



Strategic Plan

April 2025



727 East 1st Street
Minden, NE 68959

From the Board of Trustees

Within this strategic plan I am proud to underscore our unwavering commitment to enhancing healthcare accessibility, maintaining high-quality care, and upgrading our facilities to better serve Kearney County and the surrounding area. We acknowledge the unique healthcare challenges faced by rural communities, and it is our mission to ensure everyone has access to the essential services they need.

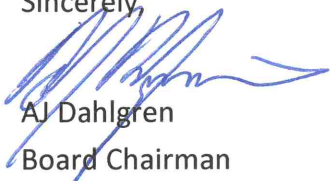
We have outlined significant initiatives aimed at increasing accessibility for patients. By enhancing our emergency room capabilities and expanding our inpatient, swing and behavioral health services, we will provide comprehensive care that meets the varied needs of our community.

Quality remains at the heart of our operations. We are dedicated to continuing and expanding the high level of care being provided within our facility. Our commitment to high-quality care translates into continuous healthcare delivery improvements, ensuring that we maximize patient experiences at every touchpoint. Engaging our community through feedback and collaboration is essential to our success, as we strive to meet and exceed the expectations of those we serve.

Additionally, we are acutely aware of the importance of modernized facilities in providing effective healthcare. Our infrastructure faces considerable challenges, and we are committed to addressing these needs through strategic planning and investment. Improving our facilities will not only boost our capabilities but will help establish KCHS as a destination for quality health services.

As we move forward, we ask for your continued support and input. Together, we can build a healthcare system that truly reflects the values of our community, ensuring that Kearney County Health Services remains a trusted partner in health and wellness for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Al Dahlgren

Board Chairman

Kearney County Health Services

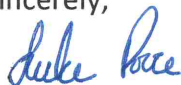
From the CEO

(Strategic Overview)

As Chief Executive Officer of Kearney County Health Services (KCHS), I am pleased to present our strategic plan for the future. This plan outlines our vision for enhancing healthcare access and quality within Kearney County. We recognize the unique challenges and opportunities facing rural healthcare, and this document details our proactive approach to address them. Our focus is on expanding services, improving efficiency, and enhancing the patient experience, all while ensuring the long-term financial health and sustainability of KCHS. This plan is a roadmap for growth and a commitment to the well-being of our community.

This strategic plan centers on several key initiatives designed to meet the evolving healthcare needs of our region. We will be focusing on increasing our emergency room volume by improving operational efficiency and leveraging our Critical Access Hospital (CAH) designation to offer more comprehensive care. Simultaneously, we will expand our inpatient services, attracting more complex cases and enhancing our financial stability. We will also be investing in the growth of our swing bed program and expanding our behavioral health services to address the growing mental health needs within our community. Ultimately, our goal is to provide the highest quality, most accessible healthcare possible right here in Kearney County. This strategic plan represents a significant investment in our future, and we are confident that by working together, we can achieve our goals and build a stronger, healthier community for generations to come. We encourage you to review this plan and share your feedback as we embark on this exciting journey.

Sincerely,



Luke Poore

Chief Executive Officer

Kearney County Health Services

Mission and Vision

Mission

To provide exceptional, family-centered care while strengthening the health and well-being of our community.



Vision

We strive for quality healthcare in a safe environment, with progressive health and wellness options, in order to be the trusted partner in health and wellness and the employer of choice.



Values

Kearney County Health Services strives to operate by these Key Values:

Trust

Being a committed health care provider ensuring confidentiality and accessible, high-quality healthcare.

Respect

Exhibiting a culture of respect towards patients, visitors, and employees by treating other with kindness and dignity.

Exceeding Expectation

Exceeding the expectations of those we serve through compassionate care and positive patient experiences.

Invested

To be the top employer in the surrounding area by engaging our employees through collaboration, clear communication, recognition, and appreciation.

Encouragement

Understanding the importance of staff development, as well as the development of local youth talent, and furthering education to encourage future generations to return to the area.

Integrity

Bringing personal responsibility and professionalism to the daily work environment.

Stewardship

Being responsible with our resources and managing our assets and finances appropriately to ensure we are able to meet the health care needs of our communities in the future.

Commitment to Community Collaboration

Overview

KCHS is committed to both establishing and strengthening local collaboration to best serve all within Kearney County. This will include leveraging local emergency services, nursing homes, and non-profit organizations specifically identified to assist with the needs of the elderly and underserved population. Additionally, all county school districts will be invaluable to future collaboration, leveraging each other to best serve the needs of students. It is through these relationships that Kearney County can be best suited for emergency preparedness, improving access to care, and working towards community wellness in collaboration with community partners in the future.

Strategies

1. Integrating staff into community opportunities to serve.
 - a. Providing education to communities we serve such as life-saving courses and/or collaborating with local emergency services for continuing education.
 - b. Partnering to provide medical staff and rehabilitation personnel in school districts within our service area.
 - c. Continue support with all volunteer EMS departments within Kearney County.
 - i. Identifying ways KCHS can be part of the solution for transferring patients to high levels of care.
 - d. Promoting staff to volunteer for community events throughout Kearney County.
2. Supporting our Aging Population.
 - a. Collaborating with organizations for the elderly and underserved such as Area Agency on Aging, Community Action Partnership, and HelpCare Clinic to assist with obtaining services and opportunities (*such as food assistance, Medicaid enrollment, access to healthcare, and/or mental health resources*).
 - b. Assist with transportation for those in need from hospital stays, clinic appointments, etc., potentially partnering with Ryde Transportation or other resources.
 - c. Continue to be a partner to local nursing homes, such as Bethany Home and Premier Estates in Kenesaw, and hospice services.
3. Carrying out Community Health Needs Assessment initiatives identified, through collaboration with identified partners throughout Kearney County.

Commitment to Employee Engagement & Retention

Overview

Employee engagement and retention are important elements of our Strategic Plan. In order to effectively ensure long-term organizational success, we must plan for future growth. Positive engagement directly affects patient care, productivity, company culture, and the ability attract and retain top talent.

Strategies

1. Recruit Top Talent.
 - a. Develop positive and creative recruitment process ensuring transparency and the right candidates are hired to achieve our mission.
 - b. Retain competitive compensation and benefits program, including salaries, wages, health benefits, wellness initiatives, work-life balance benefits, and professional development opportunities.
 - c. Develop employee branding and a positive image of KCHS that appeals to candidates.
2. Focus on Retention Efforts.
 - a. Provide robust onboarding program, initiating new employees into the KCHS culture.
 - b. Monitor and gauge new employee's perception within the first 90 days and beyond through surveys and personal follow-up.
 - c. Provide pathways for career development through leadership training, mentoring, and continuous learning opportunities.
3. Maintain a Positive Work Culture.
 - a. Continue to develop strategies for recognizing and rewarding employees.
 - b. Provide a positive work culture and employee well-being through work-life balance and inclusiveness.
 - c. Encourage team building by creating opportunities for facility activities and bonding through events, projects, and/or training exercises.
 - d. Encourage open communication.
 - i. Ongoing and relevant employee engagement surveys and pulse surveys measuring key performance indicators (KPI's).
 - ii. Open-door communication channels with supervisors and administration.
 - iii. Consistent supervisor / employee communications through honest and timely feedback.

- 
- e. Monitor turnover rate and exit reviews and identify areas of improvement.
4. Succession Planning.
- a. Nurture internal talent for future leadership roles through mentoring and career ladders
 - b. Continue to develop interest in healthcare careers through all ages of students to encourage future healthcare leaders.
 - c. Ensure leadership accountability.

Commitment to Quality for All Patients

Overview

Kearney County Health Services is dedicated to caring for each patient's needs by prioritizing engagement from leadership, workforce, and community members through data collection and quality improvement.

Strategies

1. Ensure that rural risk factors do not decrease a patient's ability to receive appropriate care:
 - a. KCHS will collect information from patients regarding social determinants so that these items do not become barriers to care.
 - b. Using data collected from patients, KCHS will identify equity gaps in our community and share those gaps with others to promote needed resources for our community.
 - c. KCHS will work with community-based organizations to collaborate care and resources for patients based on needs.
 - d. KCHS provides training to staff regarding culturally diverse needs of the patients we serve.
 - e. KCHS leadership and the Board of Trustees reviews the Strategic Plan for achieving optimal health equity through the Critical Access Hospital Annual Review.
2. Ensure a commitment to high quality care and patient safety with zero preventable harm:
 - a. KCHS leadership ensures that patient safety is a core institutional value by prioritizing reporting of incidents, conducting risk assessments, and promoting a culture of patient and workplace safety.
 - b. KCHS promotes community engagement regarding quality and safety by including the Patient and Family Advisory Council as key stakeholders in decision making and problem solving.
 - c. KCHS routinely addresses patient and workplace safety by conducting surveys such as the AHRQ Culture of Patient Safety Survey and/ or Workplace Safety Survey annually or more frequently in specific departments as needed.
 - d. KCHS staff receives annual training regarding skills and behaviors to ensure patient safety.

- 
- e. KCHS reports safety data to NHSN, CDC, and CMS. This data is available to patients, staff, and the board of trustees for review outside of the Quality office, and through committee reports and digital media.
 - f. KCHS is a high reliability organization by conducting safety huddles, utilizing technology for CPOE and barcode medication scanning, teaching team communication to all staff, and implementing Plan-Do-Study-Act improvement processes.
 - g. KCHS utilizes training through the Nebraska Hospital Association, Heartland Health Alliance, and the CHI CAH network to promote patient safety improvement practices.

Maintain Growth and Profitability Through Traditional Service Lines

Overview

Through KCHS' vision, we strive for quality healthcare in a safe environment, with progressive health and wellness options, in order to be the trusted partner in health and wellness and the employer of choice. This vision is rooted in the principals of our traditional service lines – such as family practice care, diagnostic testing, and therapeutic services. The goal of KCHS is to continue to grow these service lines in tandem with the forthcoming specified service line opportunities.

Strategies

1. Differentiate our Services.
 - a. Emphasize family-centered care from birth and beyond.
 - b. Highlight ability to provide quick-turnaround appointment times.
 - c. Community educational opportunities.
 - d. Targeted marketing opportunities.
2. Offer competitive preventative care packages, extensive chronic disease management, and emphasize annual wellness visits.
3. Engage with community and business partners to enhance corporate wellness plans, health screenings, pre-employment physicals, DOT physicals, drug screen options, flu shots, back-to-school physicals, etc.
4. Improve Access and Convenience.
 - a. Acceptance of wide range of insurance plans
 - b. Online scheduling, online pre-registration, easy to use patient portal options
 - c. Evaluate extended hours, and staffing needs.

Emergency Room Volume Growth

Overview

KCHS has a significant opportunity to dramatically increase Emergency Room (ER) volume based on the local population within a 30-mile radius. Patient preferences in the ER can shift more easily than in other settings with proper planning. Currently handling 1,175 patients, KCHS has the potential to likely exceed over 4,000 visits/annually by emphasizing key value drivers such as: faster treatment in a rural setting, a personalized patient experience, and leveraging its CAH designation for more thorough workups.

Strategies

1. Improve operational workflows to ancillary services that support the ER, and lower ER wait times.
 - a. ER wait times can be improved through turnaround time improvements in ancillary support departments (i.e. Laboratory, Imaging, etc.).
2. Resolve ER Transportation Perceptions/Issues in Patient Service Area (KCHS working hours, ER capabilities, etc.) for county EMS units.
 - a. Some EMS services in KCHS's PSA are unaware of their 24-hour schedule.
3. Advertise ER wait times online with targeted marketing strategies.
 - a. There is a significant opportunity to capture volumes from the metro through marketing around ER turnaround time data (4,000+ visit opportunity) due to people being willing to drive for a shorter wait time if they save time in the aggregate, within the KCHS service area.
 - b. For example, comparable hospitals have advertised their ER wait times on their website and used targeted ads to pull patients from their nearby metro (geo-fencing metro ER waiting rooms).

Inpatient Volume Growth

Overview

KCHS is dedicated to increasing inpatient volume by increasing our ability to admit patients from the Emergency Department instead of transfer patients to a larger institution for care. Caring for patients close to home allows for more personalized care, while maintaining proximity to family members and friends. Inpatient volume is a critical strategy for CAHs as it helps absorb fixed costs, particularly given a high Medicare mix and ancillary utilization. CMS expects CAHs to admit 8% of their ER volume, making ER strategy a key driver of inpatient growth. Compared to urban settings, CAHs offer distinct advantages such as visitor ease, patient comfort, and personalized care, further enhancing their appeal.

Strategies

1. Change perception of Patient Service Area to include Kearney, Hastings, and Holdrege.
 - a. KCHS has a service area of 110,000 people within a radius of 30 miles.
 - b. This patient service area (PSA) has very favorable demographics, specifically with a large. Commercial base that is slated to grow in the next 10 years.
2. Enable staff to take more complex/costly patients (wound care, therapies, etc.).
 - a. Encourage Staff Education.

Swing Volume Growth

Overview

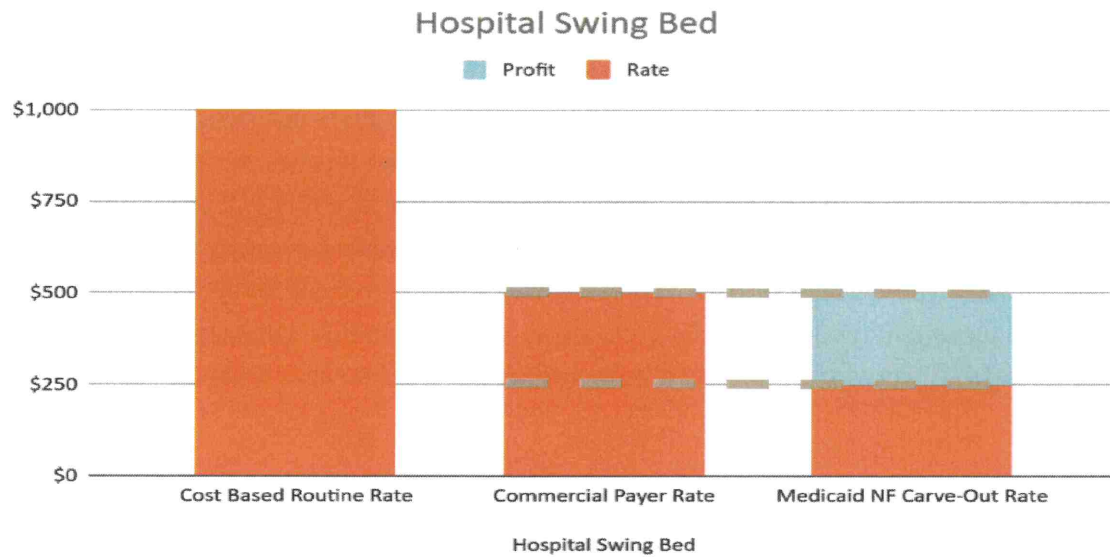
Swing Bed programs provide additional inpatient rehabilitation services while increasing reimbursement and optimizing length-of-stay management. By diluting fixed costs in the nursing unit, they enhance financial sustainability by ensuring a greater proportion of fixed costs are reimbursed on a cost basis. Since cost-based reimbursement only allows hospitals to break even, the real opportunity lies in Non-Medicare or Medicare Advantage patient days. It should be noted that Medicaid NF carve-out rates are excluded from routine costs at a statewide level and do not impact cost-based rates. If contracted rates exceed the statewide NF carve-out rate, the hospital generates a profit (see figure 1 below).

Strategies

1. Establish a plan to take more complex Medicare patients.
 - a. The Kearney County Health Services service area is slated for large growth in Medicare Advantage Plans which are far more challenging to bill/collect.
 - b. Accepting and treating complex patients now will lead to better Medicare Advantage rates in the future due to Traditional Medicare rates being the basis for Medicare Advantage rates.
2. Create Physician Buy-In for streamlined Swing Bed Acceptance Process.
 - a. Swing Bed Program success depends upon being able to build a "Culture of Yes".
 - b. Enable and build confidence in Hospital staff to take patients and become the "easy button" for metropolitan partners.
 - c. Who better to take care of the patients? Nursing Homes? Why Not Us?
3. Streamline Swing Bed Patient Acceptance Process.
 - a. The key to Swing Bed Program Improvement is being able to accept patients in a timely manner.
 - b. There should be agreed upon criteria for acceptance rather than many people needing to look over and approve before the decision is made.
4. Accept more Medicare Swing Bed Patients from PPS sites.
 - a. Swing Bed acceptance is mutually beneficial to both CAHs and larger PPS hospitals.

- b. CAH: Improve Medicare Census (Cost-Based Reimbursement).
- c. PPS: Lower Length of Stay (Lower Cost/Patient).

Figure 1



Behavioral Health Growth

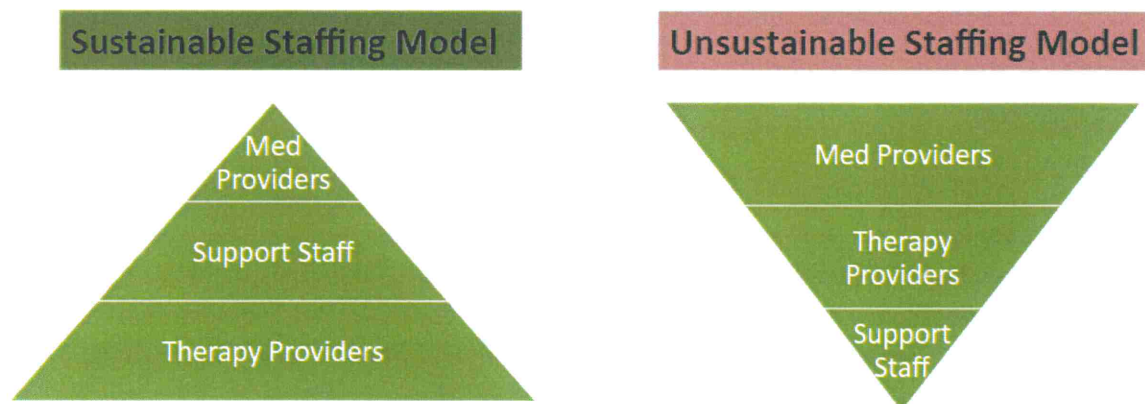
Overview

The strategic importance of Behavioral Health (BH) integration within healthcare systems, particularly in rural settings will become critical in the coming years. There are many opportunities for growth through value-based care and addressing high ER utilization by patients with BH needs (see figure 2 below). The post-pandemic surge in addiction cases highlights the necessity of BH services, which impact decision-making, medication adherence, and overall health outcomes. Financial viability depends on staffing efficiency, ensuring providers operate at the top of their licensure while leveraging telemedicine and alternative provider types to reduce costs. Addressing Upper Payment Limit (UPL) challenges and optimizing reimbursement models is crucial. Sustainable staffing models, investment in clerical support, and strategic partnerships with universities are key to expanding BH services while maintaining profitability.

Strategies

1. Recruit Male Behavioral Health Providers.
 - a. There are only female providers on staff, reducing the incentive for male patients to seek psych treatment.
2. Create a sustainable Behavioral Health staffing model where Therapy Providers are the base, followed by support staff, with one or two Medical Providers to oversee and make applicable orders/patient decisions (see figure 3).
 - a. This allows for Providers to work efficiently as possible and therapists to work at the top of their license.
3. Resolve issue in regards to staff not being able to see psych notes in the EHR.
 - a. There currently exists issues with KCHS Provider being able to see Psych notes in EHR.
4. Integrate Behavioral Health into the KCHS Care Continuum.
 - a. Behavioral Health (BH) integration into the care continuum represents opportunity for increased value for patients served.
 - b. This can be a feeder for ancillary services (i.e. Laboratory and Pharmacy).
 - c. This patient panel often represents 50% of high utilizers in the ER.

- d. School and Mobile Clinics were discussed as a way to feed behavioral health and other hospital programs.
 - e. Integration can help reduce the current 3-6 month wait time for psychiatric care.
5. Ensure that the correct Psych Providers (Therapy Providers compared to Med Providers) are taking the long patient visits.
- a. There are also inherently long patient visits, ensuring that the noted staffing model optimizes the time of the providers.

Figure 2**Figure 3**

Specialty Volume Growth

Overview

Specialty expansion in CAHs must be a strategic and deliberate process due to high barriers to entry, primarily driven by provider recruitment challenges. The greatest opportunities lie in Medicare-dominated specialties, which allow CAHs to offset investment costs through cost-based reimbursement and designation advantages such as RHC and 340B programs. Expanding specialty services not only strengthens financial sustainability but also enhances community perception of local healthcare quality and value.

Strategies

1. Evaluate physical space limitations.
 - a. Staffing, when to add more, who, and where.
 - b. Space.
 - c. Physical expansion, what does it look like?
2. Grow patient volumes through the above staffing models and operational changes.
 - a. Volume growth will come first, then margin, then specialties.
3. Become a location that specialists are attracted to due to hospital culture and unique panels of patients.
 - a. Specialists are now negotiating payment for their time in addition to allowing them to bill their professional fee.
4. Prioritize Cardiology, Orthopedics, Neurology, and Surgery.
 - a. These specialties will be the highest growing in KCHS service area over the next ten years.
 - b. Leverage CHI and other tertiary partner resources to limit investment and grow strategically.
 - c. Ensure that ER is part of the strategy, evaluate potential of adding new specialty services, and supplementing current services offered.
 - i. Based upon current referral volumes, targeted areas of focus could be: Rheumatology, Dermatology, Hematology/Oncology, Neurology

Facility Infrastructure

Overview

Expansion and growth of services will continue to be a top priority for KCHS, as both are critical to the continued sustainability as a healthcare provider in Kearney County. In some capacities, KCHS will be limited due to the lack of available space to continue on current growth trajectory. For history, in 2019, KCHS completed a Strategic Plan in collaboration with John Roberts, Chairman from the Nebraska Rural Health Association, to identify areas of focus for 2019-2021. A Facility Master Plan was conducted by HFG Architecture for KCHS, as part of the adopted Strategic Plan, which was completed in January 2021. As part of this review by HFG Architecture, it was identified that outside of patient care needs, and trending growth barriers, the facility plant faces challenges resulting from end-of-life infrastructure such as HVAC and boiler, while also contending with ongoing issues stemming from electrical, plumbing, and sewer from 1954 when KCHS was built. It will be imperative for KCHS to stay ahead of these challenges, and plan accordingly both short-term, and long-term. Projected patient volumes also show the need for expansion of patient care spaces to serve our growing outpatient service lines.

Strategies

1. Explore economic impact of various options, but also look into financing/grants opportunities.
 - a. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Grants.
 - b. Specific-Use Grants through State and Federal Funding.
 - c. Energy Credits through Federal Funding.
2. Weigh growth-based initiatives on various square footage additions departmentally.
 - a. Seek out new opportunities through programs and services.
 - b. Evaluate current growth trends and utilization departmentally.
 - c. Ensure best use of all spaces within the current facility infrastructure, and future.
3. Seek community involvement
 - a. Look to establish a thorough understanding of needs versus wants, and weighing the impact of potential wants. Learn what is it that community is willing to support.
 - b. Leverage local governance/municipalities on potential ways to partner for possible amenities/services.