



# Better Together: The Value of Scale

The many benefits multi-state health systems bring to their communities

AUGUST 2021



# Executive summary

Spanning seven states, the Providence family of organizations delivers the same high standard of excellence in every area we serve, from rural communities to large cities. **During more than 25 million patient visits each year, we are creating health for a better world and enabling our patients to find the care they need, closer to home.** Together, we are using our scale to relentlessly pioneer new and better ways to bring health, hope and healing to more people in need.

Our multi-state network shares medical innovations and best practices, administrative efficiencies and emergency support and advocates for patient-centered policies while giving back to the many diverse communities we serve. The full value of scale often is demonstrated over time, but many shorter-term benefits are already available to patients. Today, our size enables us to meaningfully invest in medical research, including more than **1,400 active clinical studies**; develop new ways to deliver care, such as our Maternal Early Warning Trigger System; partner with like-minded community-based organizations to invest **\$1.7 billion** in community benefit in 2020; and protect rural health care access at our **10 critical access rural hospitals**.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought into sharp focus the strengths that the Providence system offers to the communities we serve. After treating the first confirmed COVID-19 patient in the U.S., we were able to use our scale and scope to quickly ramp up and deploy resources in response to this unprecedented public health emergency. Some highlights include:

- Updating our COVID-19 screening protocols in Epic, our electronic medical record, across the health system **within 24 hours of admitting the first confirmed COVID-19 patient**.
- Dramatically expanding telehealth services from an average of 50 visits per day to a peak of more than 12,000 per day, totaling **more than 1.7 million virtual visits in 2020**. Patients continue to value this service, with **530,000 telehealth visits** during the first quarter of 2021.
- Operating some of the largest clinical trials in the country for drug therapies, including **Remdesivir** and antibody testing.
- Advocacy to secure regulatory flexibility, enabling us to serve where needs were greatest.
- Leveraging technology to support our patients and inform the public with a coronavirus consumer awareness hub, assessment and triage chatbot and urgent virtual visit platform.
- Providing **behavioral health** and **child care support** for our caregivers.
- Supporting mass and targeted local vaccination efforts across the Western U.S., **administering more than 900,000 doses to date**, with special emphasis on vulnerable groups.

The pandemic has changed life as we know it, but the entire Providence family of organizations continues to invest in the future of health. **We are transforming health care to help people live their healthiest lives, and make our services more convenient, accessible and affordable.** Longer term benefits of scale are starting to emerge, for example from our investments in mental health, and from our population health approach to Medicare participation that is delivering consistent savings and quality scores. Our goal is a continuum of care with closely aligned partners that is focused on compassionate, value-based care for all.



# Being big and small at the same time

Being a big system means all organizations that are part of the Providence family can do good at scale and being small means we understand unique neighborhoods.

**The human connection matters most:** Working at the intersection of innovation and compassion, the organizations that make up the Providence system strive to be big and small at the same time. Large enough to do good at scale – including emergency response, increasing access to care, strengthening clinical and mental health care and reducing fragmentation. Small enough to understand each unique community and neighborhood – including culturally and racially diverse communities, rural care needs and community benefit investments.

## **Our 120,000 caregivers (all employees)**

### **across the system are at the heart of**

**our care experience** because the human connection will always matter most. We care deeply about the many groups we serve who are vulnerable or marginalized in some way and recognize the social factors that contribute to health.





# Responding to the pandemic emergency

**Rapid updates and emergency guidance at scale:** While emergencies of varying scales are constantly occurring across our nation, there has not been a public health emergency like the COVID-19 pandemic in a century. In January 2020, Providence Regional Medical Center–Everett located in Washington state admitted and treated the first confirmed COVID-19 patient in the country, and from that moment on, every organization across the Providence system knew we had to work together like never before. Within 24 hours of that admission, COVID-19 protocols were updated in EPIC, our electronic medical record, providing vital guidance to every organization across the system’s **seven states, including 52 hospitals and 1,000 clinics**. We continue to rapidly disseminate current information across our network, ensuring all of our clinicians have the best available guidance for treatment plans.

## **Dramatically expanding telehealth services:**

As the impact of the pandemic grew, organizations across the system were uniquely prepared to keep our patients and caregivers safe. We quickly ramped up our telehealth services, going from an average of 50 visits per day to a peak of more than **12,000 per day**, thanks to regulatory and payer flexibility granted for the pandemic. In total, clinicians conducted more than 1.7 million virtual sessions in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

When hospitals on the frontlines of COVID-19 – our own and others – were overwhelmed, we expanded our electronic intensive care unit capabilities. Our clinicians [remotely monitored thousands of patients](#) who were safely able to recuperate at home under quarantine.

The Providence family of organizations also supported another health system on the front lines of the COVID-19 response. In a matter of days, tele-intensivists and tele-hospitalists were working directly with its clinical teams to care for and admit patients, helping to save lives and contain the spread of the virus.

**Supply chain solutions:** Early on in the pandemic, escalating rates of COVID-19 cases required massive increases in medical supplies and personal protective equipment. Anticipating that shortages were imminent, our supply chain management team put all hands on deck. Using collective purchasing strategies and advanced clinical analytics, the team created a systemwide hub from which all our hospitals could order directly. The centralized system helped control costs and forecast where specific supplies would be needed, ensuring vital PPE could be rapidly deployed to hospitals. The hub, combined with temporary warehouses and use of third-party logistics vendors for supply delivery, created a robust and sophisticated system that helped protect the health and safety of our caregivers and patients.

Clinicians across the system conducted more than **1.7 million virtual sessions in 2020**.



On the frontlines of COVID-19, our clinicians remotely monitored thousands of patients who were safely able to recuperate at home.

The Providence family of organizations provided emergency benefits, including a behavioral health concierge service **at no cost** for **220,000** caregivers and dependents.

<sup>1</sup> Out of a total 1.7 million telehealth visits in 2020, nearly 1.4 million were ambulatory care patient visits.

**Caring for caregivers:** It was paramount to every organization across the system to support not only the safety but the mental health and well-being of the dedicated caregivers responding to the pandemic. Whether in direct clinical care or behind the scenes supporting providers, caregivers went above and beyond in ways no one could have imagined. **The Providence family of organizations provided emergency benefits, including a behavioral health concierge service at no cost for 220,000 caregivers and dependents**, with access to counselors offering flexible hours. Then, as many schools across the country transitioned to at-home learning systems, obtaining reliable child care rapidly became an unavoidable stressor for many in our workforce. In response, we began offering safe and alternative child care options.

**Using technology to support patients and communities:** Throughout the pandemic, our patients and communities needed support and reliable information to cope with the uncertainty and rapidly evolving conditions of the pandemic. Our teams quickly rolled out a [coronavirus consumer awareness hub](#), an assessment and triage chatbot known as Grace, that has to date answered questions from **384,000 people**, and an urgent virtual visit platform. Developed in partnership with Microsoft, **the chatbot design became the basis for the CDC's coronavirus assessment tool and has since been adopted by other U.S. providers, health authorities and providers worldwide.**<sup>2</sup> Then, our expert analytics team used artificial intelligence and natural language processing to develop a [COVID-19 Detection Map](#) that visually displays real-time case rates, informing communities of the current state of the pandemic in their neighborhoods.

**Lifesaving research:** The system's research network rapidly pursued innovative treatment pathways and cures for COVID-19. **We launched some of the largest clinical trials for COVID-19 drug therapies in the country**, including being **the first in the world to use Remdesivir** as a treatment option. Our scientists developed the Testing our Heroes immunity testing program to study the prevalence of COVID-19 antibodies among health care workers. Our hospitals also made landmark advancements, with one of our California hospitals being **the first on the West Coast to use the plasma of a COVID-19 survivor** as an experimental treatment against the virus. Our system is also conducting [genomics research](#) to understand why the virus affects some people more than others.

**Promoting and providing vaccinations:** **To date, organizations across the Providence system have administered more than 900,000 doses of the vaccine to caregivers, patients and those in our communities.** We used our scale to staff and support mass vaccination efforts in major Western cities and communities, including Seattle, Spokane, Portland, Medford and Orange County, Calif. To date, we continue to operate mobile and pop-up clinics with local partners to reach those who may be less able to travel to larger sites or are less confident about getting the vaccine. These include ethnically diverse community centers and places of worship. Clinical and administrative caregivers across our system have contributed **thousands of volunteer hours** to support vaccination outreach.

<sup>2</sup> Learn more [here](#).

The CDC and health authorities around the world have adopted chatbots based on the design of Grace, the Providence assessment and triage chatbot design.



# Preserving access to affordable care

**Maintaining access, especially in rural areas:** We are proud that our system's network of **52 hospitals** helps to preserve access to care for millions of people in the seven states we serve. The system's large footprint allows all of our organizations to dedicate resources where they are needed most to ensure fewer people go without care every year. We are steadfast in serving all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable, and we provide quality, compassionate care no matter the circumstances. This includes patients who live in isolated, rural areas of the states we serve.<sup>3</sup> **Our integrated hospital system includes 10 critical access facilities<sup>4</sup> in rural locations** that benefit from a shared EMR, clinical analytics, data registries, telehealth including tele-ICU, clinical institutes, a strong research network, training resources and coordinated administrative services.

**Telehealth meets many care needs:** In addition to emergency responses, our expansive telehealth network works to ensure patients have alternative care options that fit their lives and schedules. Increasingly, telehealth is helping to erase barriers to care, as patients no longer need to live near medical offices to get all the care they need. The telehealth care network includes: telestroke serving a total of 91 rural and urban hospitals across the Providence system and other health care systems; telehospitalists providing **more than 12,000 consultations** annually; tele-ICU serving **more than 8,000 patients**; telepsychiatry providing **9,000 consults**; and teleEEG, which is currently expanding.

**Driving down the cost of medications:** Another way our system's organizations are collectively focused on ensuring affordable care access is by working to reduce medication costs. In 2018, we joined with other large providers in the U.S. to launch [Civica Rx](#), a nonprofit generic drug company dedicated to ensuring affordable prices for consumers. To date, Civica Rx has given member hospitals and their patients reliable access to over 50 lifesaving medicines, including antibiotics and those used to fight COVID-19, which has lowered costs and increased supplies of essential medications.



**Advocating for the most vulnerable:** Multi-state nonprofit health systems, such as the Providence system, are strong advocates for patient-centered policy and standards that contribute to the health and well-being of our communities. We are committed to socially responsible decisions and to speak up and act when we see disparities. **The centerpiece of our advocacy agenda is the preservation and expansion of access to affordable care, especially for the most vulnerable among us.** This includes **sustaining and increasing coverage** for those who depend on Medicaid, protecting the [340B Drug Pricing Program](#) and advancing "[primary care for all](#)" coverage. We are also strong advocates for Medicare, increased mental health and substance use care and reducing provider shortages in rural and underserved communities.<sup>5</sup>

The centerpiece of our advocacy agenda is the **preservation and expansion of access to affordable care**, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

<sup>3</sup> About 57 million Americans depend on rural hospitals. During the past decade, more than 130 rural hospitals across the U.S. have closed, and almost half of those remaining have negative operating margins. Source: [American Hospital Association](#)

<sup>4</sup> Critical access hospitals are small, with no more than 25 inpatient beds: [Critical Access Hospitals | CMS](#)

<sup>5</sup> See our full advocacy agenda at [www.providence.org/advocacy](http://www.providence.org/advocacy).

# Scaling clinical strengths for patients

**Connected care based on best practices:** One of the important benefits of scale is the ability to ensure a connected patient experience across the care continuum. From birth through the golden years, the Providence family of organizations provides patients with the **compassionate, quality care they need at every stage of life**. Our integrated system allows us to quickly scale proven ideas over a large geographic area in both acute and non-acute settings. As our health care experts develop best clinical and safety practices, we can standardize these across our footprint to improve patient outcomes. No matter where patients live, be it rural Alaska or metropolitan Los Angeles, they are receiving consistent, [whole person care](#) administered by clinicians across the **seven states** the system serves.

**Improving outcomes for patients:** We are very proud of the strides made by our care experts to improve maternal health. We have reversed the alarming trend of mothers dying during delivery by nearly eliminating preventable maternal mortality across our system. Our Women and Children's Institute developed a standardized Maternal Early Warning Trigger System for obstetrics that has improved our physicians' and nurses' ability to identify and treat hypertension, including lowering readmissions. In addition, **we reduced the number of prescribed opioids to delivering mothers at discharge by 98% systemwide to help prevent persistent use, opioid dependency or overuse**. As of 2020, 95.5% of mothers were discharged with no opioids, and since 2017, coordinated efforts resulted in 20,000 fewer mothers receiving opioid prescriptions. By taking a similar approach and sharing and applying our best clinical practices in other areas of care, we've seen dramatic reductions in hospital-acquired infections and made significant improvements in sepsis care.

**Valued-based models increase care quality:** Value-based care models help all the Providence family of organizations enhance the patient experience, [improve the health of individuals and populations](#) and reduce the costs of health care. **Emphasizing quality of care over quantity of care, our providers focus on proactive, preventive care, ultimately reducing patient cost** through the prevention of emergency visits, reduction in readmissions and duplicative testing and elimination of unnecessary administrative procedures. We have seen good results in our Medicare participation. During the past three years, we have consistently contributed savings to Medicare, **ranking within the top 20** of all such initiatives across the country, while our quality scores have been among the highest in our region, **consistently scoring over 90%**.<sup>6</sup> Programs such as these take time to prove their worth, but they can deliver tremendous patient outcomes and are cost-efficient in the long-term.

**Bench to bedside research:** The [Providence Research Network](#) is an integrated system of scientists, caregivers and scholars aligned across regions and services working together to improve treatments for disease and disability to help patients to live longer, healthier lives. With more than 50 locations across seven states, the Providence Research Network is one of the largest in the country. Our research profile is comparable to medical school portfolios, including about 1,450 active clinical studies, 700 research investigators and more than 10,000 patients enrolled in clinical trials to date. A total of **145 studies** are related to COVID-19, including treatment paths and vaccines. **The network's size, breadth and patient population allow us to create efficiencies for our partners with clinical trials, including the pursuit of health equity.** Together, we embed scientific breakthroughs directly into care practice.

## Our research profile includes:

- **1,450 active clinical studies**
- **700 investigators**
- **> 10,000 patients enrolled in clinical trials to date**

<sup>6</sup>Our organization has a long-term commitment to improving care delivery by working closely with CMS and CMMI to test and develop scalable programs.



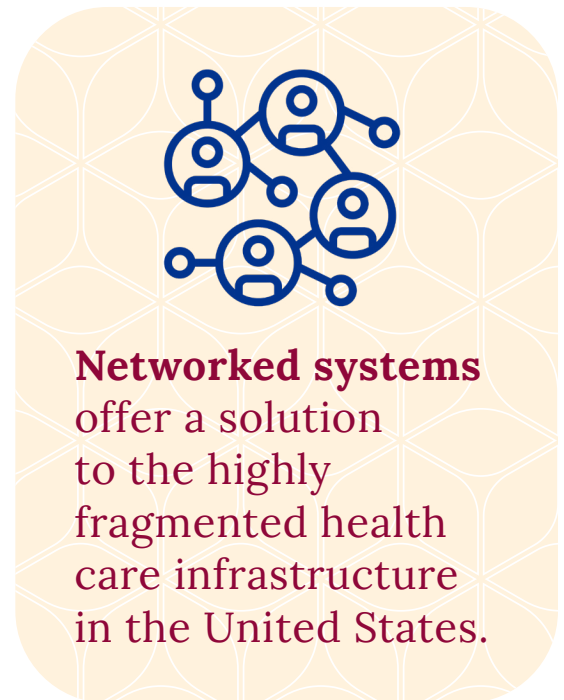
**Providence Clinical Institutes:** The multi-state [Providence Clinical Institutes](#) are part of our research network and also play a key role in ensuring patients have access to exceptional, leading-edge clinical outcomes based on the latest in scientific developments and data. Our institute model for specialty care is a virtual network that links all of our care locations, solving gaps in continuity of care for our patients and creating a connected experience for them and their families. Clinicians have timely access to the latest research and newest treatments enabling them to personalize care for each patient. The institutes have provided life-saving research, such as the Providence Neuroscience Institute's findings on stroke care, which helped us **treat 75% of our patients in 2020 in less than 45 minutes, exceeding the 2020 Stroke Executive Metric.** As part of our work as a pioneering [Age Friendly Health System](#), the institute has also launched a Center for Healthy Aging to help clinicians care for vulnerable older adults experiencing cognitive decline.



## A solution to fragmented health care

### **Integrated systems reduce fragmentation and frustration:**

High costs and unnecessary complexity reduce patient access and decrease patient satisfaction. Fragmentation has become a major problem, with one poll [finding](#) that nearly **50% of respondents** said that “every step of the health process is a chore” and that they want a “fully connected digital experience” and better clarity on costs. Care fragmentation can also be risky and costly for patients, as the Commonwealth Fund [explains](#). Networked systems offer a solution to the highly fragmented health care infrastructure in the U.S. For example, the Providence system organized our shared administrative services; standardized best-practice care protocols through a shared EMR; applied population health strategies with value-based care models; and we are digitizing access to care including linking multiple disciplines of care in all the communities we serve. All of the hospitals that are part of the Providence system also offer a price cost estimator, enabling anyone to get a personalized estimate for **300 procedures** based on their coverage and facility preference.



**Networked systems offer a solution to the highly fragmented health care infrastructure in the United States.**

**Connecting and expanding mental health care:** Mental health is one of the most fragmented and overtaxed areas of care in the U.S. That is why we established Well Being Trust, a foundation focused on the mental health and well-being of the nation. Outlined in its [2020 annual report](#), the trust is tirelessly responding to the soaring rates of mental health and addiction challenges in our country. **The Providence family of organizations is also taking action. Together, we developed a network of psychiatrists and social workers to expand behavioral health services to 36 locations that previously did not have access, including**



# The Providence family of organizations has expanded its behavioral health network to **36 locations** that previously did not have access.

**rural communities.** We're also investing in new behavioral health facilities, such as a [24-bed unit in Everett, Wash.](#), and a [94-bed unit in Orange, Calif.](#), which is part of the Be Well OC community partnership. Our [Work2BWell](#) campaign is destigmatizing mental health, amplifying young voices for mental health, and offering free resources to teens, parents and families. Reaching out to online audiences, we're partnering with Facebook, Instagram and TikTok to share clinically vetted mental health content.



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**Population health supports vulnerable patients:** The [majority](#) of those covered by Medicaid, the single largest insurance coverage provider in the country, are low-income children, adults, seniors and those with disabilities. Even with this vital insurance coverage, many people covered by Medicaid [struggle to overcome barriers to care](#), leaving them vulnerable to poor health. The system's [population health approach](#) has made real progress for this patient group in just a few short years. Since 2017, we've seen a reduction in avoidable emergency department visits from Medicaid-covered patients, **down from 311 avoidable visits per 1,000 unique visits to 235**. In addition, several regions that are part of Providence's system have reported a **decrease in total long length of stay** cases among certain patient groups from 2019 to 2020. These positive milestones are a direct result of the Providence family of organizations' care strategies and collaborations with post-acute facilities, adult family homes and other partners that help patients find safe locations to continue their healing journey.

### **Digital innovation reduces fragmentation, increases access:**

The Digital Innovation Group identifies the biggest problems in health care that can be addressed through a digital solution. DIG finds ways to provide **accessible, equitable health care** to the communities we serve using digital technology. Our approach entails small-batch testing, consumer feedback and rapid adoption of proven new technologies, whether from innovative companies or products designed by our team. The Digital Innovation Group has built several health-related businesses including Xealth and Circle (now [Wildflower Health](#)). We always keep consumers at the center of our work and often collaborate with other health systems to build a better health care future for all. [Visit our digital resource center.](#)



# Being a catalyst for positive change

Through **community benefit investment** – totaling more than **\$1.74 billion** in 2020 – we continue to live our Mission, working with community partners to identify and respond to the greatest needs.

**Investing in the foundations of health:** Our [founding Sisters](#) were called to serve their communities by providing health care and education services to all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. Their dedicated work laid the foundation for our collective vision of health for a better world. **Through community benefit investment – totaling more than \$1.7 billion in 2020 – we continue to live our Mission, working with community partners to identify and respond to the greatest needs.** Our focus areas extend to [food insecurity](#), including **\$1 million in donations to food banks**; [safe and affordable housing](#), including funding housing solutions and our own supportive housing program for seniors and those with disabilities, housing about **1,000 residents**; and [education](#), including support for Mental Health First Aid training.

**Health equity is an urgent priority:** As a large system, the Providence family of organizations has access to the resources needed to be a catalyst for positive change at scale. This is vitally important in reducing health disparities. The pandemic has amplified systemic health inequities that prevent many minority communities from having an equal chance to achieve health. During the next five years, the Providence family of organizations [will invest \\$50 million](#) to improve health equity in our communities. In addition to COVID-19 prevention and education, we are committed to listening to and working closely with many local partners to address key discrepancies in health conditions, such as hypertension in the Black community and access to primary care and screenings for Asian Pacific Islander and Latinx communities. In addition, as part of our broad commitment to [reduce economic, racial and environmental disparities](#), we increased our investment in a [supplier diversity program](#) that prioritizes women- and minority-owned businesses.

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**Innovating for the future:** Meeting the needs of today must be paired with planning for tomorrow's health. The St. Joseph Community Partnership Fund invested **\$1 million through grants and technical assistance** for a California program that [engages residents](#) in **11 communities** so they can respond to health issues in their neighborhoods. The fund also invested in a [Community Recovery and Resilience Initiative](#) to help communities rebound from the pandemic. Staffing for rural hospitals can be challenging, so Providence St. Joseph's Hospital in eastern Washington created its own [training program for certified nursing assistants, free for caregivers](#). Tuition reimbursement is available for program graduates who want to continue their education. In another area, the [University of Providence](#) is working to [meet the demand](#) for infection prevention specialists and epidemiologists.

**Caring for our environment:** The Providence family of organizations strives to be good stewards of our earth's resources because individual health is impossible if we do not have a healthy planet. In 2020, we supported the [Washington State Clean Building Act](#) and national legislation to address the [Paris Agreement on Climate](#), renewable energy and climate resilience and launched our [WE ACT scorecard](#). We are committed

to becoming [carbon negative by 2030](#). Many of our hospitals are working to improve their local environments by cutting greenhouse gas emissions and increasing recycling efforts, and best practices are scaled across our network. For example, by using a different anesthetic agent, Providence Portland Medical Center in Oregon **cut greenhouse gas emissions by 1,100 metric tons** of carbon dioxide equivalent.<sup>8</sup> This initiative has expanded to involve multiple hospitals that are part of the Providence family in **seven states**, along with other leading health systems.<sup>9</sup>

The Providence system is committed to becoming **carbon negative by 2030**.

<sup>8</sup> 1,100 metric tons would have the same environmental impact as driving 1.2 million miles in a Hummer. In addition to the environmental benefits, this change has realized savings of nearly \$2 million to date.

<sup>9</sup> Legacy Health, Salem Health and Kaiser Permanente have all scaled our approach with similar results.



Providence is a national, not-for-profit Catholic health system comprising a diverse family of organizations animated by our belief that health is a human right. As a mission-driven organization we are steadfast in serving all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable. With 52 hospitals, 1,085 physician clinics, senior services, supportive housing and many other health and educational services, our health system and partners serve communities across Alaska, California, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas and Washington, with system offices in Renton, Wash., and Irvine, Calif. Learn about our vision of health for a better world at [providence.org](#).

#### OUR MISSION

As expressions of God's healing love, witnessed through the ministry of Jesus, we are steadfast in serving all, especially those who are poor and vulnerable.

#### OUR VISION

Health for a Better World.

#### OUR CORE VALUES

Compassion, Dignity, Justice, Excellence, Integrity.

[providence.org](#)

We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability in our health programs and activities.

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