MILKEN INSTITUTE | 2025 FUTURE OF HEALTH SUMMIT

KEY TRENDS IN HEALTH

JANUARY 2026

The 2025 Milken Institute Future of Health Summit centered on the theme *In Service of Better Health*. The event featured more than 200 speakers from diverse sectors and industries, spanning nearly 60 sessions that covered a broad range of health topics in the fields of biomedical innovation, public health, healthy aging, food systems, and strategic philanthropy.

This brief summarizes the key trends, ideas, and solutions discussed at the Milken Institute Future of Health Summit.

Accelerating Innovation

Scientific breakthroughs are happening at a record pace and are rapidly improving to be more patient-friendly. A long history of research and practice is the foundation for personalized treatments, as science builds on prior knowledge.

The challenge is building ecosystems that enable treatments and cures to reach many, not just a few. Data sharing and platform development can accelerate translational research. For R&D, this includes developing reusable infrastructure and making long-term investments to improve treatment preparation and delivery. By streamlining and standardizing manufacturing processes, we can deliver more straightforward, scalable, and cost-effective treatments and even eliminate multistep processes. Regulators should consider how to transition from a chronic treatment to a durable treatment in terms of payment models, specifically how to pay for something once, rather than over a 20-year period.

View relevant panels:

- Conquering Cancer: Innovations Closing Gaps and Improving Outcomes
- The Future of Biomedical Research and Innovation
- New Frameworks for Agile Innovation of Gene Editing Therapies

Harnessing the Potential of AI

Technology, AI, and data can be enablers of better health, serving as a complement rather than a replacement for human touchpoints. The inefficiencies of the health-care system cannot be rewritten overnight. However, it is possible to integrate technology—in particular, AI—into the system in a way that doctors and patients can readily adopt, thereby reducing errors and inefficiencies while enhancing the quality of care delivery.

New initiatives at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) aim to eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse from the system, while also reducing administrative costs and burdens. This will be achieved through a CMS interoperability framework, focused on getting data to the right people at the right time. Government should set the guardrails for an interoperable system, build the infrastructure, and let the private sector innovate.

View relevant panel:

- What Does Smart Implementation of AI in Health Look Like?

Building the Health Workforce of the Future

The future of health will leverage nontraditional providers and technology, with an emphasis on team-based and community-focused care rather than only physician-centered models. There is a growing recognition of the critical role played by "unseen providers" in health care, including pharmacists and community health workers, further enabled by the integration of technology (including AI) in primary care models. These providers are increasingly accessible to the public and serve as pivotal points for patient engagement and care delivery. Interdisciplinary collaboration is essential for delivering comprehensive care that extends beyond medical treatment to encompass the social, behavioral, and economic determinants of health, ultimately resulting in improved patient outcomes.

Policy reforms are needed to modernize reimbursement models that compensate and incentivize these providers. Technology solutions, such as AI and digital tools that streamline administrative tasks and enable more patient-facing care, must incorporate codesign in collaboration with providers and the communities they aim to serve.

Within the biomedical field, the future science workforce faces unique challenges, including changes to policies that increase the length of training required to receive grant funding, impact immigration, lack financial incentives, and intensify competition for talented individuals to enter technology rather than science. The talent pipeline has been slow to adapt to the rapid rate of advancements in the field, and with uncertainty about funding and job security, candidates are seeking alternative opportunities. Solutions include early promotion of the science workforce through STEM education, mentorship, and building relationships and trust in underserved communities that have historically been untapped.

View relevant panels:

- Biomedical Workforce in Crisis: What's at Stake?
- Health Beyond the Doctor's Office
- Opening the Front Door: Unseen Providers Transforming Primary Care

Enabling Community-Based Research

To realize the potential of community-based research infrastructure and build a coordinated ecosystem of excellence to address health challenges, we must rethink community and trust, bridge the gap between care and research, modernize infrastructure and processes, realign incentives, and reduce risk. Clinical research in the community should transition from a one-time engagement to a continuous investment in community trust, achieved through local navigators, trusted brokers, and long-term relationships that make participation meaningful and sustainable. It is essential to take the time to listen to communities, invest in navigators and trust brokers on the ground, and intentionally scale trust through long-term, reciprocal relationships that make participation meaningful.

Opportunities for policy improvements include strengthening local capacity by engaging non-physician health-care professionals (nurses, community health workers, etc.) to expand research. Additionally, align incentives across government, industry, and community partners to encourage participation, reduce risk aversion, and ensure innovation benefits reach all populations.

Technology solutions include automating data transfer and management, streamlining trial operations, and reducing administrative burden. Simplify trial design through harmonizing fragmented electronic health record and research data to make them usable, interoperable, and actionable for more efficient and representative clinical trials.

View relevant panel:

- Enabling Community-Based Research Through Policy and Practice Change

Addressing Antimicrobial Resistance

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a growing global health crisis that threatens modern medicine and must be understood not only from a human health perspective but also from the angles of animal health and the environment. Prevention can be supported with diagnostics to better identify resistant infections and spot trends earlier, along with effective stewardship. AI is supporting the discovery of new diagnostics and data aggregation on resistance to inform public health efforts, making diagnostics more affordable and accessible, and easing regulatory burdens. Addressing the threat of AMR requires education at a micro level and partnerships at a macro level for international and multisectoral collaboration on a wide scale.

View relevant panel:

- Terminating Superbugs: How New Technologies Can Fight Antimicrobial Resistance

Redesigning Global Health

Widespread disruption to the global health ecosystem is an opportunity to envision a more effective system. At the same time, stakeholders are working to fill the current funding gap, bridging the urgent needs of today and planning the long-term vision of the future. As countries move to greater aid independence and self-reliance, the private sector is poised to play a bigger role, including investing in health infrastructure. Leaders are exploring a range of funding options for countries, designing debt relief models, and experimenting with new financial solutions. Multi-sector partnerships between governments, industry, philanthropy, and other stakeholders—partnerships that are created early in the process, before plans are set, and are long-term and transparent—will be critical to this shift.

Engaging communities is key as they are best placed to articulate problems and identify sustainable solutions. Innovation, AI, and new technology, both in health products and service delivery, will continue to be critical in addressing workforce challenges and expanding access to health care, and can enable countries to "leap-frog" past older ways of working. The new paradigm of investment in health, traditionally viewed as a cost driver, takes a longer view as a workforce, capacity, and economic growth driver.

View relevant panel:

- Charting the Course: Opportunities to Re-think Global Health

Advancing Women's Health as Health

Advancing women's health in the United States and globally can improve the health and well-being of women, their families, and society. A core component of advancement is integrating women's health as a distinct area of focus, which requires research, care practices across the lifespan, policy, investments, and collaborative partnerships.

A strong scientific foundation is essential for determining what works best for women and for guiding more effective diagnostics, treatments, and clinical support across the life course. Therefore, women need to be considered in clinical trial design and enrollment to build a stronger evidence base for care.

Patient navigation programs must consider the full context of women's lives and health determinants. Coverage issues for women's health conditions must be addressed, including the elimination of reimbursement gaps and the creation of billing codes for specific women's health conditions. Diagnostic testing and follow-up screening in insurance coverage should be classified as preventive care. By focusing on prevention rather than treatment, the cost curve can be bent.

Looking ahead, the investment case for future innovation in women's health is compelling, with

opportunities for partnerships across the ecosystem, including communities, health systems, employers, life sciences, investors, universities, and research collaborations, to share data, de-risk innovations, improve care practices, and accelerate translation from discovery to impact.

View relevant panels:

- Integrating Women's Health as Health
- The Next Era of Women's Health

Spanning the Health Journey

Addressing whole-person health across interconnected life stages and conditions requires integrated models that blend physical, behavioral, and social supports. Rising rates of mental health challenges, obesity, and chronic disease risk factors underscore the need for coordinated approaches for both children and adolescents—whose environments and support systems shape long-term trajectories—and for adults managing complex cardiometabolic conditions that demand sustained engagement.

For young people, improving mental and physical health also involves confronting mis- and disinformation, strengthening digital and health literacy, and relying on trusted providers to help families navigate an increasingly complex information environment. Integrated care pathways and trusted messengers can guide individuals through preventive services and chronic condition management, and address social and behavioral needs. Opportunities include strengthening prevention-focused models, aligning incentives, and incorporating nutrition into routine care, while technology streamlines coordination and enables more continuous, person-centered engagement.

View relevant panels:

- Growing Up Unwell: Child, Youth, and Adolescent Health in the United States
- Unlocking Potential in Cardiometabolic Care: Breaking Barriers in Obesity and Diabetes

Integrating Food into Health Care

As momentum around Food Is Medicine (FIM) grows, both as a market and a movement, it is equally essential to build an economically viable FIM market and to ensure that the movement's principles remain at the center. In the US, the Make America Healthy Again movement presents an opportunity to connect essential health topics, such as nutrition and chronic disease, while grounding the conversations in science and evidence-based information. Nutritious food can be an integral part of preventing and treating diet-related diseases, and now, retailers, payers, and providers are integrating food into health care from prevention to management and treatment.

As FIM policy evolves across the federal and state landscape, it is essential to ensure that it represents

all the stakeholders in the FIM ecosystem, from retailers and health plans to social enterprises and communities. While retailers are dedicated to meeting consumer demand, there is a need for stakeholders across sectors to align on criteria for nourishing food and beverages in nutrition-related programs. FIM presents an opportunity for investment in the private sector, and innovative financing approaches are emerging that unlock new capital for FIM interventions and provide funders with transparency on impact and health outcomes.

View relevant panel:

- Integrating Food into Health Care: What's It Going to Take?

Improving Detection, Treatment, and Care for Alzheimer's and Related Dementias

We are entering a new era for the treatment of Alzheimer's and Related Dementias. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)-approved blood tests for early detection, treatments for slowing decline, and care models for comprehensive dementia care represent positive advancements and innovations. Personalized prevention strategies and focused research on modifiable risk factors and lifestyle interventions offer a promising approach to delaying the onset of symptoms. Technology, particularly AI, offers new potential for improved care but cannot replace the need for comprehensive, community-based models.

Urgently, health systems must continue to build national infrastructure supporting interventions for people living with dementia and their caregivers, integrate community-based organizations alongside medical care, and target programs that focus on early detection and accurate diagnosis. The research pipeline is strong for pre-symptomatic treatments and non-amyloid targeted therapies, and together we must continue to destigmatize diseases causing cognitive impairment to enable earlier intervention.

View relevant panel:

- Innovating Hope: Charting the New Era of Alzheimer's and Other Dementias

Supporting Family Caregivers

There is an urgent need for the health ecosystem to address the "breaking point" many family caregivers are reaching and to move toward more holistic, supportive approaches to family caregiving. Recognizing caregivers as essential members of the care team is a critical shift, acknowledging that their insights and support are central to patient well-being. Integrating caregiver identification and screenings into medical settings can help providers facilitate goal-setting and treatment options that reflect the emotional, practical, and medical needs of both patients and caregivers. Workplaces and educational settings can support family caregivers by adopting policies that recognize caregiving responsibilities and provide optimal flexibility.

Technology is also playing an increasingly important role with AI-powered platforms that match caregivers with personalized resources, digital tools that simplify navigation across complex health systems, and data-driven insights that identify caregiver stress and recommend timely emotional support and practical guidance. Together, these trends indicate a more coordinated and caregiver-centered ecosystem that acknowledges caregivers' central role and establishes the infrastructure to support them sustainably.

View relevant panel:

- The Breaking Point: America's 63 Million Family Caregivers

Progressing from Living Longer to Living Well

Medical and public health advances are extending life expectancy, but longevity without equity leaves too many behind. Persistent gaps in health and wealth reveal a widening disparity between years lived and years lived well. This places new responsibility on health-care institutions to act as anchor institutions that not only deliver care but also help build local prosperity and fairness. Progress across the health ecosystem depends on a shared vision and coordinated strategy, meaningful community investment to improve access and quality, policy and accountability frameworks that reward collaboration, and the innovative use of digital tools to scale solutions.

Longevity must be defined by healthspan, not lifespan alone. Well-being in later life is shaped by work, social connection, and financial security as much as by clinical care. Preparing for longer lives, therefore, requires earlier and more integrated education around financial planning, lifetime income, and Social Security. When health, financial, and education systems are aligned, longer lives can become more stable, dignified, and productive for all.

View relevant panels:

- Democratizing Longevity: Harnessing the Economic Power of Health-Care Institutions
- The Longevity Equation: Integrating Healthspan and Wealthspan

The Future of Health Summit underscored the crucial role of collaboration and partnerships. To fully realize the potential of early detection, treatment, and innovation, we need multisectoral collaboration and comprehensive support for patients, utilizing community-based organizations, health departments, health-care systems, and the private sector. With renewed energy and commitment, we must join together to be of service to better health.

Explore these ideas further in the following plenary conversations:

- Leading the Next Era of Health
- A Conversation with National Institutes of Health Director Jay Bhattacharya
- Access Reimagined
- A Conversation with FDA Commissioner Marty Makary and CMS Administrator Mehmet Oz
- A Conversation with US Department of Health and Human Services Deputy Secretary Jim O'Neill

Watch all public panels from the Future of Health Summit on demand.

About Us

The Milken Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank focused on accelerating measurable progress on the path to a meaningful life. With a focus on financial, physical, mental, and environmental health, we bring together the best ideas and innovative resourcing to develop blueprints for tackling some of our most critical global issues through the lens of what's pressing now and what's coming next.

Milken Institute Health develops research and programs to advance solutions in biomedical innovation, public health, healthy aging, and food systems.