

How Geisinger Health Partnered with Iris Telehealth to Increase Access to Behavioral Health Care Across Pennsylvania

Since 2021, Iris Telehealth has developed a close and ongoing partnership with Geisinger to efficiently increase access at scale for their behavioral health patients across the care continuum. To date, Iris's services are live in six of Geisinger's 11 hospitals and across their ambulatory network.

Background

Geisinger is committed to making better health easier for the more than 1 million people it serves. Founded more than 100 years ago by Abigail Geisinger, the system now includes 11 hospital campuses, a health plan with more than half a million members, a Research Institute, and the Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine. With nearly 24,000 employees and more than 1,700 employed physicians, Geisinger boosts its hometown economies in Pennsylvania by billions of dollars annually.

Geisinger's Behavioral Health and Psychiatry department offers a full range of inpatient, outpatient and telehealth services and continues to expand services and access. In 2021, for example, Geisinger and Acadia Healthcare Company formed a joint venture that includes two new 96-bed, 73,000 square foot freestanding inpatient behavioral health facilities serving adult and pediatric patients beginning in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Geisinger saw referrals for behavioral health services grow at a much faster rate than they were used to as their communities sought care in the face of not only the pandemic but the worsening mental health crisis as well. At times, this growth exceeded 300 referrals per day. Their team saw an opportunity to pursue a partnership that would help them manage the increased volume and improve patient outcomes and experiences.

Challenges

The Geisinger care team faced challenges in effectively and efficiently triaging their referral queue, which comprised low and high acuity patients. It was a critical point for Geisinger that these patients not only receive care more rapidly but also receive the appropriate level of treatment – including ongoing treatment plans where needed.

In their consideration of partnership with Iris, Geisinger emphasized the need for providers to be practicing at the top of their licenses. They also saw an opportunity for several roles (psychiatrists, psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs), and licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs)) to be involved at various stages of the process to ensure patients received the specific care they needed.

Geisinger



Solution

With Geisinger's needs in mind, Iris developed a best-in-class care navigation assessment led by LCSWs to accurately triage the patients in Geisinger's referral queue and deployed a customized care pod comprising psychiatrists, PMHNPs, and LCSWs to ensure each patient got the right level of care, by the right provider, in a timely manner. Additionally, Iris deployed providers delivering 24/7 consult-liaison services in Geisinger's EDs as well as ongoing follow-up care for patients as needed.

For all patient populations, Iris worked with Geisinger to augment their EMR to deliver a consistent experience for patients and track the care provided. For each Iris provider, Geisinger worked to conduct training that would make an Iris provider indistinguishable from a Geisinger provider and would ensure they felt fully integrated into the Geisinger team.

Iris's clinical hiring and medical staff services teams worked to recruit and vet best-fit providers for Geisinger's patient populations and conducted their licensing and credentialing to enable the providers to integrate effectively into Geisinger's various hospitals and healthcare facilities.

In order to ensure these services were effective and sustainable, the Iris team worked closely with Geisinger stakeholders to consistently ramp and evaluate services, making adjustments and methodically adding new providers where necessary. To date, Iris has staffed 26 providers to serve Geisinger's patient populations.

Results

Over the past year, Iris supported a **reduction in Geisinger's referral queue from 18,000 patients to 3,000 patients** utilizing their intake assessment and care pod method. This work was done through a close partnership with Geisinger's patient content center, additional provider recruitment on Geisinger's side, and through a concentrated effort to create standardized, repeatable workflows. For patients within the referral queue, Iris has also moved them from assessment to initial consult appointment in less than seven days.

As part of this intake assessment process, Iris's team found that **40% of the patients referred to psychiatric care would be better served by psychotherapy or another appropriate lower level of care**. This discovery allowed Iris to move patients to the provider type who would best serve their needs while saving high-demand psychiatric resources.

Due to the higher volume of patients needing therapy providers, Iris quickly adjusted their hiring strategy to accommodate the provider types Geisinger's patients needed to see the most.

This success was possible due to the **highly collaborative nature of Geisinger's partnership** with Iris, which both teams will maintain as Geisinger's service needs continue to evolve.

Looking toward the future, Iris, Geisinger Health System, and Geisinger Health Plan will continue to innovate to expand access and improve patient outcomes across the care continuum.



"We are so proud of the work we have done here with Iris. We are literally helping hundreds of patients who need our help and could not have done it without Iris."

Health System Program
Manager at Geisinger Health

Geisinger reduced
their referral queue
by 15,000 patients

