

Hardwiring the Future of Older Adult Care

Healthcare systems must improve outcomes in an environment where traditional transformation efforts are too slow and too resource-intensive to scale.

Mass General Brigham identified a structural gap common across health systems: care models are designed for a generalized adult patient profile, yet older adults represent approximately 50 percent of inpatient admissions and have distinct clinical and functional needs. When care is not intentionally designed to recognize and support this population and their needs, preventable harms such as delirium, functional decline, and adverse medication events increase. The imperative to mitigate these risks is clear. The challenge is consistent execution at scale.

The West Health Accelerator at Mass General Brigham was created to close that execution gap.

Traditional change management and quality improvement approaches play an important role in promoting best practices; however, achieving reliable behavior change at scale often requires additional structural support. Rather than relying solely on education or manual workflow redesign, the Accelerator leverages Epic to make the right care easier to deliver by operationalizing best practices within routine care delivery. Through automation, optimized defaults, embedded decision support, and standardized care pathways, evidence-based practices are integrated directly into the workflow. The right action becomes the simplest action, reducing unwarranted variation and lowering cognitive burden for clinical teams.

By treating the electronic medical record as strategic infrastructure, West Health Accelerator at Mass General Brigham translates evidence into reliable execution. EHR-enabled standardization, visible leadership commitment, an interdisciplinary Champions model, and real-time performance dashboards work together to reduce preventable harm and strengthen system-wide reliability.

The Strategic Opportunity

Compared to younger patients, older adults are disproportionately vulnerable to:

- Delirium
- Functional decline
- Adverse medication events
- Prolonged length of stay

Improving care for this population improves:

- Clinical outcomes
- Operational efficiency
- Patient experience
- High reliability goals

Because older adults account for approximately half of inpatient admissions (50% across 10 Mass General Brigham hospitals; 96 units; ~70,00 lives annually), reducing variation drives measurable impact on quality and cost performance.

Leadership Perspective: We have an opportunity to break down barriers, to break down silos, and to recognize that we can do things in a more systematic, standardized way. We are leveraging the push that we're getting from our leaders to become a high-reliability organization, to hold ourselves accountable for the type and quality of care that we deliver, and how we measure it. – Zara Cooper, West Health Accelerator at Mass General Brigham Co-Director

The Core Insight: Automation Drives Adoption

Traditional quality initiatives depend on education and sustained manual effort. They often stall at the pilot stage.

The West Health Accelerator embeds best practices directly into Epic. Age-specific standards are integrated into optimized order defaults, prescribing decision support, and nursing workflows so that:

- Memory is replaced with smart defaults
- Variation is reduced at scale
- The right action becomes the default action
- Performance can be tracked system-wide

When best practices are built into workflows rather than layered onto them, adoption accelerates and improvement sustains.

Evidence-based Impact, Operationalized

The Accelerator does not challenge existing clinical evidence or introduce new standards of care. It operationalizes practices already proven to improve outcomes into the electronic health record to ensure they are applied consistently across patients and settings.

National evidence shows:

- Early mobilization and delirium prevention reduce length of stay by 0.5 to 1.0 days
- Evidence-based nursing practices improve HCAHPS Likelihood to Recommend
- Approximately 40 percent of delirium cases are associated with potentially inappropriate medications

West Health Accelerator at Mass General Brigham translates this evidence into execution:

- Automating dose-reduction defaults for nearly 40 high-risk medications
- Embedding age-specific orders and discharge standards
- Standardizing geriatric nursing plans of care
- Tracking outcomes at the hospital and system level

The advantage is not discovering new best practices. It is ensuring best practices happen reliably, every day, across the enterprise, while leveraging existing, native technology.

The Model: Four Integrated Levers

01 Reimagined Clinical Workflows
Hardwiring standards for mobility, delirium prevention, and What Matters conversations into routine inpatient care

03 Data Transparency
Real-time dashboards that segment older adult data and track outcomes such as length of stay and medication safety

02 EHR Automation and Decision Support
Using Epic order defaults and embedded clinical decision support to reduce variation and drive rapid adoption

04 Workforce Activation
A year-long interdisciplinary Champions Program that builds local ownership and promotes, then sustains, adoption

Automation establishes the standard. Leadership and champions sustain the culture.

Scaling Vision

The West Health Accelerator offers a replicable model for targeted population quality transformation:

- Faster than traditional quality improvement approaches
- More sustainable than education-only initiatives
- Scalable through EHR automation
- Durable because best practice is hardwired

In a resource-constrained environment, health systems cannot rely on manual change management alone. The future of quality transformation lies in embedding evidence into existing, accessible digital infrastructure and designing systems where best practice is the default.

The West Health Accelerator demonstrates that when the electronic medical record is used as a strategic asset, measurable and sustainable improvement follows.

Want Help Bringing This Solution to Your Organization?

This solution is part of the West Health Accelerator at AHA's Health Research & Educational Trust, a national initiative helping hospitals adopt and scale proven solutions to improve patient safety, clinical outcomes and workforce efficiency.

Hospitals can implement approaches like this through Accelerator collaboratives, where peer organizations work together with expert support to drive measurable improvement.

Join the movement and get involved at nationalaccelerator.org