

## **What is an Integrated Care Model?**

An integrated care model is an evolving approach to the delivery of health care services characterized by a high degree of collaboration and communication among all the health care providers involved in the continuum of care for any given patient. Designed to break-through the barriers that define the current fragmented and siloed nature of the health care delivery system, and this model relies on the sharing of information among team members related to patient care, and the establishment of a comprehensive treatment plan to address the biological, psychological and social needs of the patient. This interdisciplinary team of health care providers, depending on the needs of the patient, can include a diverse group of physicians (primary care and specialists), nurses, psychologists, social workers, and occupational and physical therapists.

The idea is that more coordination and less duplication of effort and services among the provider team – as well as more patient involvement in the treatment decisions themselves – will result in higher quality, yet less costly, health care services. The benefits of the integrated care approach extend to the patients, providers and the larger health care system itself. The evidence suggests that integrated care can be more effective at reducing the acute care symptoms of a patient while at the same time enhancing access to services, improving the quality of care and reducing overall health care expenditures for the system itself.

An integrated care model can be established in various types of settings to benefit the patient over his/her entire lifespan, including primary care, specialized medical settings (i.e. surgical centers, cardiology, rehabilitation units), long-term care, and community-based health and social services sites. While the exact make-up and processes of the integrated care team will differ depending on the setting, integrated care of any type requires consistent communication and mutual respect among the provider team and with the patient.

Several integrated care models have begun to take hold, including Accountable Care Organizations, Patient-Centered Medical Homes, and Health Homes, each with distinct features but all with the same goal of better care coordination. Moreover, the Affordable Care Act allows for demonstration authority to create integrated care models for individuals eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, and currently a number of states are working with the CMS to develop proposals to test capitated and/or managed-fee-for service models to integrate care and align financing for these dual eligible beneficiaries, who tend to account for a disproportionate share of spending in both programs.

For more information on integrated care models, see the [Myth Busters here](#). For more information about care coordination, see <http://www.healthinfolaw.org/topics/55>.

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