

What is Answer Health?

Answer Health is a new Clinical Integration Organization formed by independent physicians from across several existing physician organizations in West Michigan. It was formed to support the efforts of independent physician practices to provide exceptional care – enhanced quality at reduced cost with high patient and provider satisfaction – and greater value to purchasers and the community.

AH has been designed from the ground up to meet all requirements of a federally-designated CIO. In partnership with independent practice leaders across Western and Northern Michigan, AH will: engage independent providers, invest in care coordination and clinical IT infrastructure, monitor and improve the quality and cost of care provided, develop equitable risk-sharing arrangements with payers, and distribute incentive earnings.

What is “Clinical Integration” and what defines a Clinically Integrated Organization?

Clinical Integration (CI) describes the processes through which health care professionals work more closely together to coordinate and improve the delivery of health care services across a continuum of care (i.e., preventive, outpatient, inpatient, post-acute, home health, etc.). It also refers to a specific legal arrangement that allows physicians across independent practices (and hospitals) to collaborate on improving quality and efficiency while remaining independent entities.

In a Clinical Integration Organization (CIO), physicians collectively invest in IT infrastructure and staff focused on performance improvement. Participating providers engage with the organization to develop evidence-based care pathways, and standardize care delivery within and across their clinical practices. Participants commit to explicit plans to improve quality, outcomes and efficiency, and to monitor performance over time. In exchange, physicians can negotiate collectively with insurers for enhanced reimbursement based on quality/cost improvements and share in the value they create through more efficient, higher quality care.

↳ What is the difference between a “CIO” and an “ACO?”

A CIO/CIN (clinical integration organization/network) and an ACO (accountable care organization) are fundamentally similar and pursue many of the same objectives. ACO is a federally-defined term for a provider network that contracts directly with CMS (Medicare) through the Medicare Shared Savings Program (MSSP). CIOs implement clinical and cost improvement efforts on behalf of all patient populations – including pediatric, young adult, and older adult populations – in partnership with commercial payers and employers.

How is Answer Health different from existing physician organizations?

Answer Health LLC is a joint venture between West Michigan Physicians Network (WMPN), Physicians’ Organization of Western Michigan (POWM), and potentially other interested POs/PHOs. The members of AH are the sponsoring POs, with individual providers participating through the sponsoring organizations. AH is designed to capitalize on services and staffing within existing POs and provide a focal point for provider engagement, new investments, and growth.

↳ What is the relationship between Answer Health and large health care systems?

Answer Health is an independent physician network, formed, governed, and managed and comprised of independent providers. This independence allows AH to be more nimble and participating practices to provide the best care for patients and the greatest value for purchasers.

While there are no current partnerships with health care systems, close clinical relationships will be required to meet the health care needs of patients and the community. It is anticipated that AH will have clinical and business relationships where appropriate and required to meet its business objectives.

How will participation in Answer Health change the way physicians practice medicine?

Many physician practices already have experienced significant changes based on existing, payer-driven improvement programs, including quality improvement, patient-centered medical home, care management, use of a clinical registry, etc. Answer Health will build upon current initiatives to increase the coordination and standardization of care across practices and care settings.

New tools will be used to track providers' clinical performance, outcomes, and utilization of evidence-based care protocols. Chronically ill and high-risk patients will be identified and referred to case management or disease management programs where their condition(s) are monitored. Health information will be available to providers through a clinical data repository to ensure accuracy and availability of relevant patient data; a robust health information exchange will enhance communication among providers, encouraging frequent collaboration with the intent of reducing inadequate hand-offs or transitions of care.

Participation does not require all providers to utilize the same electronic medical record. As AH continues to develop and grow, continuous evaluation of metrics and performance will be necessary to modify clinical protocols or guidelines and foster collaboration among providers.

↳ Will I have to change my referral patterns?

Answer Health will not require providers to change their referral or admitting patterns. The network will provide information to providers upon which they may make individual decisions regarding referrals that have the potential to impact AH performance. Over time, employer demands and resulting benefit design (e.g., narrow networks) are expected to restrict referrals or require higher out-of-pocket costs for patients.

Will clinical integration result in higher reimbursement for physicians?

Successful CIOs provide financial rewards and incentives for physicians who perform well against the standards established by their peers. The CIO also will create opportunities for enhanced fee schedules, shared savings, and shared risk contracts that recognize the higher quality and greater efficiency generated by the clinical integration initiatives. Sustainable increases to physician reimbursement will

depend on the enhanced performance of the network, including clinical quality, cost-effectiveness, commitment to improvement, and ability to hold each other accountable for results.

What are the benefits to my practice of participation in Answer Health?

The most important benefit derived from any clinical integration program is the improvement in care that physicians, payers, and especially patients enjoy as a result of a shared focus on quality and accountability for best practices. In addition, participation in Answer Health will allow physicians to:

- demonstrate their clinical quality and cost-effectiveness to current and future patients,
- choose the clinical measures against which they will be evaluated,
- enhance revenue through better management of chronic patients,
- gather support for building necessary infrastructure, and
- seek reimbursement that reflects the increased value they provide to patients and health plans.

↳ What are the risks?

Answer Health was designed to be an inclusive organization and welcomes physician organizations and practices that meet the participation requirements. All participating practices will be supported through performance improvement initiatives to maximize their performance. If a practice or physician(s) do not engage in network improvement activities, adhere to requirements, or demonstrate a commitment to improvement, they risk being omitted from the contracts and/or the network over time.

What is required to participate in Answer Health?

Because membership in AH is voluntary, physicians will need to choose whether they will participate in the clinical integration program by signing a Network Participation Agreement. This agreement, along with the AH Participation Policy, outlines the network activities and requirements for participation. These requirements include willingness to:

- engage in clinical initiatives designed to enhance the quality, service, and cost-effectiveness of patient care
- maintain appropriate IT infrastructure to support care coordination, management of chronic conditions, and performance reporting
- participate in the development and implementation of clinical protocols and care pathways

Physicians will hold themselves and each other accountable for compliance with these and other network initiatives of the Clinical Integration Program, including its disciplinary and remediation efforts should physicians not meet the benchmarks set by the Clinical Integration Program.

Where can I find more information regarding Answer Health?

For more information, you may contact the Answer Health offices at:

Answer Health, LLC
333 Bridge Street, Suite 815
Grand Rapids, MI 49504

tel 616-552-1483
email info@answerhealth.com
web answerhealth.com

