

AHRQ Long COVID Care Network

The St. Louis Long COVID Initiative

Project Overview

The Washington University in St. Louis (WashU) Long COVID clinic, established in October 2020, serves as a multidisciplinary hub for patients across the Midwest. Offering both in-person and virtual consultations, the clinic operates as a consultative care model. Supported by 34 clinicians from 12 medical subspecialties, 14 clinicians from rehabilitative services, a social worker, and a community health worker, the clinic is among the largest multidisciplinary networks for Long COVID care in the St. Louis metro area.

As part of the AHRQ Long COVID Care Network, the WashU Long COVID clinic has been strengthened by the St. Louis Long COVID Initiative, which is a broader Long COVID community network to improve the patient care experience and support primary care practitioners in the St. Louis metro area and surrounding rural region. Additionally, the Initiative is working closely with primary care clinicians, patients, and community members to co-develop patient-centered care pathways and educational resources for clinicians and patients.

Institution

Washington University in St. Louis (WashU)

Geographic Service Area

St. Louis and rural communities across Missouri

Priority Population

Black and rural communities

Project Period

2023–2028

Contact

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Notable Features

- The St. Louis Long COVID Initiative has developed group visits for the delivery of Long COVID–related physical, occupational, and speech therapy to patients whose Medicaid insurance would otherwise not cover these services. These shared medical appointments are available in person and virtually, offer the added value of peer support, and are universally covered by insurance.
- The St. Louis Long COVID Initiative is partnering with regional Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) to support Long COVID care delivery by community primary care clinics because FQHCs are a preferred source of care for traditionally underserved populations.
- Project ECHO (Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes) is a virtual learning community that provides clinicians with mentoring and feedback from experts on the management of complex patient cases. To enhance equitable access to Long COVID care, the Initiative is leveraging the state's existing Show-Me ECHO infrastructure, extending educational resources and clinical support to primary care providers in underserved urban and rural areas.

Project Goal: Expand Equitable Access to Care, Improve the Patient Care Experience, and Support Primary Care Clinicians

Specific Aims

The St. Louis Long COVID Initiative aims to 1) expand equitable access to Long COVID care by building clinical capacity and removing structural barriers to care; 2) improve the Long COVID care experience by streamlining care across multiple disciplines and supporting patients' social needs; and 3) support primary care teams as they care for patients with Long COVID by co-creating educational resources for primary care clinicians and streamlining communication and referral pathways between primary and specialty clinicians.

Capacity Building and Removal of Structural Barriers

With support from the AHRQ Long COVID Care Network, the St. Louis Long COVID Initiative has expanded equitable access to comprehensive care by hiring a behavioral health counselor who has time dedicated specifically to serve patients with Long COVID. The Initiative also monitors appointment wait times and administrative data from the WashU electronic health record to identify and troubleshoot gaps in timely access to comprehensive Long COVID care.

To improve clinician competency in delivering trauma-informed, culturally sensitive care, the WashU Long COVID clinical team participated in a 10-session, equity-centered, trauma-informed care training.

The Initiative is also working to raise awareness among healthcare teams and communities that Long COVID exists and is a possible diagnosis for patients with vague or unexplained symptoms. Clinician, patient, and community feedback has identified the lack of awareness as a barrier to care that is disproportionately affecting patients from Black and rural communities across Missouri.

By the Numbers

- **980+** clinical encounters for Long COVID in the WashU academic health system since Jan 2024
- **75** patients surveyed, **8** interviewed
- **71** clinicians surveyed, **10** interviewed
- **29** clinical visits for Long COVID–related group physical, occupational, and speech therapy
- **1** resource website created: LongCOVID-STL.org

Streamlining Care

The St. Louis Long COVID Initiative includes one WashU **community health worker** and two St. Louis Integrated Health Network **community referral coordinators** who support the patient experience by coordinating medical care across health systems, scheduling appointments, and ensuring patients are connected to relevant social and financial support resources.

These team members' efforts are supported by the Initiative's [new website](#) which links to patient-facing resources such as general Long COVID information and region-specific information for housing, food, and legal aid support. The website also links to clinician-facing resources such as up-to-date referral instructions for Long COVID specialty care and clinically actionable first-line management principles.

Continued efforts to support equitable access to care are guided by interviews with patients who have engaged with Long COVID care or any of the Initiative's newly developed resources, like the Long COVID **peer support group** or **shared medical appointments** for Long COVID–related physical, occupational, and speech therapy.

Supporting Primary Care Through Education and Integrated Support

To support primary care clinicians in managing Long COVID patients, the St. Louis Long COVID Initiative is developing multiformat educational materials on diagnosis, management, and available support resources. These materials are being distributed through community liaisons in urban St. Louis and via ECHO sessions in rural Missouri. The Initiative also aims to improve handoff processes between primary care clinicians and specialists to reduce administrative burdens and streamline documentation for medical leave and disability applications. Clinicians are surveyed and interviewed to guide continued development and dissemination efforts.

“Primary care physicians (PCPs) understand patients from their whole medical perspective, so they are in a key position to recognize and address Long COVID symptoms. PCPs are also extremely busy. We want to support primary care teams with the tools they tell us they need in order to provide best practice Long COVID care.”

- Dr. Abby Cheng, Principal Investigator



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