

# Embracing and Accelerating Healthcare Change Amidst COVID-19

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In the past few months, COVID-19 has turned the world upside down, particularly in healthcare. While there is still much uncertainty around the virus, the long-term imperative to transform the health system remains critical.

We have known the issues that plague our healthcare delivery system and for the last decade, if not longer, we have struggled to make significant progress. We have tried to become more patient-friendly, embrace value-based care delivery, and focus on population health. These key strategies were important before COVID-19 and continue to be the keys to success in the future. What could be different is whether we can seize this moment to accelerate meaningful change.

## Key Healthcare Strategies

It has been recognized for some time that healthcare is not particularly **patient-friendly**. Whether it was asking patients to come to the doctor just to get test results or packed doctors schedules, there have long been efficiency and experience challenges. In the past few months, we have seen great benefits and efficiency gains for both patients and providers alike in a greater use of virtual care. However, the delivery business model had not yet allowed the necessary changes to innovate the patient journey and incorporate a greater use of virtual care.

**Value-based care delivery** has been a concept discussed for decades but its implementation has proven to be illusive. Healthcare delivery today is supported by a variable pricing model where a small number of commercially insured patients pay substantially more for primary elective services to support a delivery model to serve all payer types. Efforts to move away from this model have been very slow and difficult to implement.

The concept of **population health** not only makes sense on paper; it also does in practice. Looking at a group of people and segmenting them to determine

what services can benefit their health and then proactively reaching out to ensure they are cared for is an excellent clinical and business model. The need for “sick” care diminishes and the benefits are proven. However, this business model has not been able to be replicated or scaled throughout the country.

## COVID Is Accelerating Change

Despite the best intentions and strong evidence supporting the migration to consumer-centric, value-based care delivery and a focus on population health, there have been countless barriers to achieving the requisite systematic change necessary to reimagine the entire healthcare industry. Very few foresaw a pandemic being a booster rocket to the pace of change—and yet, in the past several months, we have seen numerous signs of rapid innovation.

We all are living with COVID-19 every day, and the delivery system has been forced to adapt. Rapidly, providers have had to reevaluate their entire business and delivery models. This crisis has forced a rate of change that was unimaginable. Necessity is the mother of innovation and there has been a surplus of need. Providers have embraced remote care and payment is now in place. Systems are reevaluating every aspect of operations in a way to reduce costs. New care delivery models are being implemented that are focused on the patient. While we have long seen health disparities persist, the pandemic has been a bright spotlight on the myriad ways in which social determinants of health shape outcomes and experience.

Uncertainty can be paralyzing; yet in the age of COVID, many organizations have quickly driven to action. As organizations move from the initial surge preparation and response to managing

## Key Board Takeaways

- Key strategies before COVID-19—such as increasing consumer-centric care, value-based care delivery, and population health efforts—remain relevant in the era of COVID-19. Ensure your organization is still pursuing these critical strategies and has not lost sight of them in the chaos of the pandemic.
- COVID-19 is a propellant that is accelerating change. Consider this an opportunity and look at new ways to improve the quality and access of care and reduce costs.
- Rapid change can create a lot of distractions—keep focused on long-term strategic priorities.
- Imagine a future that does not exist today. It is critical for leadership to have an innovative mindset as they consider forward-looking strategies for success.
- Remember that local market dynamics still rule the day.

in the age of COVID-19, the fundamentals still apply. Healthcare is very much a local service with dynamics that will continue to vary from one market to another. The payer dynamic may get even more complicated as they issue premium rebates for this year; yet they may raise rates for next year. Employers are already challenged to keep their businesses afloat and healthcare costs are going to take on a new urgency. Your market may be different and there may be more changes yet to come.

While no one knows with certainty what is going to happen in the future, it appears that COVID-19 has changed healthcare in a way that was unimaginable just months before. The opportunity to contain COVID-19 has long passed; it will be a factor that we will need to manage for months, if not years, ahead. As we think about the changes we are making today, they are not temporary measures but rather an acceleration of strategies we have been pursuing for years. This industry must say goodbye to incremental change. Hopefully this will be the enduring silver lining from this crisis.

*The Governance Institute thanks Brian Silverstein, M.D., Consulting Director, The Chartis Group, and Governance Institute Advisor, for contributing this article. He can be reached at [bsilverstein@chartis.com](mailto:bsilverstein@chartis.com).*

