Research & Translation Forum in mid-November and requests that the project team present its interim findings at this conference. While we expect the study results will be disseminated via high-impact publications and conferences, we are interested in ways to accelerate other translation channels, such as payer policy and health care delivery system guidelines, etc. Thus, proposals that are designed with translation end points in mind and that align with our timeline for delivery are desirable.

Funding

The total funding award being offered is $200,000 plus the fees for an OLDW project sandbox. The $200,000 award may cover direct project costs with no more than 10% indirect institutional costs. Organizations should propose a budget in accordance with a project to be completed within the timeline.

Submission and Response Requirements

Please use the OptumLabs Preliminary Research Application (PRA) which is included as an attachment to submit your proposal; we outline areas of important emphasis below.

(i) A description of your proposed project, including

a. Overview of the population, including a description of study cohorts/comparison groups or other subgroups of interest
b. List of key variables of interest
c. Description of planned analyses for each objective
d. Discussion of potential translation opportunities of study outcomes

(ii) Project Feasibility

a. Summary of required project resources

i. Team staffing (staff bios)

ii. Proposed detailed budget that includes a breakdown of costs associated with this project

iii. Resources

iv. Project timeline by major study deliverables listed above

v. Deliverables

(iii) Information about your project team capabilities, distinctive competencies and why it is uniquely qualified to succeed

a. Describe team expertise, including specialties/areas of expertise (e.g., methodologist/statistician, chronic pain and/or substance use expertise highly desirable

b. Team experience with Claims data and optionally EHR data - or Optum, Humedica or OptumLabs data more specifically, if applicable. Specifically describe experience working with large-scale data sets to perform complex data scrubbing, preparation, and transformation using multi-step processes. Include detail on the programming languages, statistical techniques, and business intelligence tools employed.

c. References

d. List other relevant work that your institution has handled previously or is engaged in currently

Appendix A: Selection Criteria/Weighted Scoring

Selection criteria -have been developed in collaboration with APTA, UHC, and OptumLabs, and include a weighted algorithm of component scores across a set of strategic priorities, including but not limited to:

- Project Feasibility – data, timeline, and budget

- Project Team Capabilities
    - Subject matter expertise in musculoskeletal pain, low back pain and broad range of therapies used in their treatments
    - Experience using large claims-based data asset
    - Knowledge of OptumLabs Data
- Project Impact
    - Rationale
        - Strength of approach to defining population and key variables
        - Strength of proposed analysis
    - Translation ideas and potential for impact
    - Alignment with study objectives
    - Innovation demonstrated via the research design
    - Potential for overall health system impact

Rating Category	Rating Factor	Weight
Project Feasibility	Data, timeline, and budget	0.25
Project Team Capabilities	Team Experience in subject area	0.10
	Knowledge of OptumLabs Data	0.20
Project Impact	Rationale: Importance, Scientific Acceptability	0.10
	Potential translation impact	0.15
	Alignment with study objectives	0.10
	Degree of novelty/innovation	0.05
	Overall health system impact	0.05
		1.00