

\$30,000 in grants support telehealth equity initiatives

Projects aim to decrease barriers to telehealth

The Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) recently recognized OHSU's efforts to advance health care equity through telehealth and health technology in new and effective ways. Two OHSU initiatives received [2022 Telehealth Equity Catalyst \(TEC\) Awards](#) and pilot grants of \$15,000.

OHSU's winning clinical delivery program is titled, "The Patient Portal Simulator," led by primary investigator Jeffrey Gold, M.D., *vice chair for Quality and Safety and the co-chair of the Health Disparities Reduction Core Steering Committee. OHSU's winning clinical delivery pilot program is titled, "Centering Community Expertise in Designing for Digital Health Equity," led by primary investigator Anthony Cheng, M.D., *medical director in the Office of Digital Health.

Making digital health easier — with simulation

MyChart — OHSU's patient portal — plays a pivotal role in the delivery of telehealth at OHSU. But activation and use of the portal has notable gaps across demographics. Data from OHSU Health Disparities Reduction Core dashboards show that patients whose primary language is not English and Black patients are significantly less likely to activate their portal accounts compared to their white counterparts. Black seniors have some of the lowest rates of portal activation. Even if they activate an account, study data also show that understanding how to use the portal is a significant barrier for many.

Dr. Gold and colleagues pioneered a simulator that provides a test environment identical to the OHSU MyChart. This tool allows patients to practice with the full functionality of the portal without compromising their personal information or electronic health record. This simulator is an important and novel tool in the effort to improve patient engagement. The TEC grant will allow OHSU to expand portal usage by creating curricula for patient education using the simulator.

"We are excited to explore how the design of digital health tools and systems can advance our efforts to achieve digital equity by making digital health easier for patients," Dr. Gold said. "Digital health and diversity, equity and inclusion are core to OHSU's mission."

Centering human needs, engaging community organizations

Can we solve a problem if we don't understand what it is? Rather than working in a health care vacuum to create digital tools, Dr. Cheng is leading an initiative focused on human-centered design principles for community engagement with telemedicine.

"As health care is reimagined in the COVID-era with a focus on digital health, our goal is to use this moment of revolution to create a more equitable future in the delivery of health care," Dr. Cheng said.

The Community Organization-Led Equity by Design (CO-LED) collaborative brings community-based organizations representing perspectives of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) communities to focus on innovations in digital health. Organizations partnering with OHSU through CO-LED include Adelante Mujeres, Bridge-Pamoja, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, Lutheran

Community Services Northwest, Native American Youth Association and Micronesian Islander Community. Building relationships with these and numerous other community-based organizations has been central to the work of OHSU's Vaccine Equity Committee. The perspectives from this group will generate understanding of structural barriers and psychosocial needs in creating telehealth training. Following CO-LED and stakeholder feedback, OHSU will develop learning launches and prototypes.

The OHSU Health Integrated Delivery System (IDS) supports the collaborative with funding for engagement activities. Funding from the AAMC grant will be used to evaluate the program, engage community participants and support learning launches and workshops.

Prime examples of effective efforts to advance health care equity and telehealth

Rosha McCoy, M.D., FAAP, the acting chief health care officer and senior director for Advancing Clinical Leadership and Quality at AAMC, praised the OHSU initiatives as prime examples of effective efforts. In 2021, AAMC launched the first TEC Awards to identify and highlight academic health systems that were directly addressing barriers to care via telehealth and improving care through both clinical delivery and medical education, particularly for underserved communities.

"I'm excited to see the TEC community grow and look forward to continued partnership with our new cohort of the 2022 TEC Award and Pilot Grant recipients," she said. "By leveraging technology and community collaborations, academic medicine will continue to be a leader in improving access and equitable care."

*Particulars:

- Jeffrey Gold, M.D., professor of Medicine, OHSU School of Medicine
- Anthony Cheng, M.D., assistant professor of family medicine, OHSU School of Medicine