

## AHRQ PRBN Contract Partnerships

In February 2007, AHRQ awarded ten master contracts to a distinguished group of primary care Practice-Based Research Networks (PBRNs). These awards will allow AHRQ to commission research and development projects of relevance to primary care. The work will focus on demand-driven, practical, and applied topics related to improving health and the primary care health system.

[Introduction](#) | [Background](#) | [Partners](#) | [More Information](#)

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### Introduction

AHRQ recognizes that primary care is a vital component of an effective and efficient health care system. Research needs to focus on the questions being encountered by primary care clinicians in their practices, it should be conducted in primary care practices with members of the diverse communities served by these practices, and the results must be shared quickly with the practice community. In 2007, AHRQ expanded its PBRN initiative to include a new mechanism by which it could fund rapid-cycle research and implementation projects to advance its mission of improving the health and health care of all Americans.

The PBRN Contract partnership is a 5-year project involving ten PBRN partnerships. It allows AHRQ to fund a variety of projects including observational studies of primary care practice, field testing in real-world primary care practices of evidence-based tools, and implementation and dissemination research. This project allows AHRQ and its federal partners to access the diversity of small and medium sized primary care offices that form the core of America's primary health care delivery system.

### Background

#### PBRNs

Primary care practice-based research networks (PBRNs)—some of which have existed in the United States for more than twenty years—involve community-based clinicians and their staffs in activities designed to understand and improve primary care. The best of PBRN efforts link relevant clinical questions with rigorous research methods in community settings to produce scientific

information that is externally valid, and, in theory, assimilated more easily into everyday practice.

Increasingly, PBRNs are recognizing their potential to expand their purpose, and are supporting quality improvement activities within primary care practices and the adoption of an evidence-based culture in primary care practice. Many PBRN leaders have begun to envision their networks as places of learning, where clinicians are engaged in reflective practice inquiries, and where clinicians, their patients, and academic researchers collaborate in the search for answers that lead to the improved delivery of primary care.

AHRQ defines a primary care practice-based research network, or PBRN, as a group of ambulatory practices devoted principally to the primary care of patients, and affiliated in their mission to investigate questions related to community-based practice and to improve the quality of primary care. This definition includes a sense of ongoing commitment to network activities and an organizational structure that transcends a single research project. PBRNs often link practicing clinicians with investigators experienced in clinical and health services research, while at the same time enhancing the research skills of the network members.

## **The Partnership program**

The program began with an open competition among primary care PBRNs. Preference was given to more established networks and those whose practices serve priority populations. Applicants were judged on their research and research related experience, research capacity, and management plan. In making its decision, AHRQ also worked to assure the inclusion of the full spectrum of primary care, a broad range of patient populations, and a geographic balance across the U.S. In February 2007, AHRQ awarded 10 master contracts to establish the program.

PBRNs awarded contracts are eligible to apply for task orders under this program. Typical task orders under this program are expected to range from \$100,000 to \$300,000. Most projects will have timelines ranging from 12 to 24 months. AHRQ has committed a baseline of \$500,000 per year for task orders under this program and expects to fund significantly more through programmatic funds and through partnerships with other federal agencies.

## **Partners**

PBRN:	<b>Ambulatory Care Outcomes Research Network (ACORN)</b>
Location:	Virginia
PI:	Stephen F. Rothemich, MD, MS

Managing organization: Virginia Commonwealth University

Network description:

ACORN, launched in 1996, currently comprises 50 primary care practices with over 260 clinicians (1 to 18 per site) caring for more than 300,000 people in suburban, urban, and rural communities throughout Virginia. Nineteen practices are independent; the rest are affiliated with 4 different health systems. ACORN researchers, with backgrounds in medicine, health services research, public health, and social science disciplines, bring significant theoretical/conceptual and methodological expertise to questions of great interest to practices and policymakers. Examples include improving preventive services delivery, enhancing the quality and efficiency of primary care, and using information technology as a tool to improve outcomes. We partner with community collaborators, health systems, public health infrastructure, policymakers, and national experts. With more than a decade of practical experience, ACORN is adept at identifying emerging needs and research issues, working collaboratively with practices to conduct rigorous research efficiently, and translating knowledge into practice and policy.

Consortium: **ePCRN (Electronic Primary Care Research Network)**

Location: National

Member PBRNs: Alabama Practice-Based Research Network (APBRN)  
Colorado Ambulatory Research Network (CaReNet)  
High Plains Research Network (HPRN)  
Indiana Practice-Based Research Network (INET)  
Los Angeles Practice-based Research Network (LA Net)  
Minnesota Academy of Family Physicians Research Network (MAFPRN)  
Oklahoma Physicians Resource/Research Network  
Upstate New York Practice-Based Research Network (UNY-Net)  
Penn State Ambulatory Research Network (PSARN)  
South Florida Practice-based Research Network (SoFla-PBRN)  
South Texas Ambulatory Research Network (STARNet)

PI: Kevin Peterson, MD

Managing organization: University of Minnesota

Consortium description:

PBRN: **Iowa Research Network (IRENE)**

Location: Iowa

PI: Barcey Levy, PhD, MD

Managing Organization: University of Iowa Department of Family Medicine

Network/Consortia description:

The Iowa Research Network, a practice-based research network, was established through the joint efforts of the Iowa Academy of Family Physicians, the University of Iowa Department of Family Medicine, and the Iowa Academy of Family Physicians Foundation. The managing organization is the University of Iowa Department of Family Medicine

IRENE consists of approximately 270 clinicians in 150 family physician practices. Eighty-four physicians have completed Human Subjects training. Projects to date have been in the areas of depression screening, osteoporosis screening, management of diabetes, colon cancer screening, and management of unexplained symptoms. We are developing intervention studies to improve diabetes care and colon cancer screening. See the following page for IRENE Characteristics.

Consortium: **North Carolina Network Consortium (NCNC)**

Location: North Carolina

Member PBRNs:

- Duke Primary Care Research Consortium (PCRC), Duke University, Durham, NC
- North Carolina Family Medicine Research Network (NC-FM-RN), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- NC Multi-site Adolescent Research Consortium for Health (NC MARCH), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- Mecklenburg Area Partnership for Primary-care Research (MAPPR), Carolinas HealthCare System, Charlotte NC
- Robeson County Primary Care Network (RCPCN), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

PI: Philip Sloane, MD, MPH

Managing organization: Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research,  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Consortium description:

The North Carolina Network Consortium (NCNC) includes two well-established networks, the North Carolina Family Medicine Research Network (NC-FM-RN) – which is the lead PBRN for this Master Task Order, and the Duke Primary Care Research Consortium (PCRC). Both are dedicated to, and have established track records in, conducting research in primary care settings. Our other three participating networks are the North Carolina Multi-site Adolescent Research Consortium for Health (NC MARCH), the Mecklenburg Area Partnership for Primary-care Research (MAPPR), and the

Robeson County Primary Care Network (RCPCN). These are newer; each has AHRQ PBRN-development funding; and each targets an AHRQ priority population (adolescents, Latinos, and American Indians respectively), thereby substantially enhancing NCNC's ability to reach these groups, as well as increasing our pool of available practices. Leaders of all five participating networks are experienced researchers who have worked together in a variety of capacities. Leaders of four of the networks have faculty appointments at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH); the other network is based 12 miles away at Duke University.

**PBRN:** **The Oklahoma Physicians Resource/Research Network**

**Location:** Oklahoma

**PI:** James W. Mold, M.D., M.P.H.

**Managing Organization:**  
Network Administration: Rural Health Projects, Inc.  
Research Administration: Department of Family & Preventive Medicine  
University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center

**Network Description:**

OKPRN is a regional network with over 230 clinicians in over 90 practices, ranging from large urban academic practices to small rural private practices. Its membership includes allopathic physicians, osteopathic physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants. The network is a 501c6 non-profit corporation, distinct from, yet closely affiliated with the DFPM. OKPRN clinicians serve over 350,000 patients, almost 10% of the state's total population, which include subgroups of a substantial number of important racial and ethnic minority subgroups including African Americans (8%), Native Americans (8%), Asian/Pacific Islanders (2%), and Hispanics (6%). As a participant in the Electronic Primary Care Research Network (ePCRN), OKPRN is one of 12 regional networks with access to sophisticated information technologies designed to make it easier for the participating networks to communicate with each other and for clinicians to identify patients eligible for studies and to enter study data into a common database.

**PBRN:** **Oregon Rural Practice-based Research Network (ORPRN)**

**Location:** Portland, Oregon

**PI:** Lyle Fagnan, MD

**Managing organization:** Oregon Health & Science University

**Network description:**

The Oregon Rural Practice-based Research Network (ORPRN), founded in 2002 at Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU), is a statewide network of rural primary care clinicians, community partners, and academicians dedicated to research into delivery of health care to rural residents and research to reduce rural health disparities.

ORPRN includes 135 clinicians at 36 practices located in 29 communities throughout the state of Oregon. Family medicine clinicians (88%) comprise the majority of the network with smaller representation by practitioners of general internal medicine and pediatrics. The network is multidisciplinary with a 66%/34% mix of physician and non-physician clinicians (e.g. nurse practitioners/physician assistants). Sixty percent of the practices are private businesses with a median personnel size of 3 clinicians and 8 clinic staff.

ORPRN research studies focus on issues relating to health care delivery, including access to care, improvement of care, patient safety, chronic illness management and health information technology.

PBRN: **Pediatric Research Consortium (PeRC)**

Location: Philadelphia, PA

PI: Louis M. Bell, MD

Managing organization: The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia

Network description:

PeRC, the primary care practice-based research network of The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, is dedicated to improving the safety, quality and health outcomes of pediatric care through clinical research. Although PeRC is "juvenile" in its development, it has been able to take advantage of CHOP's expanded organizational and technological infrastructure in assembling the components of the country's largest pediatric integrated delivery system which includes a primary pediatric healthcare network of 34 pediatric practices located in urban, suburban and rural locations throughout the Delaware Valley.

PeRC serves a diverse population of over 190,000 patients cared for by over 180 primary care pediatricians and nurse practitioners. PeRC has assembled a talented group of epidemiologists, clinical informaticians and administrators to organize and facilitate the clinical research projects that it agrees to undertake. Research interests and projects across the network include: asthma care, obesity prevention, ED utilization and ADHD to name a few.

Consortia: **PRIME Net**

Location: New Mexico, Colorado, Southeast US, Texas, California

Consortia partners:

RIOS Net (New Mexico)  
CaReNet (Colorado)  
SERCN (8 SE states)  
SPUR-Net (Houston, Texas)  
CRN (California)

PI: Robert L Williams, MD, MPH

Lead PBRN/Managing organization: RIOS Net / University of New Mexico

Consortia description:

PRIME Net (Primary Care Multiethnic Network) is an established consortium of 5 PBRNs that share a common purpose of research benefitting underserved and minority populations. Together these PBRNs span the country from East to West, incorporating over 1500 clinicians of all primary care disciplines. Patients come from both rural and urban communities, and have diverse ethnic backgrounds, including substantial percentages of Hispanic, Black, Native American, and Asian persons. The principal areas of interest of the consortium include topics relevant to the underserved. Early studies are examining care of hepatitis C, care of the underinsured, management of chronic non-malignant pain, clinician behavior change and acanthosis nigricans, and counseling for behavior change.

PBRN: **Practice Partner Research Network (PPRNet)**

Location: Charleston, SC

PI: Steve Ornstein, MD

Managing organization: Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC)

Network description:

The Practice Partner Research Network (PPRNet) was created in May 1995, as a joint effort between the Department of Family Medicine at the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), Practice Partner (PP), and interested practices across the United States. PPRNet practices are recruited from users of the Practice Partner Patient Records software who are drawn by its mission as research organization designed to improve health care in its member practices. PPRNet has historical clinical data from 168 practices and approximately 2 million patients, from 1987 through September 2006. There are currently 130 active PPRNet practices in 38 States with more than 500 physicians and more than 615,000 active patients. The geographic distribution and race-ethnicity of patients is similar to that of the overall U.S. population. Through a series of federally funded research activities, the PPRNet research team has developed a theoretically based and empirically validated quality improvement model for primary care practices, which is the foundation of our demonstration projects and clinical trials.

Consortium: **SNOCAP-USA**

Location: Colorado and National

Member PBRNs:

High Plans Research Network (HPRN): A PBRN operating in the frontier counties of Colorado with headquarters in Aurora, Colorado

Colorado Research Network (CaReNet): A PBRN operating in Colorado with headquarters in Aurora, Colorado

Building Investigative Practices for Better Health Outcomes Research Network (BIGHORN): A PBRN made up of private practices operating in Colorado with headquarters in Aurora, Colorado  
American Academy of Family Physicians National Research Network (AAFP-NRN): A National PBRN with headquarters in Kansas City, KS  
Population-based Palliative Care Research Network (PoPCRN): An international palliative care network with headquarters in Aurora, Colorado

PI: David R. West, PhD

Managing organization: University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center

Consortium description:

SNOCAP-USA is a practice-based research organization. The partners that have come together to form SNOCAP-USA include the AAFP NRN, PoPCRN, and the three networks of SNOCAP, the State Networks of Colorado Ambulatory Practices & Partners: CaReNet, HPRN, and BIGHORN.. SNOCAP-USA combines this PBRN history and experience with the policy expertise provided by the Robert Graham Policy Center and the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center (UCDHSC) Division of Health Care Policy and Research, and the knowledge provided by individuals in the UCDHSC School of Pharmacy, Department of Family Medicine, and Division of General Internal Medicine, and Colorado Health Outcomes program.

## **For more information please contact:**

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