



**Health Care Systems Research Network**

# NEWSLETTER

**2025 Volume 2**

## **Transforming Health Care Through Research: Highlights from the 2025 Annual Conference of the Health Care Systems Research Network**

Michael A. Horberg, MD, MAS, FACP, FIDSA / Suzanne Simons, MS

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The Health Care Systems Research Network (HCSRN) Annual Conference brings together a diverse group of members and non-members, study managers and researchers, health systems leaders, funding agency representatives, clinicians, and patient partners every year. Continuing a long-held reputation of serving as a venue to disseminate scientific findings and share the challenges and triumphs of conducting research in a real-world care delivery setting, the meeting provides many opportunities to network and develop new collaborations.

The conference objectives were to highlight learning health system research projects and to spur collaboration regarding research initiatives that improve health and health care for individuals and populations. HCSRN is an integral part of the US and international research landscape and is deeply committed to supporting public-domain collaborative research that benefits patients, communities, and the broader population. A leader in population health, HCSRN maintains established partnerships with major research organizations, federal funders, and universities and leverages its leadership in

important national initiatives, including the CDC Vaccine Safety Datalink and the Sentinel Initiative.<sup>1</sup>

Leslie Hinyard, PhD, MSW, Executive Director of Advanced HEAlth Data (AHEAD) Institute, served as the informal host for the conference. She opened the meeting by reading a Land Acknowledgment honoring with gratitude the Indigenous peoples past and present who have demonstrated strength and resilience and the great responsibility as stewards of the land on which St. Louis sits. Sandro Galea, MD, MPH, DrPH, a physician, epidemiologist, and author, the Margaret C. Ryan Dean of the School of Public Health and the Eugene S. and Constance Kahn Distinguished Professor in Public Health at Washington University in St. Louis, delivered the opening plenary address entitled, “Why health? Why do we embrace health as a good worth pursuing?” His presentation offered an organizing framework for how we can think of health, highlighting foundational values, the cost-benefits of health, the potential and limits of science, the actions that generate health, and uncomfortable ideas for health. The presentation focused on how data can be applied to these definitional questions, ensuring that those who work in health can advance a vision of health that improves life for all.

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## State of the Network

Governing Board Chair, Michael Horberg, MD, MAS, FACP, FIDSA of Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group, provided the State of the Network address on Wednesday, April 9. Dr. Horberg noted the significance of this turbulent time and the key role that HCSRN can play in promoting collaboration and scientific rigor in health sciences and health services research while contributing to the national and international research agenda. Dr. Horberg issued a call to action by HCSRN member institutions in supporting all research and full funding of NIH, AHRQ, CDC, USAID, NSF, and wherever good science and funding are threatened. He stated that HCSRN will be a conduit for verified information where evidence informs practice and clinical practice informs research.

HCSRN had a productive year with Dr. Horberg reviewing numerous accomplishments including enhanced governance through policy development and board engagement, establishing the Membership Committee to address growth and retention, and identifying new Scientific Interest Groups (Primary Care, Infectious Diseases, Cancer, and AI in Health Care). He shared the foundational areas of the 2024-2026 Strategic Plan, which include the following:

- Engagement → Increasing value for participation
- Collaboration → Increasing funding opportunities

- Sustainability → Organizational transformation and increasing the value proposition for our member institutions
- Virtual Data Warehouse (VDW)<sup>2</sup> operations → Working group leads and new data development

Dr. Horberg provided an overview of VDW usage, including the core tables. Utilizing a common data model, HCSRN's VDW maps clinical and claims data to a common format that is designed to support multisite health system research. While each system retains its own data set, efficiencies for data extraction, collection, and management are created using this approach. The Governing Board has charged the VDW with developing social determinants of health tables and enhancing pharmacy and lab data. Appreciation was extended to Stacey Honda, MD, PhD, VDW Operations Committee Board Liaison; Mark Jurkovich, DDS, VDW Scientific Lead; Yonah Karp, VDW Technical Lead; Celeste Machen, VDW Coordinator; and the workgroup leads for their dedicated work on behalf of the organization.

Annual Conference Planning Committee Co-Chairs, Dr. Leslie Hinyard and Ivana Vaughn, PhD, MPH, of Advanced HEAlth Data (AHEAD) Institute, Saint Louis University, and Ivana Vaughn, PhD, MPH, of Henry Ford Health, as well as the committee, were recognized for their commitment and efforts in planning the event. Appreciation was also extended to volunteers for their role in the conference's success. The 2026 annual conference will be held in Dallas, Texas, April 21 to 23.

HCSRN welcomed sponsors who supported the meeting through financial contributions. Johnson & Johnson joined at the Platinum level. The Bouvier Grant Group, Gilead, and Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI) participated at the Gold level; Saint Louis University was a Silver sponsor; and AstraZeneca provided a Bronze-level sponsorship.

At the conclusion of the State of the Network address, incoming Governing Board Chair, Rebecca Rossom, MD, MS, recognized and thanked Dr. Horberg for his significant contributions during his tenure from 2023 to 2024. Under his leadership, HCSRN has continued to advance its mission of fostering high-quality, equitable research in health care systems and paving a path for the continuing success of the organization.

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## Award Recipients

One of the highlights of the conference is the awards presentation, where HCSRN members celebrate their colleagues' achievements.

This year, Brian K. Ahmedani, PhD, LMSW, of Henry Ford Health, was recognized for Paper of the Year, which was entitled, “Zero Suicide Model Implementation and Suicide Attempt Rates in Outpatient Mental Health Care.”<sup>3</sup> Stephen C. Waring, DVM, PhD, FACE, of Essentia Institute of Rural Health, was recognized as Mentor of the Year. This prestigious award acknowledges an individual who has provided guidance and motivation and shares knowledge, expertise, and wisdom to an exceptional degree.

Jaejin An, PhD, of Kaiser Permanente Department of Research & Evaluation, Southern California, received the Early Career Investigator of the Year award for her abstract entitled, “Blood Pressure Outcomes after Sodium–Glucose Cotransporter 2 Inhibitors vs. Other Diabetes Medication Use in Adults with Type 2 Diabetes.” Her abstract was reviewed on overall quality and specific criteria including research abstract quality, relevance and originality, quality of science, and impact, generalizability, and scalability.

In its first year of being presented, the Trainee Investigator of the Year award was given to Angela Chen of the University of Washington. Her abstract on the “Effects of Medicaid Expansion on HPV Vaccination Uptake Among Adolescents in the United States” was judged on the same criteria listed above.

The inaugural Founders’ Award was bestowed to Gregory Simon, MD, MPH, of Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute. The award recognizes an individual who has best exemplified the spirit of the early founders in their service and lasting contribution to the network, including the vision and confidence to create something new or unique in embedded health care research; the spirit of fostering collegiality and collaboration across partner organizations, which remains among the most important values of the network; and the persuasive expertise and determination to create a legacy of funded platforms or other valuable resources for conducting productive research in HCSRN.

Two poster awards were presented. The Poster Session 1 winner was Stephanie Hooker, PhD, MPH, of HealthPartners Institute, for her poster, “Comparative Effectiveness of Four Glucose-lowering Pharmacotherapy Classes on Incident Depression in Adults with Type 2 Diabetes.”

The winner of Poster Session 2 was Melissa Maye, PhD, of Henry Ford Health, for her poster, “Assessment of Access, Equity, and Accuracy of Universal Autism Screening Within a Large, Diverse Health System Across Birth Cohorts.”

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## Workshops and Special Sessions

The pre-conference grant writing workshop was held for the second year. This workshop brings together experts from HCSRN to assist early investigators with NIH R series applications. The goals of the workshop were to provide practical knowledge and feedback for writing NIH awards with a special emphasis on R grant mechanisms and to create a community of new investigators working towards NIH funding from which the investigators can draw support. Topics included writing outstanding specific aims, understanding the sections of grants that are especially important for reviewers, creating a conceptual model, telling a “story,” formatting a grant for maximal visual impact, and choosing a funding announcement and institute. Workshop presenters included Stephanie Hooker, PhD, MPH, and Rick Grucza, PhD, of Advanced HEAlth Data (AHEAD) Institute, Saint Louis University.

On Wednesday, April 9, HCSRN offered a special interest presentation entitled, “Insights into Clinical Data Input and Translation – Impact on Research.” There are many sources of data being placed into electronic health records (EHR) every day. This includes information from a variety of outside sources, such as laboratories, clinicians not associated with a given care system, and even patient questionnaires. How and where clinicians are trained and how the data are input and interpreted based on EHR system requirements can have a significant impact on a patient’s record. Standardizing this input is a complex process and may influence the data used for research or for developing clinical decision support tools.

The panel addressed how data sources may vary between care systems; how (and if) care systems and terminology services control variation; whether the data sources and approaches to dating can be transferred to other databases used in research, considering modern capabilities; and how the evolving WHO classifications alter input and translation. Panelists included Matthew Breeden, MD, of SSM Health; Amol Bhalla, MD, MSci, MHSA, MBA, of IMO Health; and Patricia Saleeby, PhD, MSSA, of Bradley University. Dr. Saleeby also serves as part of the USA Collaborating Center to the World Health Organization Family of International Classifications and the PACIO Project sponsored by CMS and MITRE Corporation. Jennifer Robertson, MS, RHIA, CHDA, of HealthPartners Institute, served as the moderator.

An additional session was held on Wednesday to provide an update on the Scientific Interest and Work Groups. Group leaders reported on current/future activities and how to get involved. The panel included Leah Hansen, PhD, of Aging Scientific Interest Group Lead; Cheryl Stults, PhD, of Patient Engagement in Research (PER) Scientific Interest Group; Anthony Olson, PhD, PharmD, FAPhA, of Pharmacy Scientific Interest Group Lead; and Co-leads, Jocelyn Wainwright, MS, and Julie Steiner, MA, of Research Project Management Team Interest Group. Ivana Vaughn, PhD, MPH, of Henry Ford Health,



moderated the session.

The final plenary session was entitled, “Beyond the Funding Basics: Real World Guidance for Achieving Results.” The panel brought together seasoned researchers from HCSRN institutions to share their experience and expertise. Jerry Gurwitz, MD, of UMass Chan Medical School; Rebecca Rossom, MD, MS, of Health Partners Institute; and Greg Simon, MD, MPH, of Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute, joined moderator, Claudia Steiner, MD, MPH, of the Institute for Health Research, Kaiser Permanente Colorado, and addressed the following topics:

- Gaining efficiencies in research in anticipation of a lower indirect cost cap
- Pivoting research portfolios to better align with priorities of the current administration
- Balancing convictions with the need to produce rigorous, high-integrity, ethical research
- Additional/alternative sources of funding to support current portfolios of research

Given interest in this topic and the ongoing relevance, the same panelists will again be sharing their expertise via a webinar planned for later in the year.

Another funding-focused panel session followed the plenary and was entitled, “Successful Strategies in Working with Non-Traditional Funders.” The federal government is the largest funder of academic research, but there are a variety of alternative funding sources that might be pursued. The presentation outlined private industry and for-profit, non-government funding opportunities. The senior scientists described their experience collaborating with non-government business organizations, offered advice on leveraging health data resources to expand research agendas, and recommended strategies for successfully navigating the contract process. Denise Boudreau, PhD, of Genentech; Steve Clauser, PhD, MPA, of PCORI; and Ivana Vaughn, PhD, MPH, of Henry Ford Health, participated along with moderator Robert Penfold, PhD, of Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute.

Following the conclusion of the conference programming, nearly 45 site data managers, coders, researchers, and other staff members attended the VDW Implementation Group (VIG) meeting. The agenda featured an open discussion on SAS® alternatives (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, North Carolina) and the challenges of moving away from this software. Another topic focused on “Logical Observation Identifier Names and Codes (LOINC)s, Test Types and You,” as well as a presentation entitled, “Harnessing Big Data to Transform Aging Research: Key Lessons from the Field,” by Jinmyoung Cho, PhD, of

Saint Louis University School of Medicine. The VIG meeting brought together members from different institutions to reconnect and engage in topical debate while advancing the work of one of HCSRN's greatest assets.

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## Concurrent, Poster, and Panel Presentations

Looking at the conference by the numbers, there were 70 accepted abstracts and panel presentations, which yielded 22 concurrent sessions and six panel presentations. During two poster sessions, there were a total of 42 peer-reviewed posters presented. Nine ancillary meetings of scientific interest groups and research project teams were held to discuss their work. This was made possible due to the dedicated efforts of 13 Annual Conference Planning Committee members and 21 on-site volunteers who planned and implemented the conference.

Stakeholder Engagement, Social Determinants of Health, Mental Health and Addiction Medicine, Health Equity, Implementation/Health Delivery Science, Population Health, and the Virtual Data Warehouse were some of the broad categories of abstract submissions. A wide range of topics were presented during the panel sessions, including the following:

- How to Conceptualize, Implement, and Build on Research Initiatives in Direct Partnership with Community Members: An Example from the Field
- Precision Medicine Using the All of Us Research Program Data: Examples and Discussion of Interest in Forming a Significant Interest Group
- Harmonizing Medication Data for Collaborative Research
  - Empowering Patient Partners: Training for Meaningful Engagement in Research
- What Can We Learn from Early Adopters of the Learning Health System Model to Transform Care and Improve Outcomes at a National Scale?
- Building and Implementing a Social Health Research Infrastructure in an Integrated Health Care System
  - Intro to the VDW

All the accepted scientific abstracts presented at the 2025 HCSRN Annual Conference can be found in this issue of the Journal of Patient-Centered Research and Reviews.<sup>4</sup>

## References

1. Health Care Systems Research Network. About HCSRN. Accessed May 22, 2025. <https://hcsrn.org/>
  2. Pardee R. (April 9, 2024). A brief history of (VDW) time – what a long, productive trip it's been. Remarks presented at: 2024 Health Care Systems Research Network annual conference; April 9, 2024; Milwaukee, WI.
  3. Ahmedani BK, Penfold RB, Frank C, et al. Zero suicide model implementation and suicide attempt rates in outpatient mental health care. JAMA Netw Open. 2025;8:e253721. CrossRef
  4. Abstracts from the 2025 Health Care Systems Research Network annual conference, St. Louis, Missouri. J Patient Cent Res Rev. 2025;12:148-203.
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## Meet the HCSRN Executive Committee

At the conclusion of the Annual Conference held April 8-10, 2025 in Saint Louis, MO, Dr. Rebecca Rossom took over the helm of HCSRN as the Governing Board Chair. Dr. Julie Schmitt diel is the Chair-Elect and Dr. Michael Horberg became the Immediate Past Chair. Dr. Leslie Hinyard continues in her role as Treasurer and Dr. Tina Davis remains the Secretary. Here are their bios.

### Chair 2025-2026

**Rebecca Rossom, MD, MS**, is a Senior Investigator and Psychiatrist at HealthPartners Institute and an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota with clinical and research expertise in prevention, identification and treatment of mental health conditions, neurodegenerative disorders, and substance use disorders. Since joining HealthPartners Institute in 2011, Dr. Rossom has led and collaborated on numerous federally funded projects focused on the intersection of mental and physical health. Dr. Rossom served as the overall PI of a multi-site RCT that implemented and tested a clinical decision support (CDS) tool designed to reduce cardiovascular risk in people with serious mental illness (SMI), which successfully reduced cardiovascular risk for nearly 9000 people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder in 78 primary care clinics in 3 health systems (U19MH121738). She recently co-led a National Institute of Drug Abuse's (NIDA) Clinical Trials Network (CTN) pragmatic trial that increased prescriptions of medications for opioid use disorder for over 10,000 patients cared for in 90 primary care clinics across three health systems (UG1DA040316). Moreover, Dr. Rossom serves as MPI of a





multi-site cluster randomized trial that is implementing and testing a CDS tool for improving detection of cognitive impairment in primary care (R33AG069770). In addition to her work leading pragmatic trials, Dr. Rossom served as a Co-Investigator on systematic reviews informing the US Preventative Service Task Force decisions on screening for depression and for dementia in primary care settings (HHSA2902017000017I; HHSA290201200015I).

Dr. Rossom serves as the Chair of the Health Care Systems Research Network (HCSRN), the Site PI of the Mental Health Research Network (MHRN), and as the Site PI of the NorthStar Node of the NIDA CTN. She obtained her medical degree from the University of Minnesota, completed her psychiatry residency at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and completed her geriatric fellowship at the University of Minnesota. She lives in Minneapolis with her husband and three children.



#### **Chair-Elect 2025-2026**

**Julie A. Schmittdiel, PhD MA** is the Associate Director of Health Care Delivery and Policy at the Kaiser Permanente Northern California Division of Research, and a Professor at the Kaiser Permanente Bernard J. Tyson School of Medicine. She holds a bachelor's degree in Mathematics

from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and an MA in Biostatistics and a PhD in Health Services and Policy Analysis from the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Schmittdiel's career focuses on the science of stakeholder engagement and on translational research in diabetes care and prevention. She has been principal or co-investigator on more than 50 delivery science and health policy research studies and has published more than 190 papers in peer-reviewed journals. She serves as the Co-Director of the National Institutes of Health-funded Diabetes Research and Engagement through Advanced Multilevel Science Center for Diabetes Translational Research (DREAMS-CDTR). Dr. Schmittdiel has represented Kaiser Permanente Northern California on the Health Care Systems Research Network Governing Board of Directors since 2022.

Julie lives in the Bay Area with her husband Jason, and they enjoy traveling to spend time with their two adult children and to see the world. When she's not doing research you will probably find her reading a novel; she'd love to hear your latest book recommendations!

#### **Secretary 2024-2025**

**Teaniese "Tina" Davis, PhD, MPH**, is an

investigator in the Center for Research and Evaluation at Kaiser Permanente Georgia. Dr. Davis is a behavioral scientist with experience in qualitative research methods, intervention development, stakeholder engagement, and program evaluation. Her work focuses on engaging community members in advisory boards, evaluating telehealth care delivery modes, social health screening programs, and the National Diabetes Prevention Program. She is currently the Principal Investigator of a feasibility trial adapting and testing a type 1 diabetes education and support program (T1DES) for Black young adults aged 18-30 years. She is the Kaiser Permanente Georgia representative for the Social Needs Network for Evaluation and Translation Research Committee. In 2021, Dr. Davis was elected to the Executive Committee for the Health Care Systems Research Network and is currently leading their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategic plan across the network. Dr. Davis is a proud graduate of Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, where she resides with her family.



#### **Treasurer 2024-2025**

Leslie Hinyard, PhD, MSW – Bio to be provided in the next issue of the newsletter.

#### **Immediate Past Chair 2025-2026**

**Michael Horberg, MD, MAS, FACP, FIDSA**, is Associate Medical Director for Kaiser Permanente Mid-Atlantic Permanente Medical Group, serving greater Baltimore and District of Columbia, suburban Maryland and northern Virginia. In that role, he is responsible for Research, Medical Education, Community Health, Medicaid, Genomics, HIV and STI, Complex Care, LGBTQI+ Health and Infection Prevention.



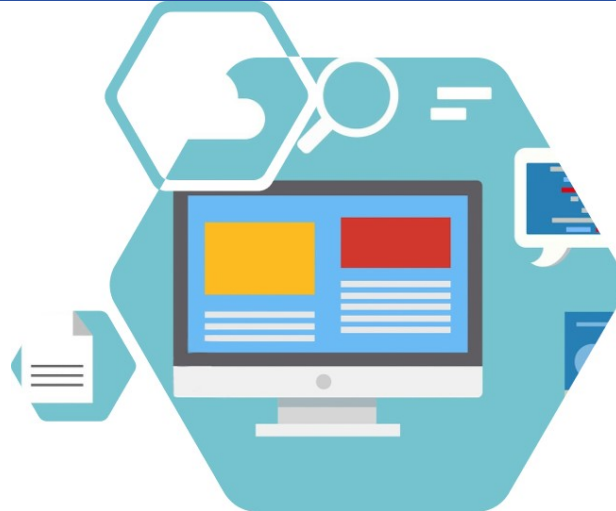
Dr. Horberg is the director of HIV/AIDS nationally for Kaiser Permanente, serving nearly 80,000 members with HIV, as well as Clinical Lead for HIV/AIDS and STI, creating clinical multidisciplinary

guidelines to improve such care in KP. He has chaired the KP HIV, Liver Disease, STI, and LGBTQ Health Conference since 2003, bringing together clinical and research staff to ensure best practices.

Under President Obama, Dr. Horberg served on the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS and co-chaired the Access to Care and Improved Outcomes Committee. He is a Fellow of the American College of Physicians and the Infectious Disease Society of America. He is Past Chair of the Board of Directors of the HIV Medicine Association. He presently co-chairs the IDSA HIV Primary Care Guideline Committee. Dr. Horberg presently serves as the physician chair of the CDC-sponsored Health Care Action Group, promoting sexual health. He is Past President of the national Gay and Lesbian Medicine Association.

As Executive Director for research, he is responsible for all research in KPMAS and is executive director of MAPRI. His research interests include quality measures, care improvement, and determinants of optimized multidisciplinary care for HIV-infected patients; hepatitis, sexually transmitted and COVID infections. He is Executive Sponsor for Commission on Cancer Accreditation and National Surgical Quality Improvement Program in KPMAS.

## Scientific Data Resources Forum Recap



## Insights into Clinical Data Input and Translation: Impact on Research June 10, 2025

[View Webinar](#)

**Passcode: 4^u.R?bs**



**Amol Bhalla, MD, M.Sci, MHSA, MBA**  
**Chief Informaticist of IMO Health**

Clinical data do not emerge fully formed in research-ready shape—their journey begins with syntax and concludes with semantics. In this talk, I guide the audience through that voyage, starting with the “plumbing” of healthcare IT: HL7 v2, FHIR resources, CDA documents, and the workflow constraints that shape what clinicians type or click. These syntactic details—how a blood pressure reading is tokenized, which code systems are permitted in a drop-down—determine whether downstream tools even recognize the observation at all, much less treat it consistently across sites.

The webinar then pivoted to the semantic layer, demonstrating how terminologies such as SNOMED CT, LOINC, and IMO’s interface terminology transform raw messages into computable meaning. A cancer registry case study makes the stakes tangible: you extract “gastric antrum...”, an unambiguous concept, but it gains meaning and context after NLP, large language model disambiguation, and IMO concept normalization are applied. The payoff is dramatic—cleaner cohorts, faster study start-up, and reduced abstraction overhead—yet the example also reveals how fragile research pipelines can remain when either syntax or semantics is neglected.

The session closed by offering a practical “balancing checklist.” Attendees’ learning involves maintaining a balance between syntactic rigor and semantic richness. The central message is simple: striking a balance between the two is no longer a nice-to-have but a prerequisite for reproducible, multisite, AI-ready science.

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Check out the merchandise with the new Virtual Data Warehouse logo and see the expanded offerings featuring the HCSRN logo!

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## HCSRN Job Board



Want a rewarding job in health research? Check out the [HCSRN Job Board](#) to browse career opportunities. We list faculty and staff positions at HCSRN research centers and academic institutions as a service to the research community.

## American College of Epidemiology Conference

The American College of Epidemiology is holding the [ACE 2025 Annual Meeting](#) in Pasadena, CA which is scheduled for Sunday, September 7-Wednesday, September 10. The early bird registration deadline is August 8, 2025.



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Be sure to forward this email to share the latest from HCSRN with you peers and colleagues!

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