

Research and Education

2021 Institute Highlights



Asking a different question

HealthPartners' mission is to improve health and well-being in partnership with our patients, members and community. In our efforts to make meaningful progress to achieve this mission, we can ask, What will it take to get people to behave in ways that will improve health and well-being? However, this question would yield an incomplete picture of our opportunities to influence change. As a health system and community, we should ask a fundamentally different question: How can we change the environment within which people are most likely to be successful at improving their health and well-being?

This report presents examples of research and education across HealthPartners that appreciate the second question. Creating simulated environments to explore how to best address racism. Intentional efforts to ensure clinical research trials are equitable, inclusive and accessible to all. Ensuring that primary care teams can easily identify the most important care steps for a patient to reduce their health risks by embedding shared decision making tools into the electronic medical record. Providing medical residency programs that serve rural populations. These are but

a few examples from our portfolio of initiatives that support system-wide efforts to advance our mission.

When we extend our mission beyond health into the realm of well-being, we must go way beyond what it means to provide best medical care for physical and mental ailments. The conditions that give rise to improvements in health and well-being recognize the contexts in which people live their lives—the physical, emotional, social, behavioral, and economic environments. This year's Highlights provides a glimpse into how we address this context. If nothing else, we have learned these efforts involve highly complex systems, need to include multiple stakeholders, must be co-created with community partners, and represent merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Clearly, much work remains.

We hope you enjoy this update.

Nico Pronk, PhD
President, HealthPartners Institute
Chief Science Officer, HealthPartners

Jen Augustson
Vice President

A colleague's experience with racism leads to change

As an emergency room technician at Regions Hospital, Sumaya Noor enjoyed caring for patients and spending time with her colleagues. But in her role, Noor experienced racism. One moment stands out for her, and it has sparked a program to help others respond to racism in the workplace.

"A patient said racial slurs to me while colleagues were in the room," Noor recalls. "In the moment, nobody knew what to say or do. I didn't feel supported, and that hurt me." Her willingness to share this experience led to one of the most requested simulation trainings.

The simulation involves a nurse and a patient (in this case, a mannequin) who makes racist remarks. Then, participants decide what to do next. Word about the impact of this training has spread. More than 40 team members participated in 2021, giving the program high marks for providing a safe and effective space to understand and practice anti-racism.

Noor's hope for the program she helped launch is that employees will be better equipped to support their colleagues of color. She says, "There are many ways to step in when you witness racism or bias impacting your colleagues but being silent is not one of them."



Pictured, left to right: Tina Kvalheim, Professional Nursing Practice specialist, Sumaya Noor and Ryan Aga, director, Clinical Simulation.

We welcomed more than 8,700 colleagues in immersive and educational experiences last year.
More diversity and inclusion training is in the works.

Making clinical trials more equitable

Research opportunities, including clinical trials that incorporate the newest cancer treatments, offer patients another treatment option and lead to discoveries that can improve care. But research that isn't accessible to everyone can mean missed opportunities for patients and science.

It's critical that all studies are equitable and accessible to the diverse communities we serve. That's why we joined a project led by the American Society of Clinical Oncology and the Association of Community Cancer Centers. We were one of 75 research sites invited to participate in implicit bias training aimed at reducing barriers to clinical research opportunities. We also piloted a self-assessment tool intended to improve policies, procedures and programs that may inadvertently hinder participation in trials. The tools and knowledge gained are helping us ensure studies are equitable and inclusive to all.



Leading the way in COVID-19 vaccine research

The Institute has been active in COVID-19 vaccine research on several fronts, from participating in a vaccine trial to examining the safety and effectiveness of mRNA vaccines in various populations. Our research provided critical answers that helped scientists and communities navigate the pandemic.

- We were the only site in Minnesota to participate in the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine trial. HealthPartners was one of the highest enrolling sites in the U.S. and one of the most diverse with 36 percent of participants from communities of color.
- A study of 6.2 million patients showed that mRNA vaccines are safe, providing reassurance to help overcome vaccine hesitancy in the community.
- A study of 105,000 patients showed that COVID-19 mRNA vaccines were not linked to an increased rate of miscarriages. The study included HealthPartners and eight other large health systems that make up the Vaccine Safety Datalink.
- We co-authored two studies on the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccines against the Delta variant. The studies found the vaccines remained effective against hospitalizations and emergency and urgent care encounters from the Delta variant.
- Through Centers for Disease Control and Prevention studies, we found that COVID-19 vaccines don't cause preterm birth or small-for-gestational birth. And that a third dose of COVID-19 mRNA vaccine significantly restores waning immunity and is highly effective at preventing severe illness caused by both the Delta and Omicron variants in adults.

New data on heart disease risk and mental illness

On average, people with serious mental illness (SMI) die 10 to 20 years earlier than the general population, with heart disease the leading cause of death. It's this disparity that prompted Institute researchers to lead studies on heart disease risk as well as the impact of clinical information for patients living with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, or schizoaffective disorder. Analysis showed risk of developing heart disease was significantly higher for patients with SMI. A separate study showed that a shared decision-making tool called the Cardiovascular Wizard, which helps clinicians identify a patient's biggest opportunities to improve their heart health, lowered modifiable risk of heart disease by 4% over 12 months. Results were published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association (JAHA)* and *JAMA Network Open*.

"For the general population, we'll start to monitor heart disease risk factors more closely at around 40 years old. But this is likely too late for our patients with SMI, who die earlier than their peers without SMI."

Rebecca Rossom, MD, senior research investigator

A best-in-class learning environment

New strategic partnerships are being formed between HealthPartners and select Advanced Practice Clinician (APC) schools. Our Office of Health Professional Education is developing these strategic partnerships, cohorting fewer students over a longer rotation period, facilitating recruitment, and streamlining administrative support. Students train at dedicated clinical sites where preceptors have the passion, skills and time to train among inter-professional teams using best practices. APC school partners are aligned with HealthPartners' values, workforce needs and commitment to provide high-quality and equitable care to our patients and community. The goal is to design a sustainable and effective education model that can be replicated in other health professions.



Our Advanced Practice Clinician (APC) Fellowship programs continue to grow. We will welcome our first Orthopedics APC Fellow and first Cardiology APC Fellow in 2022, bringing our total number of programs to six. Through the fellowships, we ensure high-quality care for patients while providing support and development for new clinicians. A win-win as nearly 90% of our program graduates have become HealthPartners clinicians — continuing to care for our patients and communities.

Wisconsin doctors move to next phase of rural residency program

In 2021, two new doctors in the HealthPartners Western Wisconsin Rural Family Medicine Residency experienced the rural side of their three-year program.

Adam Strohschein, MD, and Dwijesh Sheth, MD, are splitting their time between Amery Hospital & Clinic and Westfields Hospital & Clinic to learn about practicing medicine in rural settings. They each spent their first year in the Twin Cities at Methodist Hospital, where they were exposed to high volumes of patients, many of whom required complex care.

The rural residency program's experienced mentors teach residents the unique skills needed for building a sustainable small-town family practice. In 2021, the program also had its first graduate, Katie Cress, DO.

The Office of Health Professional Education supports the clinical learning environment at HealthPartners by training 60+ student learner types with 125 school partnerships.

First-of-its-kind project integrates CGM data into electronic health records

Continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) gives patients real-time blood glucose data that allows them to more accurately manage their diabetes. But there are many CGM devices on the market. And the data they provide hasn't always been easily accessible to care teams who help interpret the ups and downs of patients' blood glucose — until now.

Our International Diabetes Center and HealthPartners recently partnered with CGM manufacturer Abbott Diabetes Care on a first-of-its-kind project that integrates patients' CGM data into their electronic health record (EHR). Now, clinicians can easily see a patient's CGM data alongside their health history and medical information.

We now hope to work with other CGM device makers so all patients using CGM can have their data integrated into the EHR in a standard way. This new model should also help guide other health care systems to do the same.

COVID-19 clinical trials have impact on lives and hospital capacity

Since the first case of COVID-19 was identified in Minnesota, we used our research and education expertise to help curb the worst effects of the pandemic. Our Critical Care Research Center has been involved in several clinical trials for COVID-19 therapies, a key area of study given the few treatments available. While this work is ongoing with final analyses in-progress, preliminary data from the COVID-19 trials we conducted show tangible impact on patients' lives and hospital capacity.

Using these preliminary results, we were able to estimate that patients who received study medications were in the hospital 382 fewer days than patients who did not receive study meds. Reducing length of stay helped patients get home sooner,

created more capacity for other in-need patients, and saved an estimated \$800,000 in hospital expenses, based on average costs for in-patient COVID care. Patients receiving study medications also spent less time (73 fewer days) in an intensive care unit (ICU). This is a significant benefit for critically ill patients as well as those searching for an ICU bed during a shortage caused by COVID-19 surges. And the reduction in ICU days saved an estimated \$200,000.

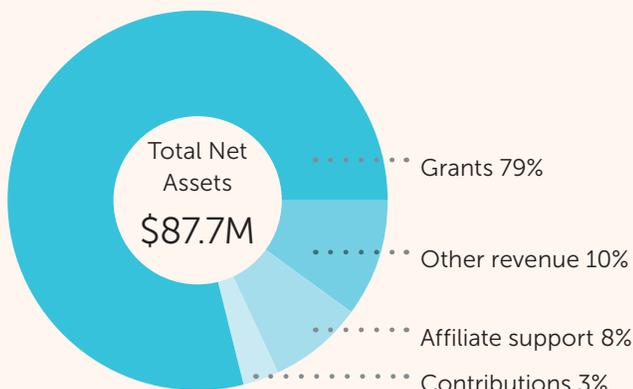
We're proud that this research is helping our patients, members and community, while at the same time generating knowledge that will improve treatment for patients hospitalized with COVID-19 around the world.

FINANCIALS 2021

Operating Revenue
\$43.5M

Operating Expenses
\$41.7M

Operating Revenue Sources



99% of our net assets are unrestricted

Mission: To improve health and well-being in partnership with our members, patients and community.

Vision: Health as it could be, affordability as it must be, through relationships built on trust.

Visit our website to learn more about the Institute.

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