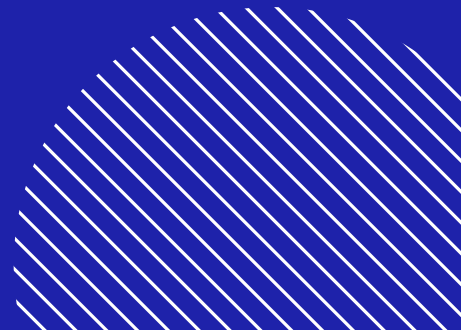




INFRAM Increases Access to Care for Central Health

Travis County's hospital district leverages the HIMSS framework to better serve people with low income in Central Texas

Central Health, Travis County's hospital district, is building a comprehensive, high-functioning healthcare system for residents with low income, part of the district's Healthcare Equity Plan which was adopted in early 2022 and is funded by local taxpayers. Central Health is spending \$700 million in investments over seven years to close gaps in the local safety-net healthcare system, including primary care, specialty care, dental health, behavioral health, hospital-based care and post-acute transitions of care.



“Central Health’s mission has always been very simple: provide care for those who need it most to improve the health of the community,” said Amrit Giani, the organization’s Chief Technology Officer (CTO) who oversees an 80-person IT department.

While Central Health’s mission is straightforward, its Information Technology (IT) ecosystem is extremely complex. The organization requires an IT backbone capable of supporting more than 40 health clinics, as well as planned additions of specialty care services such as cardiology, neurology and podiatry surgeries.

“The complexity of providing healthcare to a low-income population can become a really unwieldy process,” Giani pointed out. “Leadership is constantly challenged to keep services accessible to patient populations who often lack modern necessities like a car or home internet connection.”

As CTO, Giani is tasked with implementing an organizational IT strategy that aligns to broader business and clinical objectives. His role involves demonstrating the value of IT investments and ensuring adherence to industry best practices for protecting both technology assets and patient data.

While searching for a way to do that, Giani discovered the HIMSS Infrastructure Adoption Model (INFRAM). This tool identifies organizations’ technology gaps, highlights areas of success and pinpoints aspects that need to be addressed. The outcome of the initial six-month-long evaluation process “was an eye-opener,” Giani said. His organization did better than initially expected, with results helping to build support for future initiatives like mobile clinics and in-home healthcare that will continue to improve the lives of Travis County citizens.

INFRAM’s strategic role in healthcare technology advancement

HIMSS unveiled INFRAM in 2018 in response to the growing complexity of healthcare IT ecosystems and the need for a structured methodology to measure digital transformation progress in healthcare settings.¹ The comprehensive assessment framework evaluates and guides healthcare

organizations as they modernize their IT infrastructure. Using a standardized approach, organizations assess their IT capabilities across various domains, such as security, data management and interoperability.

In early 2024, HIMSS announced updates to INFRAM that would better help healthcare executives align IT capabilities to business and clinical goals.² The modernized global model now concentrates on five essential areas that measurably impact healthcare organizations’ value and results: cybersecurity, IT management and performance, adoption, outcomes and sustainability.

INFRAM stages reflect a hospital’s IT maturity by evaluating its technological infrastructure and capabilities across key domains. Higher stages indicate that the hospital has more advanced, integrated and strategically coordinated IT systems that can help improve healthcare delivery and outcomes. INFRAM’s data-driven approach empowers healthcare executives to make informed decisions regarding technology investments, ensuring alignment with overarching strategic objectives and patient care imperatives.

Choosing the INFRAM assessment team

Once a healthcare organization selects the INFRAM model to evaluate its IT infrastructure maturity, the next crucial step is determining who will conduct the assessment. In-house assessments can be cost-effective, appealing to organizations with tight IT budgets. However, engaging external assessors offers distinct advantages, including specialized expertise and impartial results.

Central Health partnered with Cisco to conduct its INFRAM assessment. “We are evolving fast, and we needed a partner like Cisco to help us grow in certain areas,” Giani said. The global technology company’s Customer Experience (CX) Healthcare team has decades of healthcare experience that allows it to provide comprehensive strategic evaluations for hospitals. This enabled Central Health’s internal IT staff to focus on other IT projects while having a strong voice on the focus of the assessment.



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AMRIT GIANI | Chief Technology Officer | Central Health

For the INFRAM assessment to be effective, it needed to be understood and valued by all affected stakeholders.

Giani's primary objectives were to:

- Evaluate the impact of recent network topology and infrastructure upgrades
- Assess the alignment of IT investments with organizational goals
- Determine the scalability of systems to support rapid growth

The INFRAM model complemented Central Health's Information Technology Department strategic pillars: digital transformation, people and culture, innovation, cybersecurity and IT governance. Unlike many health systems that focus on meeting consumer demands for advanced digital health options, Central Health's priority is ensuring equitable access to health services for its patient populations, who will benefit from innovative solutions that address their unique needs.

"Some [patients] took three different buses to reach a clinic. Others lacked access to electronic health records and patient portals," Giani said. This led leadership to explore creative, cost-effective options such as extending services through mobile clinics, in-home healthcare for those with transportation difficulties and expanding Wi-Fi coverage to community centers to give patients access to online portals, electronic records and appointment scheduling.

"We wanted to make sure that people in need of high-capacity healthcare [could receive care], so they didn't need to travel to one of our clinics," Giani explained. "After all, a core focus area for us is to enhance the healthcare delivery side."

'This was not all about IT; this was about the entire organization'

For the INFRAM assessment to be effective, it needed to be understood and valued by all affected stakeholders. "This was not all about IT; this was about the entire organization," Giani said.

Giani began by utilizing the IT governance platform he oversees to share information about the INFRAM assessment process, potential short-term impacts and how the findings would contribute to the bigger picture: enabling Central Health to better serve the people of Travis County.

As Giani outlined INFRAM goals in a series of briefings, enthusiasm grew among executives, directors, clinicians and administrative staff. He organized two workshops: one for business and clinical operations and another for technology operations, including IT managers, data and network engineers, project managers and the CIO.

The Cisco CX team then conducted the actual assessment, culminating in a final readout that ranked Central Health's maturity levels on a scale from zero to seven. "We did pretty well," Giani reported, with scores in the mid-range compared to 180 other healthcare organizations included in the benchmarks. "Knowing that we were in the middle, we now see opportunities that we want to capitalize on to improve our scores even further," Giani added.

The assessment specifically identified gaps in wireless capabilities and revealed a need for improvement in mobile clinics, community Wi-Fi access and home care delivery. Giani noted that some of this work was already underway during the assessment process, which helped confirm that the organization was on the right track.

The INFRAM assessment concluded that Central Health's network and infrastructure investments both on-premises and in the cloud connected to organizational goals, specifically building out its wireless network and keeping homebound patients connected through remote digital health tools. While Central Health's tech was aligned with its strategy, the assessment also showed adoption and capability gaps. Cisco pulled these findings into a usable, actionable format that Central Health can use in scaling its systems to support anticipated patient and technology growth. This is important to Giani since clinical and administrative departments are eager to incorporate artificial intelligence into workflows and adopt a more data-driven approach to healthcare delivery.

Striving for excellence: the journey to Stage 7

The assessment also motivated Giani and other executives to advance Central Health on the model's maturity scale until it is certified at Stage 7 in all domains. It's an ambitious goal since, to date, few organizations globally have achieved that stage.⁵

To reach this objective, leaders plan to conduct new assessments every two years to track progress and develop new benchmarks, both for Central Health and for other healthcare organizations wishing to compare digital transformation journeys. Based on its successful partnership with Cisco, the organization will continue its INFRAM

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planning through Cisco for the next assessment.

Cisco’s work with Central Health includes a three-year strategic technology plan that maps its current state to its desired future state. This clearly defined roadmap centers around the organization’s strategic goals, with tangible benchmarks and milestones throughout to measure progress and quantifiable outcomes.

“There’s always room for improvement. There’s always opportunity,” Giani said.

Optimizing healthcare delivery in a fast-changing world

As the healthcare sector continues to digitally transform, the need for a scalable and robust IT infrastructure increases. INFRAM assists organizations in establishing a technological foundation for powering cutting-edge innovations such as artificial intelligence applications, telemedicine platforms and Internet of Medical Things (IoMT) devices. By proactively addressing infrastructure requirements, healthcare organizations can leverage emerging technologies for better patient outcomes and operational excellence.

“In our daily lives, we offer support for every organizational employee. But how often do we sit down with business units to really understand their needs, their issues and the barriers that hinder their ability to provide healthcare?” Giani asked.

Giani offered some words of advice for other organizations seeking greater digital maturity.

“Capitalize on the INFRAM assessment. It will help you see how you stack up both nationally and internationally in terms of IT infrastructure and this framework will also assist you in aligning your objectives and strategies to deliver the best healthcare service, whether you’re in the private or public sector,” he concluded. “It’s a great way to re-evaluate your needs and do a self-check to make sure you’re still on the right track with your roadmap.”

To learn more about INFRAM, contact us at cxhealthcarebd@cisco.com.

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About Cisco

For over 20 years, Cisco’s comprehensive approach to healthcare has been empowering organizations to take on new challenges and adapt to the ever-shifting care landscape. Cisco technology solutions have placed over 46,000 healthcare organizations on the cutting edge of holistic, technology-enabled care.