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Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought intense focus on disparities and gaps in health care, particularly in the care of older adults. Demographics in the United States are shifting, with more than 17% percent of the current population being aged 65 or older, and this trend is forecast to continue for decades to come. Older adults are disproportionately affected by chronic health care conditions: Over 80% have at least one chronic condition and 70% of Medicare beneficiaries have two or more (National Council on Aging, 2018). This results in a disproportional increase in the average health care spend by older adults to maintain their health and lifestyle.

Providence has served older adults since its inception and service to the vulnerable is foundational to the mission. COVID-19 has highlighted the opportunity to improve the clinical care for the older adult as well as the need to be prepared for the future. In order to sustain the Providence ministries, the organization will have to learn to live and thrive at Medicare rates. This vulnerability has become even more evident during the COVID-19 era.

The Age-Friendly Health System designation recognizes health care organizations that deliver on whole person care, reflecting what is important to the patient and family (What Matters), at any stage in their life. The flexibility and broad applicability of 5M concepts have merit for other patient populations and conditions regardless of age, which helps systems improve overall. It is emblematic of the Providence promise: **Know me, Care for me, Ease my way.** For the older adult, turning 65 does not automatically place an adult into frail clinical status.

Approach

The original Age-Friendly Health System (AFHS) premise was created by a coalition of clinical and thought leaders to address the unique health care needs of older adults. Providence has been a national leader in the program's development, believing it is a path to improving care for the communities it serves. Building a

programmatic structure to advance the AFHS framework will enable the organization to meet both the challenges of value-based care and the needs of this growing population. Providence hosted a symposium to introduce the program, which was designed to energize, educate and engage caregivers and colleagues on





Providence's journey to become an AFHS. The symposium primed our ability to present and begin a dialogue on the programmatic structure needed to become an Age-Friendly Health System.

The objectives of the symposium were to:

- Describe the national AFHS initiative, evidence and impact on older adults' outcomes.
- Discuss the platform for why Providence must undertake and expand the AFHS initiative.
- Identify current age-friendly work across the continuum within Providence.
- Evaluate and commit to participating in the AFHS initiative with the goal of delivering age-friendly care throughout Providence.

Outcomes

Providence launched an AFHS framework, including metrics and accountability, in January 2020. While COVID-19 slowed the AFHS initiative temporarily, it also highlighted the critical role age-friendly care plays in addressing untoward COVID-19 outcomes for older adults.

The symposium hosted over 800 participants during the live event and many others have viewed the [event recording](#).

Following the symposium, we launched an Age-Friendly Innovation Challenge to continue to build engagement and excitement. The Age-Friendly Innovation Challenge encourages our caregivers and clinicians to bring their ideas to life through one-time grant awards that align with building an Age-Friendly Health System.

Lessons Learned

The current coronavirus pandemic has slowed some of Providence's growth and development in this area, yet at the same time, it has **accelerated the opportunity for change and created an opening for Providence to be a leader.**

Next Steps

We are continuing to update and refine our program structure and framework for better alignment in the current health care environment, ensuring it aligns within our integrated strategic plan. Our goal is to make all care for older adults age-friendly care — guided by essential evidence-based practices (5Ms), causing no harm, and aligning with what matters most to the older adult and their family.