A Partnership Model for Programmatic Learning Health Systems:
Lessons Learned from 91 Health System Collaborations over 8 years

Claire Allen, MPH; Emily Westbrook, MHA; and Paula Lozano, MD, MPH | Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute

ACT CENTER
Accelerating Care Transformation

Why we did this study

Partnership between research and health care delivery systems is a cornerstone of the Learning Health System (LHS) model — but limited literature explains effective collaboration in practice. To shed light on **what contributes to productive research–care delivery partnerships,** we examined the structure and functioning of the LHS Program at Kaiser Permanente (KP) Washington. This summary describes:

- Partnership strategies that support sustained collaboration
- Challenges that hinder successful partnerships
- Enabling features that help establish, strengthen, and sustain partnerships

What we did

We conducted a retrospective analysis across **161 engagements** between KP Washington researchers and care delivery partners since the LHS Program launch in 2017. Engagements involved **150 individuals** across diverse clinical and operational areas. Our analysis spanned **8 years of program documentation** — including tracking logs, project summaries, and qualitative insights from collaborators. We used descriptive and directed and conventional content analysis to assess:

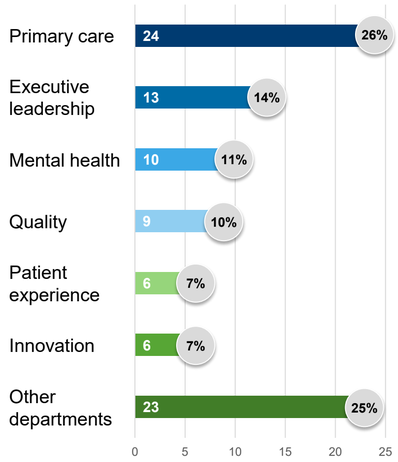
- Organizational sponsorship
- Research capabilities used
- Level of engagement
- Project deliverables
- Impact in the care delivery system

What we learned

161 research-care delivery engagements → vetting process → **91** completed LHS Program projects

12 projects were still in progress, and **58** were not started due to limited resources/capacity or lack of alignment with organizational priorities.

Sponsors came from a variety of departments, with more than a quarter coming from primary care

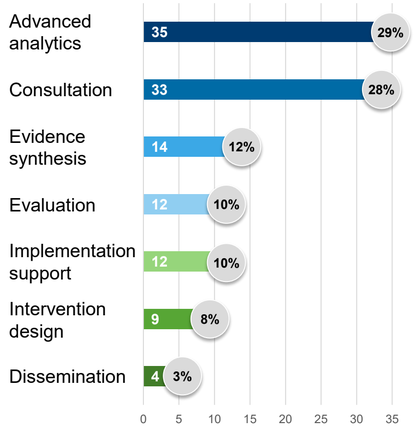


Partner insights

Maria Coghill, Executive Director, Mental Health & Wellness

"…[your help to create] practical, useable tools for our clinicians and patients has been so value-added. We can share them with other markets as we all work to solve return access challenges together."

Advanced analytics & consultation were the most common capabilities — accounting for more than half of the sample



Note: 20 collaborations used more than 1 capability

Partner insights

Kim Painter, Special Populations Medical Director

"The ACT Center…brings sophisticated analytic tools and proven protocols to the work of implementation — in this case making proactive dementia identification and management standard work in primary care."

A programmatic LHS partnership model can effectively bridge research and care delivery through **structured processes, integrated roles, and shared infrastructure.**

Partnership strategies

- ✓ Align priorities across care delivery and research through needs assessment
- ✓ Meet quarterly with department leaders
- ✓ Create cross-functional roles
- ✓ Ensure research representation on operational committees

Challenges

- ✓ Navigating turnover and maintaining continuity amid organizational change
- ✓ Balancing competing health system priorities
- ✓ Finding and maintaining stable funding
- ✓ Implementing care improvements with limited clinical staff

Enabling features

- ✓ Strong communication channels
- ✓ Embedded roles where researchers sit directly on strategic and operational teams
- ✓ Shared data and governance structures
- ✓ Robust data systems

Sustained collaboration requires deliberate strategies for **prioritization, communication, and resource alignment**.

Partner insights

Karen Sielbeck, KP National Vice President, Acute Care Coordination

"…we would like to bring [KP Washington] together with [KP Colorado], KP Insight, and Clinical Decision Technology Services teams to co-develop and test a model that could eventually be adopted across all non-hospital-based markets."

Learn more about the LHS model that guides our program

What this means for policy and practice

Organizations aiming to build an LHS program or adopt LHS principles should **invest in formal partnership frameworks** that incorporate needs assessment and **shared governance and infrastructure**.

Policymakers and organizational leaders should **prioritize funding mechanisms and oversight structures** that facilitate collaborative learning.

Future research should **explore adaptability** of this model in settings such as federally qualified health centers and **assess scalability** through initiatives that train scientists to conduct LHS research — such as the Learning Health System Embedded Scientist Training and Research (LHS E-STAR) Centers.

Contact: Claire.L.Allen@kp.org | **Learn more:** act-center.org

This work was conducted by the Center for Accelerating Care Transformation (ACT Center) as part of our Learning Health System Program funded by Kaiser Permanente Washington. The ACT Center is part of Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute.

KAISER PERMANENTE®
Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute