



Spreading Age-Friendly Care

Drivers of Successful Health System-wide
Spread of the 4Ms

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Age-Friendly 
Health Systems

An initiative of The John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI) in partnership with the American Hospital Association (AHA) and the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA).

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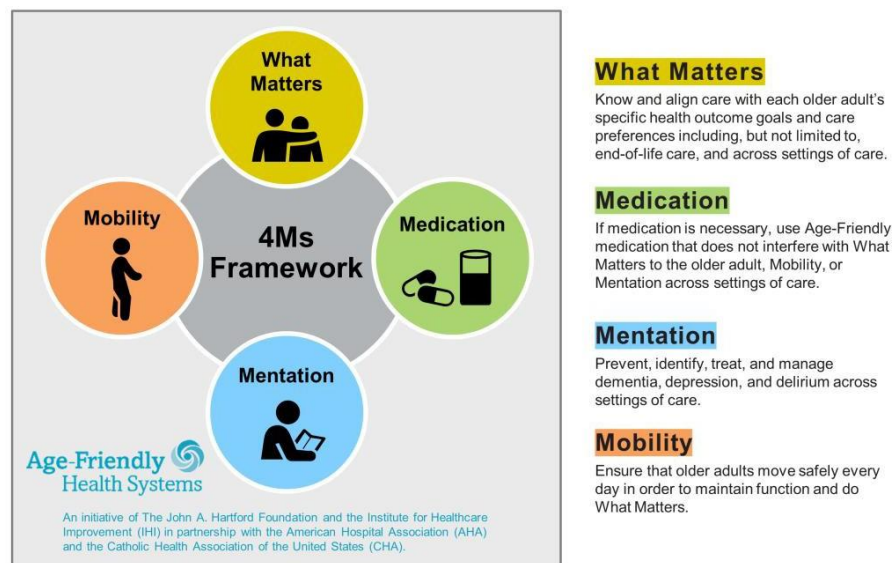
Introduction

Nearly ten years after the launch of Age-Friendly Health Systems, the aspirations of this movement have grown to supporting the provision of 4Ms care for all older adults across diverse settings of care. In 2017, The John A. Hartford Foundation and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI), in partnership with the American Hospital Association (AHA) and the Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA), launched the Age-Friendly Health Systems initiative. To date, the vision of age-friendly care for all older adults has been supported by thousands of dedicated individuals and health systems, numerous organizations and programs with goals that support and align with 4Ms care, and nationwide regulatory changes such as the [CMS Age Friendly Hospital Measure](#). As of June 2025, more than 5.7 million older adults have been reached with age-friendly care.

Becoming an Age-Friendly Health System entails reliably and equitably assessing and acting on a set of four elements of care called the 4Ms:

The 4Ms Framework (see Figure 1) entails a set evidence-based elements of high-quality care for older adults across health care settings, the 4Ms: What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility.¹

Figure 1. 4Ms Framework of an Age-Friendly Health System



Piloting 4Ms Care in Your Organization

To learn more about the 4Ms, see the [Guides to Using the 4Ms in the Care of Older Adults](#). Consistently implemented together, the 4Ms undergird and reinforce one another. This

framework guides all care of older adults wherever and whenever they touch the health system's care and services.

Most health systems find that the care they are providing already aligns with one or more of the 4Ms for many of their older adult patients. Improvement can be achieved when teams identify where the 4Ms are already in practice, test the practice of all 4Ms as a set or bundle, and then reorganize care of older adults to deliver that bundle. The goal is to incorporate the 4Ms to improve existing care of older adults, not to layer them on top of care that is already provided.

IHI recommends health systems begin the work of improving care of older adults to include all 4Ms by selecting a care setting to begin testing. By testing changes on a small (pilot) scale, health systems can empirically learn and make adaptations before implementing changes throughout the entire system. The [Guides to Using the 4Ms in the Care Older Adults](#) are core resources for testing in your pilot care location and include information about how to become recognized as an Age-Friendly Health System.

Spreading the 4Ms Through All Sites and Settings of Care

Many assume that innovative, evidence-based ideas will be easily adopted and implemented through education and changes in policies. While these tactics are essential, they are not sufficient. Spread of an innovation across a site of care or a health system occurs with intentional effort and specific activities. With more than 5,000 sites of care that have adopted the 4Ms, the Age-Friendly Health Systems initiative has learned a lot about what it takes to spread the 4Ms within one care setting (e.g., within a hospital, within a nursing home).

From 2024–2025, IHI engaged 30 health systems from across the US to help us test a theory of spread – an approach to support health system-wide spread across settings of care. System-wide spread extends across the set of affiliated care sites – hospitals, nursing homes, skilled nursing facilities, ambulatory care, convenient care, and home health care – comprising each participating health system. The trailblazing work of these 30 health systems has provided further evidence that the following drivers are essential for systems to successfully SPREAD the 4Ms (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Age-Friendly Health Systems System-wide Spread.

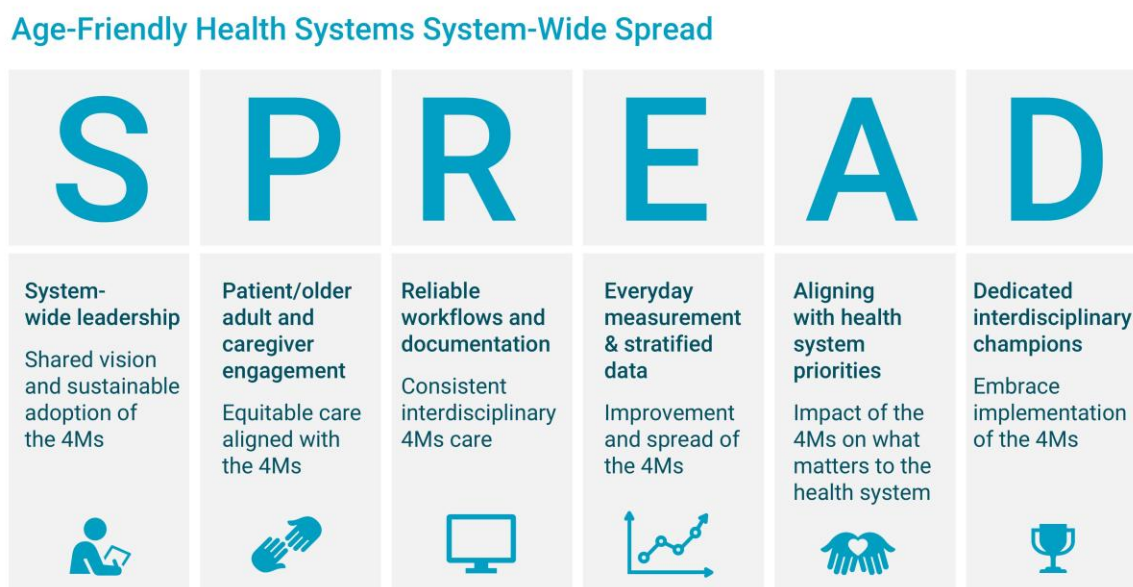


Figure 3 includes examples of key changes systems can test and implement to support the drivers of SPREAD.

Figure 3. 4Ms SPREAD Drivers and Key Changes

Driver	Key Changes
System-wide leadership supports a shared vision and sustainable adoption of the 4Ms	• Leadership champions convey urgency to adopt the 4Ms at scale because of the link between 4Ms and health system quality and safety metrics • Health system leaders set, and track progress towards, the Aim for 4Ms spread across the system • Leaders support multi-level communication about the importance of the 4Ms • Leaders leverage stories as well as quantitative data to track the progress of 4Ms spread • A system lead for the 4Ms is identified and supported to coordinate activities across sites and support the entire system to move toward its goals
Patient and caregiver engagement drives equitable care aligned to what matters	• Celebrate and share diverse stories of the impact of 4Ms care through the experiences of patients and caregivers across settings in your system • Empower patients and caregivers to be vocal advocates for 4Ms care through tools like the My Health Checklist

	• Ensure caregivers are documented in the medical record and integrate the 4Ms into caregiver support services • Ensure diverse representation of patient and caregiver experiences and voices to represent the diversity of patients who receive care in your system
Reliable workflows and documentation support consistent interdisciplinary 4Ms care	• Integrate assessment tools for each of the 4Ms into the existing workflow for relevant team members • Integrate 4Ms into existing rounds, huddles, and debriefs where appropriate, such as team huddles, case review/care management discussions, and discharge planning etc. • Understand what equipment and resources are required to assess and act on each of the 4Ms in the specific site and ensure it is available as needed • Ensure the EHR supports reliable practice and documentation of the 4Ms and enables accurate data collection • Incorporate the 4Ms into care transitions across care settings • Include 4Ms training in onboarding and ongoing training and education
Everyday measurement and stratified data support improvement and spread of the 4Ms	Define and collect meaningful process and outcome measures of 4Ms care, including patient impact measures, in your system across all relevant settings • Stratify data to ensure all older adults are benefitting from the 4Ms equally • Display data over time and leverage it for internal quality Improvement efforts to improve 4Ms care • Calculate the return on investment of the 4Ms in your system across settings
Aligning with health system priorities conveys impact on what matters to the health system	• Review your health system's strategic priorities and identify those that are advanced by the 4Ms • Integrate AFHS efforts with Equity focused initiatives in the system to ensure that the AFHS journey supports the system's equity priorities • Integrate the 4Ms into existing committee priorities (such as quality committees) and ensure that aligned initiatives are linked to the 4Ms as much as possible • Demonstrate how existing programs/accreditations align with the 4Ms
Dedicated interdisciplinary champions embrace and implement the 4Ms	• 4Ms champions and leaders exist in all clinical roles and units/teams and they are empowered to lead 4Ms initiatives and activities to meet system goals • Formal and informal networks are identified and leveraged to support engaging all relevant staff in the importance of the 4Ms • Determine "What Matters" to staff in terms of 4Ms care • Use storytelling to engage others and convey the impact of the 4Ms in the system

Resources for System-wide Spread

Use the following tools to understand your current state, make a plan, and track your progress toward system-wide spread.

- The [Age-Friendly Care System-wide Spread Self-Assessment](#) is designed to help age-friendly leaders in health systems reflect on their progress together with their teams and guide their planning for future work to spread the 4Ms.
- The [Age-Friendly Care System-wide Spread Plan](#) helps health systems to reflect on and document their goals and activities to support system-wide spread of the 4Ms in the near, middle, and long term.
- The [Cross-Setting Measurement Guide](#) collects guidance contained in the guides for hospitals, ambulatory settings, nursing homes, convenient care, and home health care. It includes a comparison of measures for all settings.
- To learn more about health systems that are leading successful spread of age-friendly care across their systems, visit ihi.org/agefriendly.

Conclusion

Achieving system-wide spread of age-friendly care means that all older adults receive high quality 4Ms care every time they interact with your system. This spread does not occur on its own. It requires deliberate implementation, using evidence-based tactics and attention to measures that illustrate equitable provision of improved care. This guide, along with associated tools and resources, is designed to help health systems take the next steps to realize this vision. Together, dedicated health systems and the people who make them run, will advance the Age-Friendly Health Systems movement, bringing us closer to a day when all older adults and their caregivers receive 4Ms care at every encounter.