

# The benefits of cross-sector collaboration on health outcomes

## ROI associated with addressing social determinants of health



### Client profile

Reading Hospital is a 714-bed acute care hospital in Berks County, Pennsylvania and encompasses many top-tier specialty care centers. It is the flagship hospital of Tower Health, the largest hospital system in the area. With more than 1,000 physicians, specialists, and advanced practice providers, Reading Hospital has been recognized for its quality outcomes and clinical expertise across services lines. It is listed as one of America's 100 Best Hospitals for four consecutive years and received a 5-Star Rating from CMS two years in a row.

**Solution in use:** WellSky® Social Care Coordination

In 2017, Reading Hospital found itself facing a unique opportunity. The Berks County, Pennsylvania-based hospital knew that addressing social determinants of health — conditions impacted by the places people live, learn, work and play that can affect health outcomes — was a priority, but they needed funding to implement the infrastructure necessary to ensure success. Fortunately, Reading Hospital was awarded \$4.5 million from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to implement the Accountable Health Communities (AHC) model. The goal of this program is to assess whether systematically identifying and addressing the health-related social needs of local Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries would impact their total healthcare costs and inpatient and outpatient healthcare utilization.

## The challenge, however, was two-fold

How could Reading Hospital survey patients to identify social determinants of health and connect disparate social services to improve care?

How could Reading Hospital demonstrate measurable ROI for the initiative?

Fortunately, with the right partner, the hospital was able to do both.

### Finding the perfect partnership with WellSky

To identify and address patients' social determinants of health (SDoH), Reading Hospital had to find a way to leverage their clinical and community relationships to screen and refer patients to social services within Berks County, and track those referrals over time.

"We needed a partner who had systems in place that were user-friendly, scalable, and adaptable," said Desha Dickson, Associate Vice President for Community Wellness at Reading Hospital. "We also needed a system that could integrate with our electronic health record (EHR) system and close the loop on referrals."

"Closing the loop" meant Reading Hospital needed a way to verify patients' needs were met after providing referrals —and if not, the reason why. WellSky Social Care Coordination, Dickson noted, enabled them to do this seamlessly.

"When you ask patients personal questions about things like food security or housing, you need to be prepared to help them," Dickson said. "There's nothing worse than a patient saying they don't have enough food to get through the month and not being equipped to provide assistance. Fortunately, WellSky Social Care Coordination empowers us to deliver that assistance in real-time."

### Crafting a community of care

The Community Wellness Team at Reading Hospital didn't just leverage the WellSky Social Care Coordination platform. In fact, a significant part of the value they received came from the care coordination that the WellSky solution enabled between their local community of organizations.

That's because Reading Hospital was able to use WellSky Social Care Coordination with local organizations like New Journey Community Outreach, Berks Encore, and Centro Hispano, which provide critical services in the Berks County area. Now, they're all connected via a referral-sharing ecosystem called the Community Connection Project, known locally as "the consortium."

"We were looking for a way not just to identify social determinants of health, but also to connect our patients to the right resources," Dickson said. "Having a consortium that meets frequently allows us to engage with one another in different ways, discuss hot topics, and generate solutions."

But the consortium isn't just valuable for Reading Hospital — it's a critical asset for the organizations involved, as well.

"When we were invited to become part of the consortium, it was a wonderful opportunity to let other social service agencies in the community know who we are and what we do," said Sue Krall, Executive Director, New Journey Community Outreach.



"We knew what we were doing was good," added LuAnn Oatman, president and CEO of Berks Encore. "And we knew we were making an impact—but we needed the healthcare community to connect with us and say, 'Let's figure out a way to work together.'" This partnership, Oatman noted, has enabled her organization to be a part of a larger healthcare and social service ecosystem—a level of connection that simply wasn't available before.

"Through the consortium, we're able to talk to organizations one on one, understand their services, and then share that information with our patients,"

said Tanieka Mason, Data Manager at Reading Hospital. Mason stressed the value of being able to seamlessly connect patients to multiple service providers to improve community health.

"We're only as strong as the team we have around us," Mike Toledo, CEO of Centro Hispano, added. "And when we can partner with anchor organizations like Reading Hospital, we can really have a positive impact, not just on the health of the individual clients we serve, but on the health of the entire population, which is paramount."

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*Sue Krall, Executive Director for New Journey Community Church*



## Real-world impact with real-world ROI

The initial results of this partnership and the consortium's work are indeed promising. In just one year, unnecessary emergency department visits declined by 15% for Medicare and Medicaid patients. According to preliminary estimates, his intervention reduced the cost of unnecessary visits by as much as \$1 million — a 15% decrease in just one year.\*\*

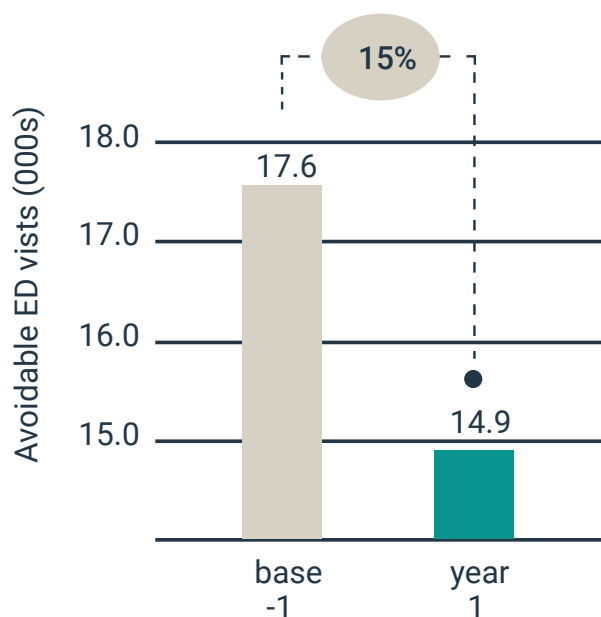
While it's too early to draw concrete conclusions, if sustained over time, these findings suggest that this partnership will make a significant positive impact on improving the quality of care while reducing costs.

Patients, too, are seeing measurable results on their health and overall well-being. One patient, for example, who was suffering from COPD and Type 2 Diabetes, as well as a history of substance use, had nine hospital encounters between 2018 and 2019. The estimated costs of those visits was just over \$82,000. In addition, the patient reported being

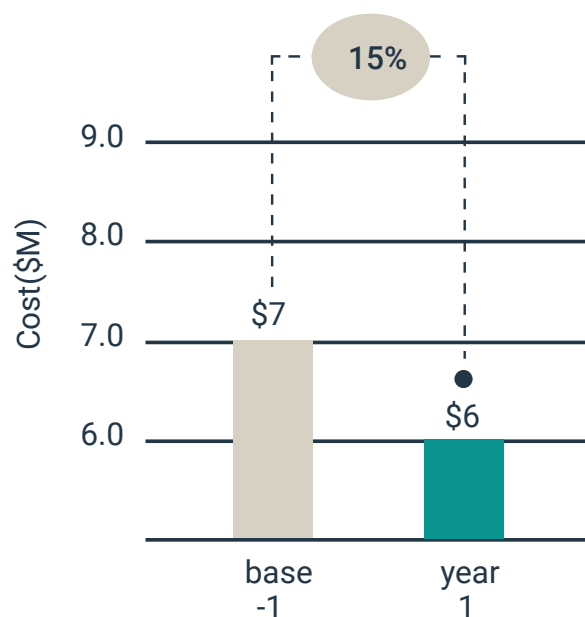
food-insecure and lacked both adequate housing and transportation. After receiving assistance from a community navigator, who helps patients understand, navigate, and access community and social services, the patient was rescreened on October 1, 2019. At that point, the patient reported having access to transportation, a reliable source of food, and a reasonable place to live — thanks to the navigator's assistance, the consortium, and timely intervention.

"Previously, when we worked with our clients, we helped them with what their needs were at that particular moment," said Toledo. "But with WellSky Social Care Coordination, we can take a more holistic and lasting approach. We look at all the needs the consumer has, and we're able to help them with all of their needs, versus them having to come back multiple times to address multiple needs."

### Medicaid and Medicare ED reduction



### Total ED cost reduction



Baseline-1: May 1, 2017 to April 30, 2018 - AHC Model Planning Year

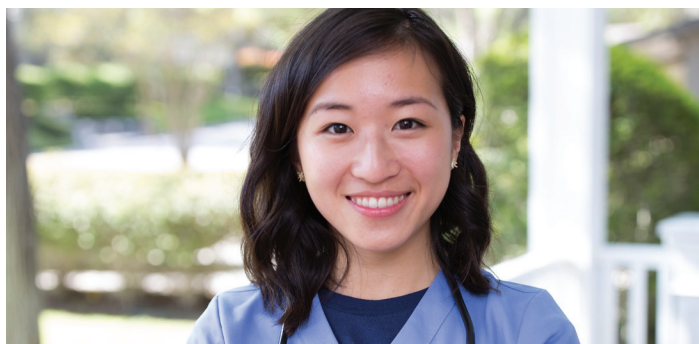
Year 1: May 1, 2018 to April 30, 2019 - AHC Model Implementation and Go-Live

\*\*The research presented here was conducted by the awardee. Findings may not be consistent with or confirmed by the findings of the independent evaluation contractor. Results are based on Reading Hospital's interpretation of internal metrics and are not drawn from the AHC data alone.

## Looking forward together

While the CMS project is finite, the possibilities for Reading Hospital — and the consortium they created along the way — are endless.

“I’d like to see WellSky Social Care Coordination become our go-to resource for connecting patients to social services across the board,” Dickson said. “Together, we’ve been able to evaluate whether patients are getting better, and if not, why. We’ve got data at our fingertips and a community of partners who help us leverage it. We’re moving the needle on the health of our community and you can’t put a value on that.”



WellSky is a technology company leading the movement for intelligent, coordinated care. Our next-generation software, analytics, and services power better outcomes and lower costs for stakeholders across the health and community care continuum. In today’s value-based care environment, WellSky helps providers, payers, health systems, and community organizations solve tough challenges, improve collaboration for growth, harness the power of data analytics, and achieve better outcomes by further connecting clinical and social care. WellSky serves more than 20,000 client sites — including the largest hospital systems, blood banks, cell therapy labs, blood centers, home health and hospice franchises, post-acute providers, government agencies, and human services organizations. Informed by more than 40 years of providing software and expertise, WellSky anticipates clients’ needs and innovates relentlessly to ultimately help more people thrive.

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