

Empowering Rural Health

Southern Coos' Strategic Leap with AI



Rural healthcare organizations navigate a unique landscape of challenges, from resource scarcity to aging technologies that limit strategic capability. **Southern Coos Hospital and Health Center (SCHHC)**, on the southern Oregon coast, is addressing these hurdles by thoughtfully architecting and implementing an Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategy. This case study explores how SCHHC is approaching Generative AI (GenAI) to bridge critical gaps, empower its workforce, and enhance service delivery.



The Challenge

Navigating Rural Healthcare Hurdles

Southern Coos Hospital and Health Center is a Critical Access Hospital providing comprehensive medical services to residents on the southern Oregon coast. However, SCHHC, like many rural health systems contends with limited resources and specialized expertise, budget constraints, infrastructure limitations, data availability and regulatory complexities.



SCHHC's Strategic Leap with AI

Recognizing the transformative potential of AI and specifically, GenAI, to enhance patient care and streamline operations, SCHHC embarked on a proactive journey to establish its AI strategy and governance. Their approach was carefully aligned with their mission, resources, and the specific needs of their rural community.

Establishing SCHHC's strategic framework involved several critical steps:

- **Engaging Stakeholders:** To ensure comprehensive buy-in and collaboration, SCHHC established, an AI Strategic Council comprised of leaders from cross-functional areas, including Clinical Staff, Administrative Leadership, and the IT Department to enable enterprise-wide AI governance. **The support of the SCHHC leadership was a critical catalyst** in creating and maintaining AI governance.
- **Establishing AI Policy:** These policies provide guardrails for all SCHHC team members about approved GenAI tools for internal and external use. Key policy elements were debated to create **a tailored "rules of the road"** approach that fits SCHHC's culture and values. An internal communication and education plan supported the policy rollout.
- **Prioritizing Use Cases:** Given resource constraints typical of rural settings, SCHHC is strategically prioritizing GenAI use cases based on their **potential for maximum impact** and feasibility.

- **Infrastructure and Data Readiness:** SCHHC's assessed and **readied its infrastructure and data capabilities**, including:
 - Their hosted EHR's ability for data quality, interoperability, and accessibility.
 - IT infrastructure to support GenAI algorithms and data processing.
 - Expansion of data governance policies to uphold data privacy, security, and ethical use.
- **Creating an AI Use Case Library:** SCHHC is building a repository to aid in cataloging, monitoring and holistically governing AI initiatives in the organization.

Key Learnings & Success Factors

SCHHC's successful AI Strategy and Governance rollout was underpinned by:



Fostering an innovative culture.



Establishing well-defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).



Leveraging valuable resource programs including Microsoft's [Rural Health Resiliency](#) Program, and the [Trustworthy & Responsible AI Network \(TRAIN\)](#) for policy framework and tools for responsible and effective use of AI in healthcare.

Impact & Future Outlook

By integrating strategy, policy and clearly defined KPIs, **SCHHC has effectively prioritized AI projects, optimized resource allocation, and tangibly demonstrated the value of their AI investments**, even with limited resources. This approach maximizes the potential for successful AI adoption and transformation within the innovative rural health system.

Looking ahead, SCHHC remains steadfast in its commitment to data-driven progress. They will continuously monitor KPIs of existing GenAI use cases to optimize performance and maximize impact. Simultaneously, SCHHC will strategically prioritize and implement new GenAI use cases, carefully aligning them with the evolving needs of their patients and staff, and the advancement of AI technology.

This strategy of ongoing evaluation and proactive expansion will **enable SCHHC to steadily mature its use of GenAI** further solidifying its commitment to innovative and effective rural healthcare delivery for the southern Oregon coast.

