



**Kansas Health Impact Conference**

*Bridging Gaps for a Healthier Kansas*

# The Health Equity Innovation Award

Thursday, October 23rd, 2025  
Hilton Garden Inn, Manhattan, KS





## **2025 Health Equity Innovation Award**

### **Introduction**

The Health Equity Innovation Award celebrates organizations and leaders who are breaking down barriers to care and creating new pathways toward healthier, more equitable communities. Innovation in health equity takes many forms—whether it's using technology to expand access, tailoring care to meet cultural and language needs, addressing social drivers like housing and transportation, or building powerful partnerships across sectors. This year's nominees truly exemplify these values, bringing forward creative, sustainable, and community-driven solutions that are reducing disparities and improving lives.

## Examples of health equity innovation may include:

**Technology-based solutions:** The use of technology, such as mobile health apps, telemedicine, and wearable devices, can improve access to healthcare services and health information for populations in remote or underserved areas.

**Community Health Worker programs:** These programs train individuals from the community to serve as liaisons between healthcare providers and community members. Community health workers can provide culturally competent care, health education, and advocacy, helping to bridge the gap between healthcare systems and marginalized populations.

**Culturally tailored interventions:** Designing interventions that consider cultural beliefs, values, and practices can improve engagement and health outcomes. This includes adapting health education materials, providing language services, and ensuring representation of diverse communities in healthcare decision-making.

**Social drivers of health interventions:** Recognizing that health disparities are influenced by social drivers such as education, housing, employment, and income, innovative programs can address these underlying factors. For example, initiatives that provide access to affordable housing, education and job training, or income support can have positive impacts on health equity.

**Collaborative partnerships:** Building partnerships among healthcare providers, community organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders can foster innovative approaches to address health disparities. Collaborative efforts can leverage resources, expertise, and collective action to tackle complex health equity challenges.

**KFMC Health Improvement Partners** is pleased to present the third annual Health Equity Innovation Award. The award recognizes organizations, affiliated groups, partnerships, or individuals that have developed and implemented novel approaches, strategies and interventions aimed at reducing health disparities and promoting health equity in their community.

Award winners think outside the box, challenge existing systems, and implement creative solutions to ensure that everyone has a fair and equitable opportunity to achieve optimal health.

The Innovation Award winner is recognized at today's event and in subsequent social media and marketing campaigns, plus receives a \$500 cash award and free registration to the Kansas Health Impact Conference.

## Criteria for the Health Equity Innovation Award



**1. Impact on health disparities:** Degree to which the nominee addresses and reduces health disparities among different populations, particularly those that are marginalized and underserved.



**2. Reach and accessibility:** The nominee's ability to reach and benefit their targeted population, taking into account how they improve access to healthcare services, health information, and/or resources for marginalized communities, including those facing barriers such as geographic location, language, and/or socioeconomic status.



**3. Cultural competence:** The nominee demonstrates cultural competence and sensitivity by considering the unique needs, beliefs, and values of the target population, including how they address cultural barriers and promote inclusivity and understanding.



**4. Sustainability and scalability:** The potential for the intervention to be sustained over time and replicated in different settings or communities. This includes its feasibility, cost-effectiveness, scalability, and potential for long-term impact.



**5. Collaboration and partnerships:** The nominee promotes collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, such as healthcare providers, community organizations, policymakers, and individuals from the affected communities.



**6. Evidence-based (if applicable):** There is evidence supporting the innovation, including research, data, and/or evaluation studies demonstrating its effectiveness in improving health equity outcomes if available.

## Congratulations to all nominees!

Read more about this year's impressive group of healthcare organizations working to further health equity in their communities on the next page.



## 2025 Health Equity Innovation Award Winner

### City of Lawrence Homeless Response Team, Homeless Solutions Division

The City of Lawrence Homeless Response Team (HRT) addresses some of the community's deepest health inequities by delivering medical care, behavioral health outreach, substance use assessments, and housing navigation directly to unsheltered individuals. HRT removes barriers of identification, insurance, and appointments, while integrating peer specialists, clinicians, and housing support into one mobile team.



HRT's work is grounded in the Housing First model, leveraging evidence-based outreach practices such as the National Alliance to End Homelessness Housing-Focused Street Outreach Framework. Services are mobile, multilingual when needed, and pet-inclusive, eliminating many silos that prevent marginalized populations from accessing care. These measurable outcomes demonstrate effectiveness in advancing health equity:

- 63% reduction in unsheltered homelessness within one year
- Deployment of three Narcan vending machines at high-need sites for 24/7 access to lifesaving medication
- Increased successful placements into housing or shelter
- Reduced preventable ER visits among engaged clients

HRT's philosophy is trauma-informed, harm reduction-based, and rooted in lived experience. Rather than creating stand-alone programs, the team leverages existing contracts, targeted grants (including Kansas Fights Addiction funding), and partnerships to share resources and staff. The framework can be adapted to urban or rural communities, ensuring long-term impact and feasibility even with limited funding. Moreover, the team actively works to promote dignity, choice, and respect in every interaction, ensuring inclusivity for all.

For more information about City of Lawrence Homeless Response Team, visit [www.lawrenceks.org/homeless-solutions](http://www.lawrenceks.org/homeless-solutions) or contact Misty Bosch-Hastings at [mhastings@lawrenceks.org](mailto:mhastings@lawrenceks.org).

### Decatur Health, Family Practice Clinic

Decatur Health is addressing one of rural communities' most pressing needs: access to mental health care. Through a key partnership with High Plains Mental Health, the Family Practice Clinic now offers on-site counseling 1-2 days per week, eliminating long travel distances and financial barriers that often prevent rural patients from seeking help. The clinic also implemented the evidence-based Zero Suicide program, creating a systematic framework to identify and support at-risk individuals before a crisis occurs. These initiatives directly respond to needs identified in the hospital's Community Health Needs Assessment and are reducing stigma by integrating mental health into primary care. With a sustainable model built on collaboration and resource sharing, Decatur Health is expanding access, improving equity, and saving lives in northwest Kansas.



For more information about Decatur Health, visit [decaturchalth.org](https://decaturchalth.org) or contact Jordan Stephenson at [jstephenson@decaturchalth.org](mailto:jstephenson@decaturchalth.org).

### Missouri EMS Association & Kansas EMS Association

The Missouri and Kansas EMS Associations are advancing health equity through their Mobile Integrated Healthcare and Community Paramedicine model. By deploying paramedics and Community Health Workers (CHWs) directly into underserved communities, the program reduces barriers such as transportation, provider shortages, and cost—particularly for rural and low-income populations. CHWs, drawn from the communities they serve, provide cultural insight, language support, and trusted connections, ensuring care is accessible and responsive. This integrated model addresses chronic disease management, preventive care, and post-discharge follow-up, easing reliance on emergency rooms and reducing hospital readmissions. Nationally recognized with the HRSA Primary Care Innovation Award, the program has demonstrated measurable reductions in non-emergency 911 calls and improved outcomes, offering a scalable blueprint for coordinated, community-driven care.



For more information about Missouri EMS Association & Kansas EMS Association, visit [www.memsa.org](https://www.memsa.org) and [www.kemsa.org](https://www.kemsa.org) or contact Justin Duncan at [jduncan@wcadems.org](mailto:jduncan@wcadems.org).

### Nemaha Valley Community Hospital

Nemaha Valley Community Hospital is advancing health equity by making care more accessible for its growing Spanish-speaking population. Recognizing that many resources were available only in English, the hospital translated its website, patient documents, and financial assistance forms into Spanish, and worked with its EHR vendor to complete missing portal functions. Since these changes, requests for Spanish translation average more than 30 per week, and Hispanic primary care visits have more than doubled in just two years. The hospital also engages a Spanish-speaking patient advisor and a Community Health Worker to guide culturally responsive improvements. With sustainable translation practices and ongoing collaboration with community members, Nemaha Valley is removing barriers, building trust, and expanding access for underserved families.



For more information about Nemaha Valley Community Hospital, visit [www.nemvch.com](http://www.nemvch.com) or contact Kiley Floyd at [kfloyd@nemvch.org](mailto:kfloyd@nemvch.org).

### RISE Cowley

RISE Cowley is a cross-sector coalition dedicated to making Cowley County a healthier, more equitable place to live, work, and play. By hosting more than 30 “A Closer Look at Cowley Kids” Data Walks, the coalition elevated local awareness of child poverty and its impact on health, leading to the Cowley ACTs initiative on childcare, housing, health, and rural resources. Through efforts like the Grow Club at Winfield Correctional Facility—producing thousands of pounds of produce annually for hunger relief—RISE Cowley expands access while fostering dignity and skill-building. The coalition sustains the Local Health Equity Action Team, ensuring culturally competent solutions such as interpreter access, transportation to markets and care, and inclusive park improvements. With nearly 20 years of systems-level impact, RISE Cowley exemplifies collaborative, community-driven action for health equity.



For more information about RISE Cowley, visit [www.risecowley.org](http://www.risecowley.org) or contact Allyson Payne at [apayne@cowleycountyks.gov](mailto:apayne@cowleycountyks.gov).

### TECHS EMS

TECHS EMS is redefining emergency medical services by extending care beyond the initial 911 call. Through its Patient Advocacy Outreach Program, EMS advocates follow up with high-risk patients—many from underserved or rural communities—to connect them with primary care, behavioral health, and social services. By providing in-home wellness checks and follow-up visits, the program removes barriers of distance and transportation while fostering trust through culturally respectful communication and partnerships with local faith-based and community groups. Its integration into existing EMS infrastructure makes the program both cost-effective and scalable, supporting preventive care and reducing disparities. Already, TECHS EMS has achieved a 10% reduction in repeat 911 calls from frequent users, improving health outcomes, easing strain on hospitals, and preserving emergency response capacity for true crises.



For more information about TECHS EMS, visit [www.ksems.com](http://www.ksems.com) or contact Con Olson at [con.techsems@gmail.com](mailto:con.techsems@gmail.com).

### Upside, Family Practice Clinic

Upside, Healthy Blue Kansas's housing stabilization partner, is transforming health equity by helping Medicaid members experiencing or at risk of homelessness, secure safe, stable housing. Serving children, families, individuals with disabilities, and those in rural or food-insecure communities, Upside directly addresses socioeconomic disparities that undermine health outcomes. Within 24 hours of referral, care guides connect with members to assess needs and develop culturally affirming, language-appropriate housing strategies—coordinating every step from placement to move-in without delays or handoffs. By leveraging a Kansas-specific housing network, real-time vacancy tracking, and partnerships with care coordinators, community organizations, and local housing authorities, Upside delivers a scalable, sustainable model now active in multiple states. In its first six months, Upside supported more than 200 Kansans, with 100% of survey respondents reporting improved overall well-being.



For more information about Upside, visit [www.joinupside.com](http://www.joinupside.com) or contact Megan Wagner at [mwagner@joinupside.com](mailto:mwagner@joinupside.com).



## Meet Our Judges

1.



### **Lisa Bari, MBA, MPH**

#### **Head of Policy and External Affairs at Innovaccer**

Lisa Bari leads health and AI policy and government relations at Innovaccer. She is the host and creator of the Policy Stack podcast, as well as the co-host of the Health Tech Talk Show. Lisa also serves on the Board of Directors of the Zorya Foundation. Previously, she was the founding CEO of Civitas Networks for Health, a national nonprofit that connects and empowers regional health improvement collaboratives, health information exchanges, and other stakeholders to use data and multi-sector approaches to improve health outcomes and equity. Prior to Civitas, Lisa served as the Health IT and Interoperability lead at CMS Innovation Center, where she led health IT policy for ACO models, launched the first CMS AI Health Outcomes Challenge, and was one of the authors of the CMS Interoperability and Patient Access rule. Lisa holds an MBA from Purdue University and an MPH from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

2.



### **Kyle Kessler**

#### **Executive Director of the Association of Community Mental Health Centers of Kansas**

Kyle has spent over 25 years working in public policy analysis and development, with more than 20 years in health and human services, public policy exclusively. He began his career in state government, with his last position as Deputy Secretary for Public and Governmental Services at the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services. Before joining the Association nearly a dozen years ago, Kyle worked for a large behavioral health and child welfare provider, most recently as Executive Vice-President of Public Affairs. He is a former Chair of the Board of the National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disability Directors, and he currently serves on the Board of Directors for the National Council of Mental Wellbeing. Additionally, he has served as the President of the Kansas Children's Alliance and as Treasurer of the Kansas Head Start Association. Kyle holds an MPA from Kansas State University.

3.



**Alisha Saucedo, LCSW, CST, RPT-S, SEP (she/her)**

**RISE Professional, LLC**

Alisha Saucedo is a Licensed Specialist Clinical Social Worker, AASECT Certified Sex Therapist, Registered Play Therapy Supervisor, Somatic Experiencing Practitioner, Certified EMDR Therapist and Consultant, Breathwork Facilitator, and Artist. Her area of focus is in treating trauma with somatic approaches, as well as supporting sexual empowerment and liberation through creativity and body-based approaches. Alisha's experience includes working with individuals who are part of the LGBTQIA+ communities, are poly and kink participants, have experienced perinatal loss, and/or have experienced sexual or racial trauma and violence. It is her joy to support humans in experiencing their lives and love in fullness.