

Understanding Accountable Care



The Long-term Enhanced Accountable Care Organization (ACO) Design (LEAD) Model provides an on-ramp for health care providers (i.e., physicians and group practices), including those who are new to accountable care.



ACOs are groups of doctors, hospitals, and other health care professionals who work together to provide patients high-quality, coordinated care; improve health outcomes; and manage costs.



Under [accountable care](#), providers establish and sustain person-centered care teams who take responsibility for improving the quality of care and health outcomes for a defined group of individuals, aiming to reduce care fragmentation and avoid unnecessary costs for patients and the health care system.

Introducing the LEAD Model

- **A new long-term Medicare model built for sustainability and flexibility.** LEAD is a nationwide, ten-year Innovation Center model that gives participants a stable, predictable pathway to move into and remain in value-based care for the long term.
- **Designed to work for organizations caring for complex, high-cost patients.** LEAD provides support and flexibility to better integrate care for High Need beneficiaries, including beneficiaries who are homebound or home-limited and beneficiaries who are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid.
- **Monthly upfront payments, specialist integration, and beneficiary incentives to drive real change.** Through capitated payments, tools to partner with specialists, and new Benefit Enhancements that incentivize beneficiaries to seek care from high-value ACOs, LEAD gives participants the resources and flexibility to redesign care delivery, engage patients, and succeed in accountable care.

What Participation in LEAD Means for Providers



Innovative Benchmarks and Performance Targets: ACOs are measured based on their unique patient populations, with tailored financial benchmarks that meet ACOs where they are on their journey to value-based care.



Upfront Monthly Payments for Care Improvement: Get monthly upfront payments to invest in team care, prevention, and community partnership, keeping people healthy and connected.



Simple, Meaningful Quality Measures: Focus on what matters most: fewer hospitalizations, faster follow-ups, patient satisfaction, and managing diabetes and blood pressure with easy-to-follow measures.



Flexible Risk Options: With LEAD, ACOs can choose the risk level that fits their organization: starting with shared risk or taking on full risk for greater rewards.

LEAD offers two options for provider participation in the model:

1. **Participant Providers:** Physicians and health care organizations that take direct accountability for cost and quality and drive beneficiary alignment under the model. Typically, though not required to be, primary care providers.
2. **Preferred Providers:** Physicians and health care organizations that can take indirect financial accountability and do not drive beneficiary alignment or quality performance for the ACO. Typically, but not required to be, specialists and institutional providers (e.g., post-acute care).

Benefits of Joining a LEAD ACO

LEAD ACOs offer real, practical support to help health care providers care for patients more effectively, manage complex patients, and build a stronger, more sustainable practice.

LEAD's financial methodology is designed for a wide range of organizations.

- ACOs with historically high patient spending will have an on-ramp to accountability with higher, more stable initial benchmarks.
- Experienced ACOs will not have to constantly exceed prior performance to share in savings.

LEAD's flexible payment options allow providers to receive more payments on an upfront monthly basis, enabling them to make investments that can improve patient care.

LEAD allows ACOs to offer more benefits to patients, thereby promoting preventive behaviors and healthier living and supporting choice and competition.

LEAD integrates supports for High Needs and dually eligible beneficiaries across all ACOs, while providing extra supports for organizations that specialize in caring for these populations.

LEAD provides more ways for specialists to participate in ACOs, including standardized episode-based risk contracting.

LEAD's ten-year model structure provides predictability and time to see return on investments.

Next Steps to Joining or Forming an ACO

- ✓ **Reach Out to a Local ACO:** If you're already connected to an ACO in your area, contact them to find out if they're considering participating in LEAD or to express your interest in joining, under the LEAD Model.
- ✓ **Talk with Your Practice Group or Network:** If you are part of a larger group, clinic system, or hospital, ask your leadership about exploring LEAD ACO opportunities.
- ✓ **Connect with the LEAD Help Desk:** Have questions or need personal guidance? The [LEAD Help Desk](#) is ready to help you understand your options, connect you with potential ACO partners, and walk you through the participation process.
- ✓ **Learn More and Stay Informed:** Keep an eye out for educational webinars, meetings, and updates about the LEAD Model. Even if you are still exploring, staying informed will help you make the best decision for your patients and your practice.

Additional Resources