



For post-acute providers

The Post-Acute Care Systemness Audit

Assess where post-acute organizations can improve to
harness the benefits of systemness

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How to use this audit

With post-acute organizations growing larger in size and scope due to record amounts of M&A deals and consolidation, the post-acute market is now comprised more of moderate to large systems than smaller, independent organizations. However, many systems have yet to unlock the power of systemness to capitalize on the advantages this size and scale can offer.

Systemness means using the full scope of services offered by an organization to help achieve goals like reducing costs, improving patient experience, and improving staff engagement. While systemness is a relatively widely accepted concept in the acute care industry, it is less prevalent—but no less critical—for post-acute providers to pursue.

This audit breaks down four categories of initiatives your organization should undertake to maximize the benefits of systemness. Each section concludes with a scoring system to assess where your organization is in its systemness journey and then provides next steps your organization should take at the system level.

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System-wide goal alignment



Why this matters

Every organization has a different starting point, needs, challenges, and internal factors that inform their systemness goals. A level of alignment is needed at each part of the planning process to ensure that your organization is successfully planning and implementing long-term, strategic systemness goals.

How much input from across the organization is involved in strategic planning?

- Do you have representatives from each service line involved in the strategic planning process?
- Do you have representatives from different levels of leadership involved in the strategic planning process?

CASE EXAMPLE

Western Health¹ centralizes their planning process by incorporating leaders from across the system and service lines in the creation of system strategy

1. Leadership from across system meets to surface opportunities, threats in the primary service areas
2. Strategy team prepares document with market-specific data pertaining to top-voted forces strategic plan must address
3. Strategy leader presents new plan to each region of the system, ensures everyone is bought in



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How aligned are system level and local level goals?

- How is each location performing on system goals? Where are they underperforming or overperforming?
- What is a reasonable goal for each location? What can they accomplish given their circumstances?
- What does each location need to reach their goal? What investments need to be made to help?
- Are goals communicated uniformly?

How standardized is the implementation of strategy?

- Do service lines have a liaison between the service line and system executive level to ensure service line is equipped to plug into strategic goals?
- How are goals being communicated to disparate sites of care?

1. Pseudonym

System-wide goal alignment, continued

Scoring and next steps

Moving the market forward

Checked nearly all boxes

- Pursue next level or aspirational objectives, such as the creation of an executive role with sole responsibility to align strategy and execution across service lines

Ahead of the curve

Checked three or more boxes

- Evaluate which of your top strategic goals are supported by systems-level thinking
- Identify liaisons at each location or service to be the bridge between executive and local governance
- Create location or service specific goals or KPIs that are responsible for within your broader strategic plan

Getting started

Checked fewer than three boxes

- Add systemness as a goal to your strategic plan and develop immediate objectives to begin working towards
- Add systemness goal setting as an agenda item to your next leadership meeting
- Designate specific actions your organization will commit to across the next year to build systemness capabilities

Baseline system standardization

Why this matters



Systemness is not synonymous with standardization, but the journey to harness the benefits of systemness requires a baseline level of consistency to unify your system. Standardizing non-clinical practices and certain clinical processes that uniformly affect your workforce and quality of care is vital.

How standardized are your non-clinical functions?

- Are non-clinical processes aligned across the system?
 - Do you use the same vendors for payroll
 - Do you use the same vendors for supply chain?
 - Do you have the same conduct and PTO policies across sites?
 - Do you have a centralized HR department over the entire system?
- Do you have a committee, governing body, or position in charge of enforcing operational standardization?

How standardized are your clinical functions?

- Are your care documentation protocols and EHR standardized across the system?
- Are admission and discharge processes standardized across the system?
- Is onboarding uniform across the system?
- Are baseline care standards the same across the system?

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Baseline system standardization, continued

Scoring and next steps

Moving the market forward

Checked nearly all boxes

- Pursue next level or aspirational objectives, such as the implementation of a centralized mission control center that focuses on tracking and analyzing system data to make informed decisions at the system level

Ahead of the curve

Checked three or more boxes

- Create system-wide and local standardization oversight committees
- Nominate a clinical champion to support and enforce care standards

Getting started

Checked fewer than three boxes

- Identify areas of variation across locations and across the system
- Choose 3-5 operational *and* clinical KPIs to standardize across the system
- Focus on baseline operational standardization before beginning clinical standardization

Internal and external system identity

Why this matters





The identity of post-acute organizations should always be system-level first, but many organizations fall into the pitfall of allowing individual locations or service line identities to take precedence. Leaders need to elevate identity to the system-level perspective that emphasizes long-term systemness goals and aligns with how staff and consumers view the system as a whole.

How do staff view you as a system?

- Do staff have a baseline knowledge of system goals?
- Does majority of staff agree with system goals?
- Do staff feel they are employed by the system, as opposed to an individual site?
- Do staff trust the system as a whole?

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How do patients and families view you as a system?

- Do consumers view quality across locations as consistent?
- Do consumers tend to remain in the system to receive follow-up care after having an initial encounter?

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Internal and external system identity, continued

How system-leading is branding strategy, internally and externally?

- Is system brand recognized by staff?
- Do facilities strike a balance between their local brand and system-level brand?
- Is branding integrated into newly acquired organizations and locations throughout the system?
- Is branding uniform on documents, websites, and email signatures?
- Is there a team or mechanism to track and implement system branding?

Scoring and next steps

Moving the market forward

Checked nearly all boxes

- Pursue next-level or aspirational objectives, such as implementing a program that allows staff to flex across locations to take shifts they desire at disparate sites of care and times

Ahead of the curve

Checked three or more boxes

- Ensure that system brand is clearly displayed on all buildings, logos, patient materials, education information, and advertisements
- Designate a specific brand identity for the system overall and any variation in local or service line branding

Getting started

Checked fewer than three boxes

- Conduct a gap analyses to:
 - Identify key misalignments between system identity and how staff view you
 - Identify gaps between intended identity and patient perception of identity. Consider using focus groups, in-depth interviews, or adding a question into routine patient paperwork or surveys
- Create a set of cultural principles that dually reflect organization and staff, sourced through staff surveys

System-based external partnerships



Why this matters

When leaders develop their post-acute systemness strategy, it's natural to start from an internal perspective, but organizations should consider how to extend their concept of systemness outside their immediate system. Leaders need to strategically collaborate with their top 2-3 partners to more successfully work towards mutually beneficial shared goals—creating integrated system partners. Criteria for these partnerships include selecting organizations with a close alignment in mission, that have a large patient population that might require post-acute services, have control of market share, have unmet provider post-acute needs that can be filled, and possess complimentary assets that benefit your organization.

What is the current status of your existing hospital partnerships?

- Do you have 2-3 hospital systems you collaborate with more strategically than your regular hospital partnerships?
- Do you have clear and mutual expectations of the level of partnership you are undertaking with partners?

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How well-aligned are your relationships with your close partners?

- Have you embedded your employees with counterparts across partner systems to more efficiently collaborate on day-to-day initiatives?
- Are partner meetings focused on integrated partnership and shared goals, without putting added weight on the needs of one partner?
- Is partnership structured to support long-term sustainability and mutual growth?

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System-based external partnerships, continued

Scoring and next steps

Moving the market forward

Checked nearly all boxes

- Pursue next-level or aspirational objectives, such as exploring how to continue to grow your relationship integrated system partners to more efficiently serve your organization's long-term systemness goals

Ahead of the curve

Checked three or more boxes

- For each partnership identify 1-2 mutually beneficial initiatives to work to in the long-term

Getting started

Checked fewer than three boxes

- Recalibrate with internal leaders at next leadership meeting on what systemness-specific goals are
- Reconsider goals with health system partners to ensure post-acute systemness goals are being considered equally
- Evaluate referral partners in your market to identify those with closest strategic alignment that you can partner with to create a system-based partnership



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