

ARTICLE

The last mile of data analytics: How to achieve ROI in healthcare

| JAN 03, 2025

<https://www.chartis.com/insights/last-mile-data-analytics-how-achieve-roi-healthcare>

Many of today's digitally driven healthcare organizations face a conundrum: They are data rich but insight poor. Systematically making accurate, reliable data available is a significant undertaking. But it only becomes valuable when analytics programs get that information to those who need it when they need it. This "last mile" is often the greatest challenge to program success because it requires organization-wide commitment to create and sustain a data-driven culture.

But the effort is worthwhile. Organizations that master the last mile empower their teams to confidently make timely, data-informed decisions that create better performance across dimensions like clinical quality and safety, financial sustainability, and patient and provider experience.

In a Scottsdale Institute webinar Chartis recently moderated, three healthcare leaders shared best practices for a successful last mile of analytics. We discuss three main takeaways from their experiences at CentraCare, LifeBridge Health, and Johns Hopkins Health Plans.

Effective delivery is essential for data analytics to drive improvements

Today's healthcare organizations continue to create massive quantities of data that can be expensive to maintain, store, and migrate. Without the ability to tap into the power of that data, the entire process is a futile effort in which costs exceed returns. Meanwhile, organizations could be put at a competitive disadvantage as they miss out on opportunities to improve care delivery and experience.

Organizations that create internal demand for analytics also need to be able to deliver analytics in an accessible, efficient way. This is key for the end users to have the insights they need as they are making decisions. It's also critical for the sustainability of the staff who are creating reports and dashboards.

Panelists emphasized the importance for organizations to start their data analytics journey with the last mile in mind. The delivery of data and insights should be part of planning conversations both internally and with potential vendor partners. Without these conversations, organizations may fail to achieve strategic value and potentially even introduce new risks and vulnerabilities. Addressing the last mile ensures that analytics investments translate into return on investment.

Three actions enable a successful last mile

During the webinar, panelists highlighted three keys to success as their organizations have advanced their data analytics journeys:

1. Collaborate for results. With centralized data analytics models (or any variation thereof), communication and collaboration between the centralized team and business units is critical to ensure the right information flows to different parts of the organization efficiently, said **Zach Bork**, Vice President of Enterprise Analytics & Transformation at CentraCare, an integrated healthcare system in central Minnesota. It's also important in terms of reducing time- and resource-intensive analytics rework, he added.

"Our best work comes when we are able to collaborate with those closer to the work, those seeing patients, and those who are genuinely interested in the information," said Bork. "That's where the magic really happens."

For example, when CentraCare began diverting patients away from its tertiary care center due to a lack of available beds, it knew it needed to reduce its length of stay to serve more patients in the community. While it assumed the biggest impact would come from patients discharged to skilled nursing facilities or long-term care hospitals, data analyses showed otherwise: The organization could best reduce length of stay by focusing on patients discharged home.

"A really talented nurse on our transformation team worked with hospitalists and unit leaders to dig more deeply into the data," said Bork. "After we had more conversations, we knew specifically what days of the week we had issues, and then through collaboration with the clinical partners, we could figure out what was happening operationally during those days."

2. Incentivize data-informed decision-making. C-suite buy-in is paramount, said Bork, and at CentraCare, it helps that 40% of its profit margin is tied to value-based care. "The ability to be successful in a total cost of care world requires actionable insights that drive clinical improvements," he said.

The organization also expects leaders to come to the table with data. "No investment moves forward without the use of data and leaders' ability to articulate what they know for planning going forward," he added.

One caveat is that incentivizing data use requires trust in the data, said **Tressa Springmann**, Senior Vice President, Chief Information & Digital Officer at LifeBridge Health, an integrated healthcare system in Maryland. "We need to figure out how to grab the data in the first mile through data stewardship, so we create better data hygiene at the point of capture to increase confidence for reliable analysis," she said.

3. Empower business units. Educating staff on self-service capabilities and data literacy is vital, said Springmann. “How do we create a safe space and an appropriate operating model for each business unit to have the confidence, autonomy, and comfort in developing their own ability for decision-making based on data for their business unit?” she added.

Bork agreed. That’s why CentraCare recently created a data repository and data catalogue to help users access information when they need it without having to request analytics support.

“Self-service is absolutely a key strategy for us,” he said, adding that self-service tools prevent wasted labor on manually generating information that could be automated. “In the past, we produced more than 12,000 reports each month, and yet we still received endless requests to the deficit of about 43 requests [per month], on average. Fast forward to today, and we actually have a surplus of about five requests a month. We’re meeting demand without adding resources and people.”

Along the same lines, organizations must clearly define expectations for analytics that each business unit should perform, versus centralized teams, said **Bethany McAleer**. She is the Chief Actuary and Chief Analytics Officer at Johns Hopkins Health Plans, the administrator of provider-sponsored health plans that are backed by the clinical and research excellence of Johns Hopkins Medicine.

“We’re looking to push more and more capabilities out to the business units,” McAleer added. “We’re making progress in terms of defining and agreeing on what work belongs where. But every business unit is going to have a different level of maturity and excitement around this. We’re also focused on driving a collaborative effort around training business analysts and business thought workers in terms of what they need to understand about the data and the tools.”

Look to the last mile before you start the first mile

Focusing on the last mile of data analytics at the onset of an organization’s analytics journey ensures the technology will give organizations the insights they need to ensure high-quality patient care while simultaneously promoting financial sustainability.

Our services

[STRATEGIC TRANSFORMATION](#)

[PERFORMANCE TRANSFORMATION](#)

[DIGITAL & TECHNOLOGY TRANSFORMATION](#)

[CHARTIS CENTERS FOR AI & STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE](#)

[PAYER TRANSFORMATION](#)

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Adam Baker

Partner