



Every Minute Counts: Implementing a Stroke System of Care



A stroke system of care ensures that stroke patients are rapidly transported to the appropriate medical facilities that are certified to provide the level of care they need. By adhering to nationally recognized criteria for stroke care, states can set up a system where patients receive the right treatment at the right time—dramatically improving outcomes and saving lives.

A Key Need



Critical Need for Stroke Care Coordination

Timely and effective stroke treatment can be the difference between life and death. The American Heart Association identifies essential criteria that medical centers must meet to provide optimal stroke care. States can officially recognize these facilities based on their certification and develop policies to ensure patients are transported to the best-equipped hospitals.



Small Changes Help Save Lives

Even a modest improvement in stroke care—reducing stroke-related deaths by just 2-3% annually—could prevent 20,000 deaths in the U.S. alone and about 400,000 globally.¹ A well-coordinated system of care can make this life-saving difference.

Key Components of a Successful Stroke System of Care



Community Education and Awareness

A successful stroke system should educate the public on stroke warning signs, risk factors, and prevention methods. It should especially focus on populations at higher risk for stroke or poor outcomes. Programs should be monitored to ensure they are effectively driving behavior change and increasing treatment rates.



Preventative Measures

The system should identify and treat stroke risk factors in all at-risk populations, leveraging innovative tools like digital health technologies and behavioral interventions to encourage healthier lifestyles and adherence to stroke prevention protocols.



Tailoring Systems for Local Needs

Stroke systems of care should be tailored to meet regional needs but must be grounded in the latest scientific guidelines. These systems ensure seamless transitions between care stages, from emergency response to rehabilitation, filling gaps that may otherwise hinder a patient's recovery.



Registry for Continuous Improvement

For lasting improvements, states must establish a registry infrastructure. Comprehensive Stroke Centers, Thrombectomy-Capable Stroke Centers, and Primary Stroke Centers should be required to participate, and Acute Stroke Ready Hospitals should be encouraged to join. These registries provide data for hospitals to assess their stroke care performance, identify gaps, and improve patient outcomes.

¹ Adeoye, O., Nyström, K.V., Yavagal, D.R., et al. Recommendations for the Establishment of Stroke Systems of Care: A 2019 Update. *Stroke*. 2019;50:e187-e210