Gundersen Health System Leverages Local Volunteers to Provide Social Care to Patients

GUNDERSEN
HEALTH SYSTEM®

About Gundersen Health System

Gundersen is part of Bellin and Gundersen Health System, and the brand they are becoming – Emplify Health. Formed in December 2022, Bellin and Gundersen is a not-for-profit, patient-centered, community-focused healthcare network with headquarters in Green Bay and La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Bellin and Gundersen has nearly 15,000 employees, including more than 1,000 clinicians, in 11 hospitals and more than 100 clinic locations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Upper Michigan, and Iowa. With community partners, Bellin and Gundersen strives to lead local, regional and national healthcare transformation to enrich individuals for their healthiest lives at every stage. Learn more at **bellin.org** and **gundersenhealth.org**.

Gundersen Health System, based in LaCrosse, Wisconsin, has been a Findhelp customer since 2020. In 2021, Gundersen created a unique volunteer team called Community Resource Connectors (CRCs) to address patients' social determinants of health via navigation on their branded Findhelp platform, **Community Link**.

The CRCs' role is to review patients' social needs, contact them to learn more about their situation, and share information about community resources. To build this team of 14 highly-trained volunteers, Gundersen has worked closely with local universities, the Gundersen volunteer services team, and community volunteer programs for seniors.

In just three years, from June 2021 to June 2024, the CRC team has helped Gundersen staff achieve considerable success:

2,081
patients who were interested in assistance received information and/or referrals to community resources.

14,600
referrals were placed in Findhelp for patients.

1,520
new programs were added to Findhelp in Gundersen's service area.

Challenges

Gundersen is fortunate to have several community-based organizations throughout their 21-county service area; however, they needed a way to share information about those programs with their patients.

- Without a central directory, Gundersen struggled to keep track of the available resources in their service area.

- They did not have a standard way to refer patients to programs that allowed for closed-loop communication, including through email and texting.

- Additionally, staff did not have a convenient way to identify which resources patients had been referred to, or what the result was.

These challenges made it difficult to share up-to-date community resource information with patients, and even more difficult to track outcomes and ensure that needs were met.

How Findhelp Supports Gundersen

Gundersen knew that to sustainably assist patients with social needs at scale, they needed a solution to these challenges. In 2020, they selected Findhelp as their social care platform and technology solution.

In 2021, the Findhelp platform was rolled out to patients, staff, and community members as a resource database and closed-loop referral system. At the same time, the CRC team was created to help coordinate social care for patients. The volunteers received training on motivational interviewing, communication techniques, and how to navigate both Epic (Gundersen's electronic health record) and Findhelp.

To ensure all local resources were available in Findhelp, Gundersen brought their partner, Great Rivers 211, to the table. Initially, Great Rivers helped add more than 1,500 programs within Gundersen's service to Findhelp's network. Ongoing, this partnership continues with monthly bi-directional sharing of resources and information between Great Rivers 211 and Findhelp, benefiting both organizations and the people they serve

📄 **See how Findhelp partners with 211s and United Ways across the country**

How CRC Volunteers Support Gundersen Patients, Using Findhelp

CRC team members follow a standard navigation workflow when supporting patients.

- As part of Gundersen's social determinants of health screening and response plan, patients are asked about social needs annually for ambulatory appointments and during each inpatient visit.

- Patients who are interested in resources are referred to the CRC team through Epic. The CRC team member builds rapport with the patients to understand more about their situation.

- Using Findhelp's Epic launch integration, the CRCs identify resources within patients' local area and share information via email or text messaging.

- The CRC team follows up with patients two weeks after sharing resources and can identify which resources were helpful for patients with Findhelp's referral status feature. The referral statuses can be updated by the patient, community-based organization, or the CRC team.

> "Findhelp's user-friendly database and ability to create favorites folders, feature programs, and customize the platform has provided an exceptional experience for the CRC team, Gundersen staff, patients, and community members."
>
> **Carla Nelson**
> Manager, Wellness
> Gundersen Health System

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Results, Return on Investment, and Future Plans

Gundersen acknowledges the impact social needs have on overall health and wellbeing and is committed to connecting patients with available resources. With the dedication of the CRC team and a strong partnership with Findhelp, Gundersen has successfully conducted nearly 25,000 searches for resources, placed nearly 15,000 referrals, and helped more than 2,000 patients get connected to community resources.
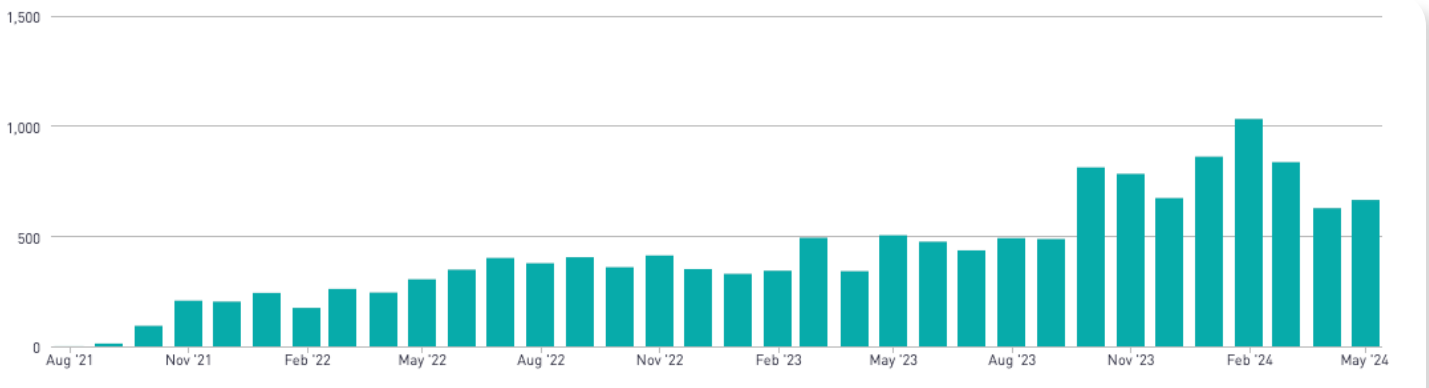

Figure 1: Referrals placed from June 01, 2021 through May 31, 2024 on Gundersen's Findhelp site.

As Gundersen continues to grow their social determinants of health screening and response plan, patients and community members remain their top priority. Gundersen uses Findhelp's analytics to determine where there are service gaps throughout their 21-county service area.

The gaps identified through the analytics tools help Gundersen prioritize system-wide initiatives and increase support of community-based interventions to ensure patients have the resources needed to live their best life. Working together, Gundersen and Findhelp are dedicated to addressing social needs and reducing health disparities. Patients have described the assistance they have received from the CRC team as "a turning point in [my] life" and "the best gift ever."

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❯ **Want to learn more?**

Schedule your demo today with one of our team members to see how we can support your organization's health equity goals.