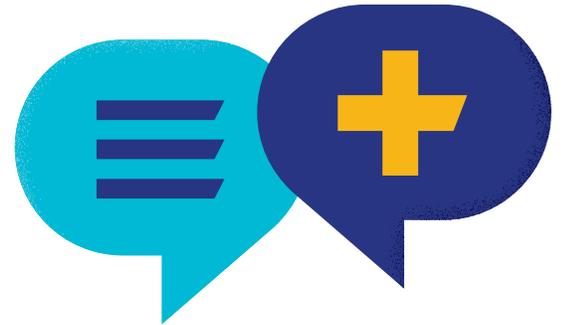




Powering health care innovation through strategic collaborations



UnitedHealth Group and stakeholders across the industry work together to solve problems facing employers and employees.

Innovation is part of the UnitedHealth Group DNA. But, given the complex nature of the health care industry and the challenges its stakeholders are trying to solve, they understand that innovation demands collaboration—no one entity can go it alone.

UnitedHealth Group, the parent company of UnitedHealthcare, taps into expertise across myriad sectors of the industry—from startups and established companies to universities, research institutions and health systems such as Mayo Clinic—to drive impactful innovation. Combining skills, perspectives and resources from across the health care landscape can help accelerate change in costs, health outcomes and member experiences.

“The best part of collaborating with UnitedHealth Group is the speed with which you can move the needle,” says Clarissa Diamantidis, a health equity researcher and associate professor of medicine at Duke University. “The breadth and depth of its infrastructure makes moving things along much easier to do than in a traditional academic setting.”

In recent years, UnitedHealth Group—and its companies, UnitedHealthcare and Optum—have engaged in strategic collaborations around:



Identifying and managing chronic conditions



Responding to COVID-19



Supporting health care startups

“Our collective research efforts are designed to accelerate the pace of health care innovation and improve the quality of care for members.”

Beth Erickson
Director of Health Care Research
Optum Labs

Identifying and managing chronic conditions



The scope and quality of data available to UnitedHealth Group is foundational to the value the company brings to collaborators. “There are only a few systems that have national health data, and UnitedHealth Group is one of them,” Diamantidis says. The data provides a national representation of clinical care in the United States. “It’s a unique health data set that can answer a lot of questions that many other data sets cannot,” Diamantidis adds.

Diamantidis was part of a team that worked with Optum Labs to test innovative ways of identifying those at risk of chronic kidney disease (CKD). Optum Labs has recognized CKD as a priority because it’s a common, resource-intensive condition that often carries a high risk of poor outcomes. According to the CDC, as many as 9 in 10 adults with CKD don’t know they have it.¹

“Unfortunately, many people who have risk factors for kidney disease are not routinely screened for it,” Diamantidis says. CKD is typically diagnosed in the clinical setting. But lack of knowledge among providers, obstacles to regular in-person care and bias in determining who gets screened all contribute to under-testing, she adds.

In a small study coordinated between Optum Labs and Diamantidis, UnitedHealth Group members with a risk factor for CKD had a kit sent directly to their homes. The recipients collected blood and urine samples and mailed them back for screening. Those with abnormal tests were then alerted that they should follow up with their primary care provider. “It’s a way of streamlining and engaging people in their own care,” Diamantidis says.

The study found that nearly 60% of people who received a kit returned it, and 9 in 10 of those were able to be processed. About 20% of members who did not have a diagnosis of kidney disease had lab values indicating moderate or greater risk of CKD. “The goal was to identify those who are at risk of kidney disease and test the feasibility of a home testing service, and both outcomes were positive,” Diamantidis says.

“To study a home test for kidney disease in my world would probably take years and years. We did it within a year with Optum Labs.”

Clarissa Diamantidis

Health Equity Researcher, Associate Professor of Medicine
Duke University

Responding to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic required an all-hands-on-deck approach to learning about the novel coronavirus as quickly as possible. UnitedHealth Group donated \$5 million to accelerate and expand Mayo Clinic's investigational study of convalescent plasma treatments for COVID-19 patients nationwide. UnitedHealth Group also collaborated with Johnson & Johnson to support its Phase 3 COVID-19 vaccine candidate trial and teamed up with other universities and research institutions to investigate and respond to the effects of the pandemic.

Optum Labs worked with the school of medicine for a leading research university to analyze variations in COVID-19 mortality at hospitals across the country. Hospital data provided by UnitedHealth Group enabled the collaborative teams to see what was happening nationally in real-time regarding the pandemic's impact.

They found enormous variation in mortality across hospitals, though all the hospitals improved their survival rates over time. The team found that the biggest factor associated with higher mortality rates was community burden of disease at the time. They also found that Black patients fared worse than white patients, not because hospitals took worse care of Black patients, but because Black patients were more likely to go to hospitals that performed less well for all patients.

Combining the capabilities of a university known for studying health disparities and a health care company with access to comprehensive data—as well as scientists to analyze the data—made it possible to conduct a study like this and proved to be a powerful collaboration.

\$5M

donated by
UnitedHealth Group
to accelerate and
expand Mayo Clinic's
study of treatments
for COVID-19



Supporting startups through UnitedHealthcare Accelerator

The UnitedHealthcare Accelerator is a mentorship-driven program focused on helping early-stage startups foster growth and enable pathways to commercialization. As vice president of innovation at UnitedHealthcare, Kaylene Thompson oversees the Accelerator program, which is based on cross-functional collaboration. The mentors, events and curricula it offers to startups bring people together from inside and outside UnitedHealthcare to help solve important problems.

The immediate goal is to help startups grow, but the program also reinforces the culture of innovation at UnitedHealthcare by providing exposure to new ways of thinking and risk-taking. “My team is really focused on how we accelerate the pace of innovation and how we bolster the right capabilities to innovate with speed and confidence,” Thompson says.

Each year, the Accelerator evaluates more than 1,500 companies in search of teams that can help deliver on the UnitedHealthcare vision to:

- Improve access to affordable, high-quality, supported care
- Enhance experiences through best-in-class solutions designed to build strong customer loyalty and engagement
- Achieve better outcomes driven by robust clinical and care management models

UnitedHealthcare Accelerator has invested in 40 startups to date. “The priority for us in selecting these companies is not for us to make returns,” Thompson explains. “It’s to solve problems in the industry.”

Building long-term collaborations with world-class startups aligns with the UnitedHealthcare mission of helping make the health system work better for everyone, Thompson says. Program alumni cross 3 primary categories that strengthen capabilities UnitedHealthcare is bringing to employers and employees today:

- Complementary capabilities like Kintsugi, a voice-biomarker technology designed to identify behavioral health needs from short clips of free-form speech.
- Peripheral capabilities like Spora Health, a virtual-first, inclusive primary care service.
- White-space capabilities like Robyn, a virtual doula and coaching service for expecting and new parents.

“We’re in the era of light-year-speed with what we’re about to see happen over the next 5 years in terms of how we experience health care.”

Kaylene Thompson
Vice President of Innovation
UnitedHealthcare

Learn more

Contact your broker, consultant
or UnitedHealthcare representative

**United
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¹ Chronic Kidney Disease in the United States, 2021. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available: <https://www.cdc.gov/kidneydisease/publications-resources/ckd-national-facts.html>. Accessed: Aug. 1, 2022. Insurance coverage provided by or through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or its affiliates. Administrative services provided by United HealthCare Services, Inc. or their affiliates.