

Susan Elster, PhD

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Profile

Researcher, writer, and editor with extensive analytic, program development and communications experience in health and social policy. Clients include private foundations, non-profits, think tanks, and private firms.

Employment History

[The Jewish Healthcare Foundation](#) & the [Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative](#) (2007 – 2020)

Led research teams in both qualitative and quantitative analyses; successfully submitted millions of dollars of federal and foundation grants; wrote and edited in-depth analyses of major social and health policy issues, in addition to op eds, periodic organizational updates, and many policy and issues briefs.

[Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute](#) (2003 – 2007)

Prepared research, literature reviews and case studies to understand food insecurity in Israel; socio-economic conditions in Ukraine, Russia & Moldova; anti-poverty policy in the United Kingdom; cross-national policies for at-risk children; published guidance with the director of Israel's Ministry of Social Welfare on using outcome measurement in the nonprofit and public sectors, and surveys and analysis of demographic and health conditions for local communities.

[Laurie Heller & Associates, Philanthropic Consulting](#) (2006-2007).

Edited proposals of grant writers working on behalf of community non-profits to analyze needs and map out fundable and successful projects and programs.

[MASA Israel Journey](#) (2007).

Analyzed enrollment data to help organization assess and better target its recruitment efforts.

[Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative](#) (2001-2002)

Led a team of physicians, employers, consumers, hospitals, and insurance plans to develop a regional approach to reducing hospitalizations for people with diabetes for PRHI, a nationally recognized quality improvement collaborative.

[University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs](#) (1999-2000)

Managed the Consumer Health Information Project – an assessment of consumer health information-seeking behavior; contracted with and directed

activities of a market research firm to conduct focus groups and 1,000 telephone surveys; guided data analysis and wrote research report.

[Jewish Healthcare Foundation \(1993-1995\)](#)

Directed the [Healthy Jewish Community Project](#) – a first of its kind, broad-based community-based health assessment. Guided by a broad cross-section of dozens of community leaders and volunteers, the project included conducting numerous focus groups, hundreds of interviews with community professionals and agency directors, and a community-wide telephone survey to inform the foundation's funding agenda.

[Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh \(1993\)](#)

Using both qualitative and quantitative analyses, assessed the viability of a central Jewish neighborhood in order to assess the risks of a major planned development and expansion of Jewish communal institutions. The study resulted in concrete recommendations for neighborhood stabilization and investment.

[Richard King Mellon Foundation \(1992\)](#)

Advised leading regional foundation on social service funding; wrote "Priorities for Human Service Program" for Annual Report; conducted background research on cutting-edge community-based anti-poverty programs to guide foundation funding.

[United Way of Allegheny County \(1990-1992\)](#)

Led research (primary and secondary) on an organization-wide effort to evaluate its portfolio of agency funding for elder services, early childhood education, and substance abuse and addiction services. The project mobilized community leadership to build consensus on strategies for programs and projects.

Publications and Presentations

In-Depth Policy & Best Practice Analyses

Elster S, with Feinstein KW. 2020. [Beyond Medicalization: Midwives & Maternity Care in America](#). A ROOTS publication of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

Elster S and Nakiryowa, H. 2019. [Reinvigorating and Reimagining the Pennsylvania WIC Program](#). Prepared for the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and WHAMglobal.

Elster S and Golebiewski D. 2014. [The Fight Against AIDS, 1981-2014: A Pittsburgh Story](#). A ROOTS Publication prepared for the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

Strategic Organizational Communication

Elster S. 2015. [The 25th Anniversary of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation](#). A ROOTS publication of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

Elster S. 2010 [Looking Back, Looking Forward](#). Annual Report of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation.

Qualitative Research

Elster S. 2018. [Community Health Workers: Learning What Matters](#) in Preparing CHWs to Provide Community-Based Services to Elders. Evaluation of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation's CHW Champions Program.

Elster S. 2001. [Consumer Health Information in Allegheny County: An Environmental Scan](#). Conducted for the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, University of Pittsburgh and presented at the CENDI Sponsored Symposium – Evaluating our Web Presence: Challenges, Metrics, Results. Co-sponsored by the National Library of Medicine.

Research Briefs & Best Practice Manuals

Elster S. 2018. [Guiding Principles & Practices for Improving Evaluation of Health Improvement Interventions](#). Proceedings from the conference, Learning from Each Other: Getting Evaluations of Complex Health Interventions Right, organized by the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and AcademyHealth.

Elster S, Vrbin C and Hazon S. 2014. [Data-Guided Hot Spotting: Characterizing Frequently Admitted Hospital Patients](#), PRHI Readmission Brief. Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Elster S, Vrbin C, Glad, J and Cynn P. 2014. [Using Hospital Admission Patterns to Improve Care for Persons Living with HIV/AIDS in Pennsylvania](#), PRHI Readmission Brief. Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Kanel KT, Elster S, Vrbin C and Hazon S. 2012. [Patterns of Hospitalizations Among HIV-Positive Patients in Southwestern Pennsylvania](#), PRHI Readmission Brief, Update. Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Kanel KT, Elster S and Vrbin C. 2011. [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease](#). PRHI Readmission Brief. Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Elster S, Vicaro L and Turner, J. 2011. [PRHI Readmission Reduction Guide: A Manual for Preventing Hospitalizations](#). Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Kanel K, Elster S and Vrbin C. 2010. [Patterns of Hospital Admission and Readmission Among HIV-positive Patients in Southwestern Pennsylvania](#). PRHI Readmission Briefs. Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Kanel K, Elster S and Vrbin C. 2010. [Overview of Six Target Chronic Diseases](#). PRHI Readmission Briefs. Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Elster S, Habib J and Sabah Y. 2010. [*Developing the Concept and Practice of Ongoing Outcome Measurement in Service Systems*](#). State of Israel Ministry of Social Affairs and Social Services and the Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute.

Feinstein K, Elster S and Rosenblum S. 2009. [*The Role of Regional Health Improvement Collaboratives in Health Policy, USA*](#). Improving Health and Health Care: Who is Responsible? Who is Accountable? Proceedings of the 4th International Jerusalem Conference on Health Policy, edited by Rosen B, Israeli A and Shortell S. The Israel National Institute for Health Policy Research.

Editing, Literature Reviews, Case Studies & Blogs

Elster S. 2020. [*In Honor of the Nurses*](#). Times of Israel.

Elster S. 2020. [*COVID-19 reveals long-standing hospital underfunding*](#). Times of Israel.

Feinstein K, Elster S and Vrbin C (editors). 2012. [*Moving Beyond Repair: Perfecting Health Care*](#). Pittsburgh Regional Health Initiative.

Habib J, Elster S, Katz E and Bienenfeld D. 2003. [*The Social and Economic Situation in Countries of the FSU*](#). Case Studies of Ukraine, Russia & Moldova: Highlights of the International Literature and Source Documents. Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute.

Elster S (editor). 2004. *Responding to the Crisis of Poverty and Food Insecurity in Israel: The Role of World Jewry*. World Council of Jewish Communal Services, Proceedings of 9th Annual Seminar in Jerusalem. Myers-JDC-Brookdale Institute.

Education

Doctor of Philosophy in Public Policy Analysis & Social and Decision Science, The Heinz School, Carnegie-Mellon University, 1992.

Bachelor of Arts, *Magna cum Laude*, International Relations, James Madison College, Michigan State University, 1975.