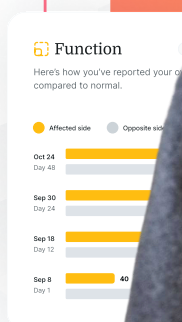
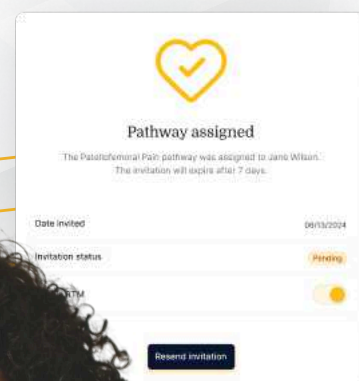


GUIDE

Expanding Access to Care in Rural Hospitals with Medbridge Care

By Medbridge



Overview

Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) serve as a lifeline for millions of Americans living in rural communities. However, they face substantial challenges, including geographic barriers, clinician shortages, and financial constraints. These challenges make it difficult to deliver timely, high-quality care—especially for patients with low- to moderate-complexity musculoskeletal (MSK) conditions.

Hybrid care, which blends in-person and virtual care, offers a scalable solution. By leveraging technology, CAHs can expand patient access while reducing clinician burden and improving outcomes. Medbridge Care enables rural hospitals to implement hybrid care models efficiently.

IN THIS GUIDE WE’LL COVER:

- The challenges CAHs face in delivering clinical care.
- How hybrid care models address common conditions in rural communities.
- How Medbridge Care expands access, improves outcomes, and streamlines operations.
- Real-world examples and best practices for implementation.

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Challenges in rural healthcare



Accessing quality healthcare in rural areas presents unique difficulties for both patients and providers. Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs) play a vital role in these communities, yet they are often stretched thin due to clinician shortages, geographic barriers, and financial constraints. Many patients must travel long distances for care, leading to delays in treatment and lower adherence to therapy. Without scalable solutions, CAHs struggle to meet the growing demand for cost-effective, high-quality care. Hybrid care models offer an opportunity to bridge these gaps, ensuring patients receive the support they need while optimizing clinical resources.

Limited Access to Clinicians and Specialists

- The patient-to-primary care physician ratio in rural areas is **39.8 per 100,000**, compared to **53.3 per 100,000** in urban areas.¹
- **66%** of rural communities are designated as Health Professional Shortage Areas.²
- **Specialty care (e.g., pelvic healthcare)** is often unavailable, forcing patients to travel long distances.

Geographic and Transportation Barriers

- **5.8 million** Americans delay medical care due to lack of transportation.³
- Many rural areas have **unreliable or no public transit**.
- Long travel times **discourage proactive care**.

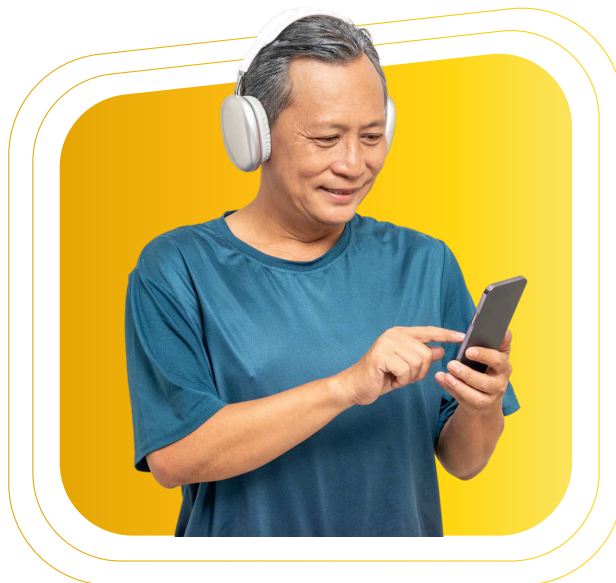
Nearly 4.5 million Americans live in “ambulance deserts,”⁴

meaning in a medical crisis, they may wait 25 minutes or more for emergency response. For a patient lying on the bathroom floor after a significant fall, this delay can mean the difference between life and death.

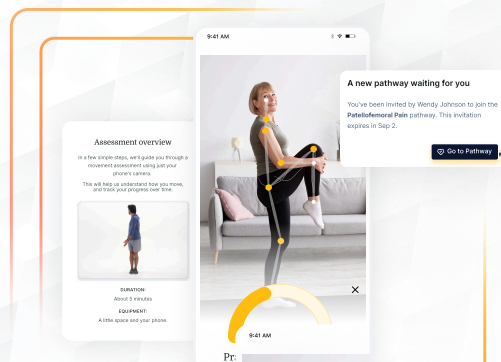
The Importance of Proactive Care and Opioid Prevention

- Early physical therapy has been shown to result in a 58% reduction in imaging utilization, 50% lower emergency room utilization for acute low back pain, and 10% reduction in long-term opioid usage.^{5,6}
- MSK conditions are among the leading diagnoses associated with opioid prescriptions in the U.S.^{7,8}
- Over 75% of individuals with opioid misuse behaviors report musculoskeletal pain.^{9,10}
- Studies show that early physical therapy reduces the risk of opioid dependence by providing an effective, non-pharmacological alternative for pain management.^{11,12}
- Healthcare leaders emphasize that physical therapy should be positioned as a first-line treatment for MSK pain to prevent unnecessary opioid use.¹³

Opportunity: Hybrid care models can help CAHs address these challenges by extending care beyond clinic walls, reducing costs, and improving efficiency.



The role of Medbridge in hybrid care



Medbridge Care is designed to be your virtual partner, helping expand patient access and enhance care delivery in remote settings.

Providers get access to clinically validated, standardized care pathways and customizable Home Exercise Programs that support specialty care and give clinicians a wealth of motion capture movement data, outcomes, and progress reporting so they can better personalize care in a hybrid setting.

What Are Care Pathways? A Care Pathway is a progressive digital care program for low- to moderate-complexity patients. Each program is broken into multiple phases that build off each other, allowing patients to progress at their own pace as their pain decreases and they build strength. Individual phases are focused on exercises combined with bite-sized “nano-education” designed to be completed in 15 minutes or less. Patients unlock the next phase of their programs based on self-reported assessments.

Medbridge Care is elevated by cutting-edge features like AI-driven motion capture assessments and outreach tools like Patient Reported Outcomes (PROs) and Care Coordination, which supports true hybrid care by giving providers a window into their patients’ progress and needs.

Unlike many virtual-only options, providers are kept in the driver’s seat and can guide patient progress—even when patients are outside of the clinic. Medbridge Care gives you the power to flex your involvement, allowing you to focus on the patients who need your attention most while still supporting those unable to come into the office. With all the tools you need to be successful, you can operate at the top of your license while overcoming geographical and logistical barriers to care that are especially challenging in this setting.

Key Features:

Home Program Builder

- Quickly create and assign customized programs with templates, clinical pathways, and exercise recommendations.

Care Pathway Library

- Access evidence-based digital pathways for low back pain, osteoarthritis, fall prevention, pelvic health, post-surgical rehab, and more.

Exercises and Patient Education Materials

- Choose from 8,000+ video-based exercises and condition-specific education to support understanding, engagement, and adherence.

Patient Engagement and Messaging Tools

- Drive engagement with real-time messaging, automated reminders, and behavioral science-backed outreach features.

Patient-Reported Outcomes (PROs)

- Track patient progress and recovery trends with built-in outcome surveys and care coordination alerts.

Remote Therapeutic Monitoring (RTM)

- Automate data collection and engage patients with built-in features that help support meeting RTM billing thresholds.

AI-Powered Motion Capture Assessments

- Remotely assess patient movement and function with real-time scoring, progress tracking, and data-driven insights that help providers make informed decisions as if they were in the room.

Patient Dashboards and Reporting

- View patient engagement and outcomes in one place, with alerts that flag those at risk or needing follow-up to help clinicians prioritize their time.

EMR Integrations

- Streamline documentation and workflows with integrations into Epic, Cerner, Casamba, Raintree, NextGen, and more.

Deliver a Patient-Centered Experience

Provide a modern care experience with our highly rated mobile app and patient platform, featuring a **4.8/5 star average and 90+ NPS**—demonstrating strong satisfaction and engagement.

Step-by-Step Walkthrough: How Medbridge Care Pathways Work

Mary, a 68-year-old in rural Kentucky, suffers from chronic low back pain that has been worsening over the past year. The nearest physical therapist is 30 miles away, and due to limited transportation and unpredictable weather conditions, she finds it difficult to attend in-person therapy sessions regularly.

During her visit to the local CAH, her provider recommends a Medbridge Care Pathway to help manage her pain from home. Through Medbridge Care:



Step 1

Mary receives a personalized low back pain care plan invite via text, including structured exercises and interactive education.



Step 2

She completes a motion capture assessment, which tracks her range of motion and pain levels remotely.



Step 3

She follows a structured, progressive exercise program, with each session lasting 15 minutes or less to fit into her daily routine.



Step 4

Automated patient reminders and progress tracking help her stay on track, increasing adherence and improving outcomes.



Step 5

Her clinician receives real-time data on her progress, allowing for timely adjustments and remote support.

With ongoing clinician oversight and digital engagement tools, Mary stays actively involved in her recovery. After four weeks, she reports less pain, improved mobility, and increased confidence in managing her condition—all without needing to make frequent, difficult trips to the hospital.

Summary:

Despite living 30 miles away from a physical therapist, Pathways has allowed Mary to:

- Begin therapy immediately through her phone, tablet, or computer.
- Follow a structured, evidence-based program from home.
- Receive motion capture assessments to track her mobility.



Turn Engagement into Revenue

With Mary actively participating in her care at home, her provider can bill for RTM—unlocking new revenue while delivering high-quality care. No extra tools or setup needed—RTM is built right into Medbridge Care.

Addressing key conditions in rural communities



Rural communities face unique challenges when it comes to managing musculoskeletal pain and other common conditions. Limited access to specialists, long travel distances, and staffing shortages make it difficult for patients to receive timely, consistent care. As a result, conditions like low back pain and osteoarthritis often go untreated or progress to more severe stages while other concerns, such as fall risk or post-surgical rehab, are either never addressed or create a burden for patients who must travel a long distance for appointments. By leveraging Medbridge Care, Critical Access Hospitals can bridge these gaps, ensuring that patients receive evidence-based, structured care while optimizing clinician time and resources.

Condition	Prevalence	Medbridge Care Pathways
Fall Prevention	44% of older adults at risk ¹⁵	Fall Prevention - High Ability Fall Prevention - Medium Ability Fall Prevention - Low Ability <i>4 weeks, 4 phases each</i>
Low Back Pain	30.9% of rural adults experience chronic pain compared to 19.6% of adults in urban areas ¹⁶	Low Back Pain Low Back Pain Advanced Low Back Pain Extension Low Back Pain Flexion <i>4 weeks, 4 phases each</i>

Condition	Prevalence	Medbridge Care Pathways
Osteoarthritis	1 in 3 rural adults diagnosed ¹⁷	Hip Osteoarthritis Hip Osteoarthritis Advanced Knee Osteoarthritis Knee Osteoarthritis Advanced <i>6 weeks, 6 phases each</i>
Post-Surgical Rehab	32% fewer PTs per capita in rural regions, compared to urban areas ¹⁸	Pre-Op Total Joint Replacement for TKR and THR (<i>4 weeks</i>) Post-Op Total Joint Replacement for TKR and THR (<i>12 weeks</i>)
Urinary Incontinence	Over 13 million people in the U.S. experience UI ¹⁹	6 UI tracks covering urge, stress, and mixed incontinence symptoms for both males and females

Financial and operational benefits



Implementing hybrid care models with Medbridge Care not only enhances patient access and outcomes but also delivers measurable financial and operational advantages for CAHs. By optimizing clinical resources, reducing costs, and expanding revenue opportunities, Medbridge helps hospitals achieve sustainable, high-quality care delivery.

Cost-Effectiveness

- Reduces cost per patient by scaling clinician resources through hybrid care.
- Lowers in-person therapy session requirements while maintaining quality outcomes.

Revenue Opportunities

- Expands the patient pool through virtual and hybrid care models.
- Reduces missed appointments with remote monitoring.
- Enables RTM billing to offset the cost of operational resources supporting hybrid care.

Staff Efficiency

- Saves clinician time with templated, evidence-based programs.
- Reduces documentation burden with automated tracking and reporting.

Overcoming barriers to adoption



Despite the clear advantages of hybrid care, adoption challenges remain for both patients and clinicians. It's a common assumption that rural patients—especially older adults—may be unfamiliar with digital health tools. Research, however, shows that this is not the case.

A recent survey found that 89% of rural households use computing devices and 81% are online.²⁰ A 2022 survey found that 73% of rural inhabitants utilize telemedicine and that number is steadily increasing.²¹ Older adults are also engaging with technology and digital care tools. In fact, according to data from the Pew Research Center, 75% of adults ages 65 and older are online,²² and according to a recent “Aging in Place” survey, 53% of adults ages 55 and older currently use some type of assistive or health-related technology—and of those who say they don't currently use this type of tech, 70% said that they just don't feel the need for it yet.²³

Medbridge's own internal data also supports older adults' willingness and capability to engage with technology and digital care delivery, showing that 63% of patients ages 60 to 79 increased their activation when prescribed home programs electronically. Unfortunately, the data also showed that only about 20% of patients in this age group were offered a digital program.²⁴

Clinicians, on the other hand, may be hesitant to adopt new workflows or skeptical about patient engagement with virtual tools. Addressing these barriers is critical to ensuring the successful implementation of hybrid care models.

Learn more about how older adults engage with technology and what you can do to improve engagement in our eBook, ["Boosting Patient Activation in Older Adults with Digital Healthcare Technology"](#).

Hybrid Care Success for Older Adults: Findings from a Medbridge User Study

A Medbridge user study examined how adults across different age groups interact with Medbridge Care Pathways. In our sample of adults between the ages of 65 and 75 (see sidebar for highlights).¹⁴

Older Adults and Hybrid Care Adoption

One of the goals of the study was to better understand how adults over the age of 65 engage with digital health tools as this particular group is often assumed to not be interested or willing to participate in digital care delivery. Most participants reported increased confidence in managing their health, improved mobility, and greater satisfaction with their care.

These findings highlight that patients—including older adults—with limited prior exposure to digital health tools can successfully adopt hybrid care when given the right support. By addressing both patient and clinician barriers, Medbridge Care enables Critical Access Hospitals to implement hybrid care successfully.

84%

had never used a digital health program before.

84%

had a more positive perception of digital care post-use.

100%

completed at least one full care plan phase.



"It's almost like you have a teacher in front of you. It's much better than when a PT gives you a piece of paper when you leave and then you never look at it again."

— Jin, TN, 70

"I definitely feel better. I can feel an increase in flexibility and a decrease in back pain. With better flexibility, I feel like I am more able to do things. Even just bending down to pick something up off the floor, I feel like I can do it much better than I could a week ago."

— Paula, IL, 68

"Pathways helps with understanding and controlling lower back pain. The exercises are clear and not too challenging."

— Deborah, PA, 65

"It's so convenient. It fits into your schedule, and there's flexibility. I like that you can review things you've done and learn from them."

— Al, IL, 66

Strategies to Increase Patient Adoption

For hybrid care to be effective, patients must feel confident using digital tools. Medbridge Care is designed to enhance accessibility and engagement, with built-in features such as automated reminders, interactive education, and adherence tracking. Multiple access points via mobile, tablet, or desktop help accommodate all levels of digital familiarity. In addition to these built-in tools, hospitals can further support adoption by:

- **Leveraging Family and Caregivers:**

Encouraging family involvement can improve patient adherence, particularly for older adults who may need help navigating digital care tools.

- **Providing Initial Hands-On Support:**

Ensuring that patients receive a guided onboarding session—whether in person or virtually—can increase confidence and reduce drop-off rates.

- **Personalizing Patient Education:** While Medbridge Care includes interactive education, clinicians can reinforce its value by explaining how digital pathways align with the patient's specific goals.

Strategies to Increase Clinician Adoption

Clinicians are often managing high patient volumes, and new technology must integrate seamlessly into their workflows to drive adoption. Additionally, some clinicians express concerns that digital tools may replace their expertise or interfere with clinical decision-making. It's critical to position Medbridge Care as a tool that enhances, rather than replaces, clinician expertise by streamlining workflows and supporting better patient engagement.



Addressing Potential Clinician Concerns

- **Medbridge Care Supports, Not Replaces, Clinicians:** Some clinicians may wonder how digital tools impact their role. Medbridge Care is designed to complement clinical expertise, not replace it. Clinicians remain in full control, with the ability to adjust exercises, personalize plans, and track progress in real time. Instead of diagnosing, Medbridge Care provides data-driven insights—such as motion capture assessments and patient-reported outcomes—to help clinicians make more informed decisions while maintaining autonomy.
- **Confidence in Use:** Some clinicians may be unsure how to address patient questions when using digital pathways. Training and hands-on practice can increase confidence, and quick-reference guides can provide easy answers for common patient concerns.
- **Embedding into Everyday Workflows:** Medbridge Care is most effective when seamlessly integrated into daily clinician workflows, reducing administrative burden rather than adding extra steps.
- **Customizable and Seamless Adjustments:** Medbridge Care allows clinicians to individualize care plans just as they would with traditional methods, ensuring patients receive tailored treatment. The platform includes easy-to-use modification tools, enabling clinicians to adjust programs as needed—just as they would in person—so patients receive the right level of care at the right time.

Pro Tip: Assign yourself a pathway before assigning it to a patient to see how it works so you feel more confident and can answer patient questions.

Tactical Steps to Drive Clinician Adoption

Challenge	Solution
Concerns about personalization	Educate clinicians on when to use standard HEP vs. Pathways and surface that they can make adjustments, including exercise swaps in Pathways.
Fear of technology replacing expertise	Reinforce that Medbridge Care is a clinical assistant, not a diagnostic tool.
Clinician skepticism	Provide peer adoption data demonstrating real-world success.
Learning curve	Offer quick-start guides and Digital Health Academy training for easy adoption.
Workflow integration challenges	Embed Medbridge Care into existing EMR systems and daily workflows.

73% of patients reported a reduction in pain interference within 30 days of starting their assigned pathway, 68% of patients indicated improvements to their physical function within 30 days of starting their assigned pathway, and 85% of patients were satisfied with their pathway.²⁴

By addressing these concerns head-on and positioning Medbridge Care as a clinician-first tool, CAHs can encourage greater adoption and improve the integration of hybrid care models.

Two paths for operationalizing hybrid care with Medbridge



Hybrid care implementation can be tailored to fit the specific needs and workflows of Critical Access Hospitals (CAHs). There are two primary approaches to fit the needs of CAHs based on availability of onsite physical therapy services.

Each approach offers distinct advantages depending on the hospital's infrastructure, staffing, and patient population.

Path 1: Limited or No Onsite Physical Therapy Services

This option is ideal for hospitals seeking to extend care beyond in-person visits because they have either no onsite physical therapy services or limited services to fully serve the needs of the community. Self-guided pathways complement the work that physical therapists can do, allowing patients to access care in the privacy of their homes while checking in virtually with providers.

In addition to benefiting hospitals with limited or no onsite PT services, this is also a good solution for patients who have difficulty attending in-person therapy due to transportation, mobility challenges, or limited approved visits from their insurance.

How It Works:

- 1. Onboarding and Training:** Clinicians receive targeted training on assigning and monitoring Medbridge Care.
- 2. Patient Enrollment:** Patients are onboarded remotely or in-person and receive digital care plans. Patients can check in with PTs virtually or, if available, in person, freeing up PTs to manage more patients more efficiently and reserve valuable in-clinic space for any patients who are unable to use a digital care option.
- 3. Remote Monitoring and Engagement:** Clinicians track progress via the Medbridge Care Platform dashboard, with automated patient reminders increasing adherence.
- 4. Billing and Reporting:** Hospitals leverage remote therapeutic monitoring codes to generate reimbursement while maintaining a cost-effective care model.

Key Benefits:

- **Streamline access to care** with a digital front door, reducing delays in care.
- **Reduce downstream costs** by guiding patients toward conservative, evidence-based treatment early to reduce unnecessary imaging, prescriptions, and specialist visits.
- **Prevent falls and complications** with proactive intervention and digital programs.
- **Divert primary care provider/emergency department visits** with direct access to virtual care.

Path 1: Limited or No Onsite Physical Therapy Services

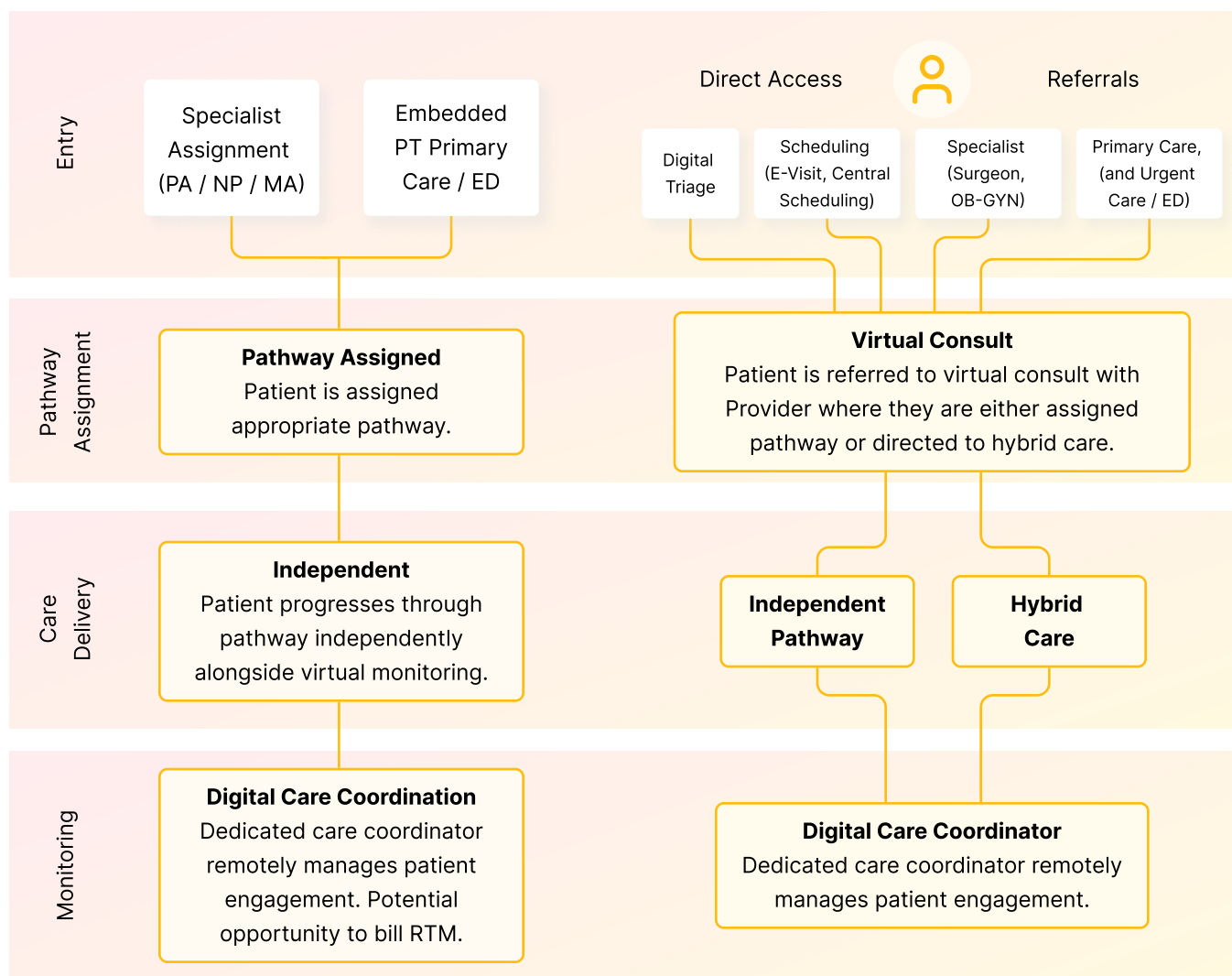
Potential Workflows

Option 1: Upstream Assignment

Provide pathways assignment access to upstream primary care, emergency department, or even specialty clinicians.

Option 2: Virtual Consult/Triage

Implement a virtual team to provide expert musculoskeletal, falls, or pelvic consults, improving patient access and care coordination.



Path 2: Combined Care with Onsite Physical Therapy Services

This approach integrates Medbridge Care directly into current care models, allowing CAHs to enhance and expand existing in-person therapy services with digital care options. It is best suited for:

- Hospitals with on-site PT and rehab teams that want to add a hybrid care layer to reach more patients and more efficiently use in-clinic time.
- Clinics aiming to streamline in-person visits while maintaining provider oversight.
- Organizations focused on improving continuity of care post-discharge.

How It Works:

- 1. Seamless Integration:** Medbridge Care is embedded into the hospital's standard care process, with therapists assigning digital programs alongside in-person visits.
- 2. Hybrid Care Approach:** Patients alternate between in-clinic sessions and guided at-home exercises, reducing the need for frequent in-person visits while maintaining engagement and improving capacity and access for patients with geographic or other barriers to care.
- 3. Enhanced Data and Decision-Making:** Motion capture assessments and patient-reported outcomes provide clinicians with real-time insights to tailor treatment plans.
- 4. Maximizing Reimbursement:** Medbridge Care enables hospitals to bill for hybrid services through RTM billing codes while improving patient adherence and reducing no-show rates.

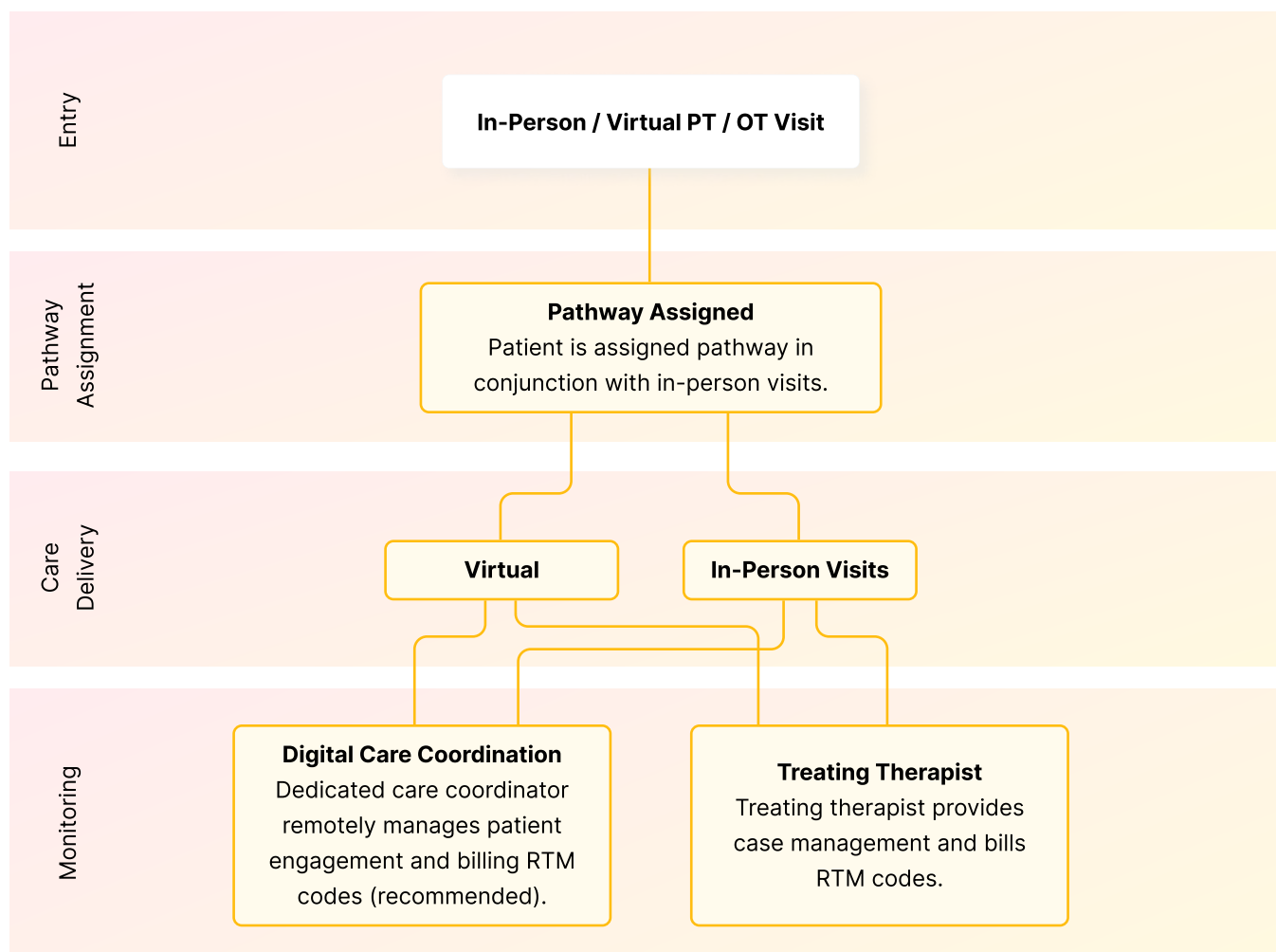
Key Benefits:

- **Improve access to care** by addressing geography, copay, and scheduling conflicts.
- **Boost patient engagement** by providing continuous digital support.
- **Improve satisfaction and outcomes** with personalized, data-driven interventions.
- **Offset costs** through remote therapeutic monitoring.

Path 2: Combined Care with Onsite Physical Therapy Services

Potential Workflow

Enhance your outpatient clinics with a hybrid care model using Pathways + RTM to extend patient support beyond in-person visits.



Choosing the Right Approach

Hospitals can choose to start with a standalone approach and gradually transition to an embedded model as clinicians and staff become familiar with Medbridge Care. Regardless of the implementation method, Medbridge Care provides the flexibility, scalability, and efficiency CAHs need to expand access and improve patient outcomes.

1. Standalone Implementation:

- Ideal for hospitals looking for a streamlined digital care solution.
- Easy integration with minimal workflow disruption.

2. Embedded in Existing Workflows:

- Integrates with in-person PT and primary care services.
- Supports hybrid models combining virtual + in-person visits.

Operational Tips: Building a Model That Works

Successfully operationalizing Medbridge Care depends on how you assign ownership and scale over time. A few effective strategies we've seen across Critical Access Hospitals include:

- **Assigning a Digital Care Champion:** Designate a PT or rehab team member to lead hybrid care efforts. This person can support adoption, answer team questions, and monitor patient progress.
- **Training a Pilot Group:** Start small by training one or a few PTs to test workflows, build confidence, and create internal success stories.

Two paths for operationalizing hybrid care with Medbridge

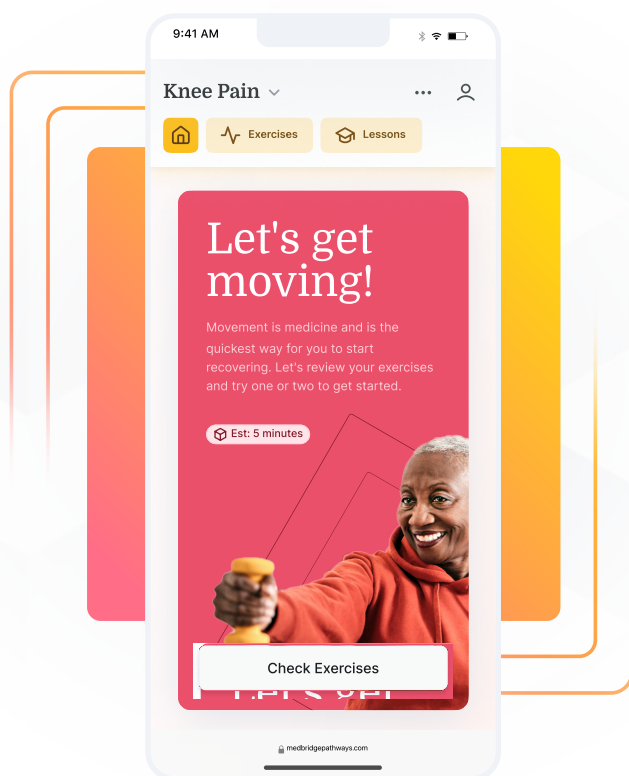
- **Hiring or Reassigning Support Roles:** Consider adding or reassigning care coordinators or rehab aides to support onboarding, patient check-ins, and RTM tracking—especially for standalone models.
- **Expanding to the Full Team:** Once workflows are established, train the entire rehab or therapy team to fully embed hybrid care into your organization's delivery model.

Next steps



Take the First Step to Expanding Access in Your Community

Ready to transform care in your rural hospital? [Request a free demo today](#) to see how Medbridge Care can improve outcomes and streamline operations.



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About medbridge

Combining powerful digital patient care with the highest quality content, Medbridge builds exceptional education and care experiences. Expert-led, dynamic education ensures compliance, boosts clinical productivity, and uplevels the practice of every provider. Pre-built and custom digital care integrated into workflows expands access to care, improves engagement, and delivers better outcomes. With products that leverage over a decade of insight from more than 350,000 clinicians and 25 million patients, Medbridge helps organizations across the continuum provide better care.

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See how Medbridge can help your organization.

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