



# Powering health care innovation through strategic collaborations



UnitedHealth Group and stakeholders across the industry work together to help solve problems facing employers and employees.

Innovation is part of the UnitedHealth Group DNA. But solving challenges within an industry as complicated as health care demands collaboration: No one entity can go it alone.

UnitedHealth Group, the parent company of UnitedHealthcare, taps into expertise across myriad sectors of the industry—from startups and established companies to universities, research institutions and health systems such as Mayo Clinic—to help drive impactful innovation. Combining skills, perspectives and resources from across the health care landscape may help accelerate change in costs, health outcomes and member experiences.

“The best part of collaborating with UnitedHealth Group is the speed with which you can move the needle,” says Clarissa Diamantidis, a researcher and associate professor of medicine at Duke University. “The breadth and depth of its infrastructure makes moving things along much easier to do than in a traditional academic setting.”

In recent years, UnitedHealth Group—and its companies, UnitedHealthcare and Optum—has engaged in strategic collaborations around:



**Identifying and managing chronic conditions**



**Simplifying processes and experiences**



**Supporting health care startups**

**“Our collective research efforts are designed to accelerate the pace of health care innovation and improve the quality of care for members.”**

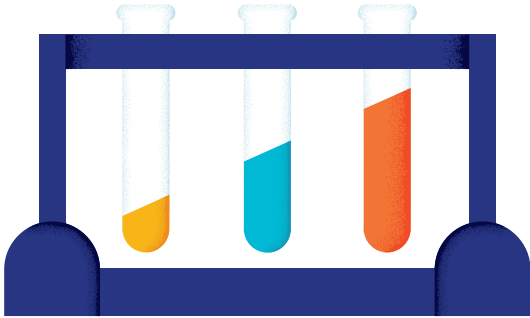
**Beth Erickson**

Director of Health Care Research  
Optum

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## Identifying and managing chronic conditions



The scope and quality of data available to UnitedHealth Group is foundational to the value the company brings to collaborators. “There are only a few systems that have national health data, and UnitedHealth Group is one of them,” Diamantidis says. The data provides a national representation of clinical care in the U.S. “It’s a unique health data set that can answer a lot of questions that many other data sets cannot,” Diamantidis adds.

Diamantidis was part of a team that worked with UnitedHealth Group to test innovative ways of identifying those at risk of chronic kidney disease (CKD). UnitedHealth Group has recognized CKD as a priority because it’s a common, resource-intensive condition that often carries a high risk of poor outcomes. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), as many as 9 in 10 adults with CKD don’t know they have it.<sup>1</sup>

“Unfortunately, many people who have risk factors for kidney disease are not routinely screened for it,” Diamantidis says. CKD is typically diagnosed in the clinical setting. But lack of knowledge among providers, obstacles to regular in-person care and bias in determining who gets screened all contribute to under-testing, she adds.

In a small study coordinated between UnitedHealth Group and Diamantidis, UnitedHealth Group members with a risk factor for CKD had a kit sent directly to their homes. The recipients collected blood and urine samples and mailed them back for screening. Those with abnormal tests were then alerted that they should follow up with their primary care provider. “It’s a way of streamlining and engaging people in their own care,” Diamantidis says.

The study found that nearly 60% of people who received a kit returned it, and 9 in 10 of those were able to be processed. Of those, 20% of members who did not have a diagnosis of kidney disease had lab values indicating moderate or greater risk of CKD. “The goal was to identify those who are at risk of kidney disease and test the feasibility of a home testing service, and both outcomes were positive,” Diamantidis says.

**“To study a home test for kidney disease in my world would probably take years and years. We did it within a year with UnitedHealth Group.”**

### **Clarissa Diamantidis**

Researcher, Associate Professor of Medicine  
Duke University

# Simplifying processes and experiences

“Overwhelming” and “time-consuming.” That’s how 65% of surveyed U.S. adults describe their experience of coordinating and managing health care.<sup>2</sup> Streamlining and simplifying the experience for members, employers and providers often requires working with others to identify and solve for the pain points that exist within the health care system.

One way UnitedHealthcare works to make it easier for members to **access care** includes teaming up with community-based organizations across the nation to **address social determinants of health (SDOH)** and connect members to the resources they need. Since 2018, UnitedHealthcare has awarded \$62M in grants across 30 states and the District of Columbia.<sup>3</sup>

## Communities of Health

### St Paul, MN

In collaboration with M Health Fairview, Minnesota Community Care, Sanneh Foundation, Second Harvest Heartland, Fairview Frontiers and Ebenezer, the Fairview Community Health and Wellness Hub was built to help make it easier for community members to access culturally specific primary and behavioral health care, social need screenings with referrals to community-based resources and a food distribution center with fresh, Minnesota-grown produce and pantry staples.

### Memphis, TN

In collaboration with the University of Tennessee Health Science Center (UTHSC), West Clinic and additional community partners, the UTHSC Health Hub was built to provide health coaching and support in areas like healthy eating, exercise, medication adherence, behavioral health, health screenings and chronic disease education, as well as SDOH-related screenings with referrals to community resources.

UnitedHealthcare also works with different health systems to help ensure its network strategy meets the unique needs of employers and employees. For example, in one of the country’s highest cost areas in Colorado, UnitedHealthcare collaborated with 2 local health systems to develop a new health plan with a curated network of quality providers, offering improved access to care and better cost management.

Simplification also means removing administrative burdens so providers can spend more time caring for their patients and employers can spend less time managing their health plan. For **providers**, this includes efforts to **remove prior authorizations** for common procedures and prescriptions—with guidance from providers and industry experts—and to integrate data feeds and eligibility information into different electronic medical record (EMR) systems and provider workflows. On the employer side, **UHC Hub™** works to bring together different benefit vendors into one streamlined dashboard, making it easier for employers to select and purchase the solutions that meet their employees’ needs.

“At UnitedHealthcare, it’s about innovating with purpose, being extremely practical in our approach and making sure we are leading with the problem to be solved.” says Jean-François Beaulé, FSA, executive vice president of design and innovation for UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual.



**“In health care, we have a lot to do in order to deliver simplicity. Technology plays a role, but making it more human-centered and higher value are the real goals.”**

**Jean-François Beaulé, FSA**

Executive Vice President of Design and Innovation  
UnitedHealthcare Employer & Individual

# Supporting startups through UnitedHealthcare Accelerator

The **UnitedHealthcare Accelerator** is a mentorship-driven program focused on helping early-stage startups foster growth and enable pathways to commercialization. As senior director of innovation at UnitedHealthcare, Clayton Burke oversees the Accelerator program, which is based on cross-functional collaboration. The mentors, events and curricula it offers to startups bring people together from inside and outside UnitedHealthcare to help solve important problems in health care.

The immediate goal is to help startups grow, but the program also reinforces the culture of innovation at UnitedHealthcare by providing exposure to new ways of thinking and risk-taking. “Our program is really focused on how we accelerate the pace of innovation and how we bolster the right capabilities to innovate with speed and confidence,” Burke says.

Each year, the Accelerator evaluates more than 1,500 companies in search of teams that can help deliver on the UnitedHealthcare vision to:

- Improve access to affordable, high-quality, supported care
- Enhance experiences through best-in-class solutions designed to build strong customer loyalty and engagement
- Achieve better outcomes driven by robust clinical and care management models

UnitedHealthcare Accelerator has invested in 50 startups to date. “The investment helps to align interests, but our priority in selecting these companies is not for financial returns,” Burke explains. “It’s to solve impactful problems in the industry.”

Building long-term collaborations with world-class startups aligns with the UnitedHealthcare mission of helping make the health system work better for everyone, Burke says. Program alumni cross 3 primary categories that strengthen capabilities UnitedHealthcare is bringing to employers and employees today:

- Complementary capabilities like **Kintsugi**, a voice-biomarker technology designed to identify behavioral health needs from short clips of free-form speech
- Peripheral capabilities like **MedZoomer**, an on-demand prescription delivery service
- White-space capabilities like **Venteur**, a digital benefits marketplace for independent workers

“We’re in the era of light-year-speed with what we’re about to see happen over the next 5 years in terms of how we experience health care.”

**Clayton Burke**

Senior Director of Innovation  
UnitedHealthcare



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**Accelerator class  
of 2023 >**

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<sup>1</sup> Chronic Kidney Disease in the United States, 2023. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Available: <https://www.cdc.gov/kidneydisease/publications-resources/ckd-national-facts.html>. Accessed: Aug. 2, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> The Patient Experience: Perspectives on Today’s Healthcare. American Academy of Physician Assistants. Available: <https://www.aapa.org/research/patient-experience/>. Accessed: Aug. 2, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> \$11.1 million in Empowering Health grants helps to expand access to care. UnitedHealthcare, July 25, 2023. Available: <https://www.uhc.com/news-articles/community/expanding-access-to-care>. Accessed: Aug. 2, 2023.

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