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## **OSF HealthCare and Illinois State launch Connected Communities Initiative (CCI) to expand research and develop solutions to transform health care**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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(March 22, 2023 | BLOOMINGTON, Illinois) – A newly formalized partnership between Illinois State University and OSF HealthCare will foster research, innovation, and economic development across Illinois. The Connected Communities Initiative (CCI) program will bring together clinicians, university faculty researchers, and students to focus on innovation in clinical and patient education, health care engineering, data science, and cybersecurity.

The program is a formalization of the partnership between these two anchor institutions in Bloomington-Normal and the broader OSF HealthCare system. Illinois State and OSF HealthCare are lead hub members of the [Illinois Innovation Network](#) (IIN). The collaborative work in the Connected Communities Initiative has the potential to generate intellectual property that the two institutions can share and advance the IIN mission of driving inclusive and integrated research, innovation, and economic development across the state.

The agreement also provides a financial foundation for the work with both organizations providing \$500,000 each, to contribute a total of \$1 million annually for research and development of strategic solutions to improve health care delivery, and patient and provider experience.

"We believe expanding academic collaborations can help us create innovative solutions and new care models that provide more access, particularly to underserved populations," said CEO of OSF HealthCare Bob Sehring.

"This partnership with Illinois State University will leverage the strengths of faculty and students and will create a pipeline of talent we hope to recruit and keep, including cybersecurity experts, health and simulation educators, informaticists, data scientists, biomedical engineers, and graduates in the creative arts who can help us with medical visualization for virtual, augmented and mixed reality. This will also build on our long-standing clinical and educational partnership with Mennonite College of Nursing at Illinois State."-Bob Sehring

"Working with OSF HealthCare on the CCI Program reflects Illinois State's core values of Collaboration, Learning and Scholarship, and Civic Engagement," said Illinois State Interim President Aondover Tarhule. "This partnership will provide many opportunities for Illinois State faculty and students to work with our partners at OSF on a wide range of innovative projects that address real-world needs. This is truly an exciting project that will have wide-ranging benefits for all involved."

The partnership will initially build on Illinois State's expertise in education, health, cybersecurity, biomedical science, visualization, and process improvement. There will be opportunities for Illinois State's

academic colleges to collaborate on projects with OSF Healthcare. The broad range of faculty expertise and the engagement from the student body will lead to exciting new solutions to complex problems facing society.

“There is a long tradition of partnership between OSF and Illinois State, perhaps most clearly with students in clinical placements and in clinical situations,” said Craig C. McLauchlan, PhD, Illinois State’s associate vice president for Research and Graduate Studies. “The CCI expands that relationship in the area of research and provides an institutional framework that will allow us to build on already existing collaborations more easily. The partnership will provide students and persons in our community opportunities to contribute to innovation and growth that will benefit many.”

OSF Healthcare and Illinois State University have a tradition of collaboration on research, including a recent project to improve low childhood vaccination rates.

Joint projects can include testing solutions in clinical spaces, such as OSF HealthCare St. Joseph Medical Center and medical offices. The efforts will take place both virtually and in-person in a variety of settings including ISU labs and computer centers, along with Jump Simulation & Education Center in Peoria, a world-class building with labs focused on advanced imaging and modeling, blockchain, children’s innovation, genomics and precision medicine, interprofessional education, neuro health, and STEAM.

“For OSF HealthCare, the expanded partnership will support the needs of researchers, medical educators, clinicians and most importantly, patients,” added John Vozenilek, MD, vice president and chief medical officer, OSF Innovation and Digital Health. “The brightest minds at Illinois State University can help us develop novel solutions with enhanced security and business processes to improve patient care and health outcomes, along with optimizing the use of resources using data.” Vozenilek adds, “That will become increasingly important as care continues to move from hospital settings to home and as we expand access to patients across all of the regions OSF serves.”

The CCI is built upon successful models that OSF Healthcare has developed and maintains with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois-Chicago, and Bradley University.

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**OSF HealthCare** is an integrated health system owned and operated by The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis, headquartered in Peoria, Illinois. OSF HealthCare employs nearly 24,000 Mission Partners in 150 locations, including 15 hospitals – 10 acute care, five critical access – with 2,089 licensed beds, and two colleges of nursing throughout Illinois and Michigan. The OSF HealthCare physician network employs more than 1,500 primary care, specialist and advanced practice providers. OSF HealthCare, through OSF Home Care Services, operates an extensive network of home health and hospice services. It also owns Pointcore, Inc., comprised of health care-related businesses; OSF HealthCare Foundation, the philanthropic arm for the organization; and OSF Ventures, which provides investment capital for promising health care innovation startups. More at [osfhealthcare.org](https://osfhealthcare.org).

**OSF Innovation** was launched in 2016 and includes a multidisciplinary team that inspires, mentors and partners to transform care for patients and providers. With expertise in everything from ideation to commercialization, the division designs agile solutions, connecting everyday needs with inventive approaches and bold advances. More at [osfinnovation.org](https://osfinnovation.org).

**Illinois State University**, founded in 1857, is Illinois’ first public university. A diverse community of scholars with a commitment to fostering a small-college atmosphere with large-university opportunities, Illinois State promotes the highest academic standards in teaching, scholarship, and public service. More at [illinoisstate.edu](https://illinoisstate.edu).