

HCSRN Connect

Health Care Systems Research Network

HCSRN Quarterly Newsletter — March 2026

Don't miss the HCSRN Annual Conference April 20-23 in Dallas!

Centered on advancing learning health systems, this year's conference showcases cutting-edge research, innovative methodologies, and real-world applications that are improving health and health care delivery. Attendees will benefit from expert panels focused on evolving funding opportunities, including foundation and industry partnerships that are shaping the future of research. The conference also celebrates excellence across the network, with awards recognizing the outstanding contributions of colleagues and collaborators.

Equally important are the opportunities to build and strengthen professional connections. Whether through structured sessions or informal conversations, participants will engage with peers, spark new collaborations, and expand their networks in ways that drive impactful, multi-site research.

It's not too late to be part of this dynamic event—register today and join the HCSRN community in Dallas.

Welcome New Board Members

Please join the HCSRN Governing Board in welcoming two new board members!



Eric S. Armbrrecht, PhD, is a professor in the Department of Health and Clinical Outcomes Research at **Saint Louis University** with appointments in the School of Medicine and the College for Public Health and Social Justice. A health



Brandie DePaoli Taylor, PhD, is a reproductive and perinatal epidemiologist who joined the **Advocate Aurora Research Institute** in 2024 as the Scientific Director of Academic Research. She earned her PhD in reproductive

services researcher and data scientist, his work focuses on chronic disease management, health care quality improvement, and primary care delivery. For more than 20 years, he has designed and evaluated health improvement strategies across health systems, community organizations, and government agencies. His expertise includes big data analytics, cost-effectiveness analysis, and data visualization. Armbrrecht also advises regional health initiatives and contributes to national evaluations of emerging health care interventions.

epidemiology from the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health and completed postdoctoral training in perinatal epidemiology. Her research examines reproductive health, including sexually transmitted infections, immune dysfunction, and mechanisms of preterm birth, as well as the influence of social inequality and nativity on obstetric outcomes. Funded by NIH, HRSA, and foundation grants, her work is nationally and internationally recognized. She serves as Treasurer of the Preterm Birth International Collaborative and as Associate Editor of the *American Journal of Epidemiology*.

SDRF Webinar Series

Two outstanding webinars have been held so far this year as part of the Scientific Data Research Forum webinar series. If you missed them, click on the titles below to link to the video!

[Aging, Death & Politics](#)

On February 10, 2026, **Dr. Susan Hickman, Director, Investigative Science and Senior Investigator, Kaiser Permanente Washington Health Research Institute**, shared her experiences translating research focused on end-of-life decision-making into policy and practice.

In “Aging, Death and Politics,” Dr. Hickman explores how research, policy, and practice can work together to improve end-of-life care for older adults. Drawing on decades of work in palliative care and advance care planning, she explains the development and national expansion of POLST, a portable medical orders system designed to ensure patients’ treatment preferences are known and honored across care settings. She highlights research showing POLST improves documentation and aligns care more closely with patient wishes, while also discussing the challenges of implementation, outdated directives, and family decision-making. Dr. Hickman also shares how coalition-building and legislation in Indiana advanced this work, and argues that better systems, communication, and implementation strategies are essential to making care planning meaningful, effective, and equitable. Her research findings have been used to support programs based on the POLST model across the country.

[Comorbidity Tools and Indices – Adventures in Understanding Local Use and the Updating of an HCSRN Resource](#)

On March 10, 2026, Heather Tavel, MPH, Senior Manager of Research Data and Analytics, and Emma Weffald, BS, Research Data Management Intern, at the Institute for Health Research Kaiser Permanente Colorado, shared how they researched and compiled an overview of comorbidity tools and indices commonly used in the IHR and developed an in-depth understanding of which SAS-based macros could easily be updated and which could not. This resulted in a new version of the Elixhauser macro for the HCSRN Virtual Data Warehouse.

The team, with the help of Roy Pardee from KPWA, ultimately developed updated Elixhauser macros, including a refined Elixhauser version with yearly code lists to improve consistency and usability. The session emphasized that these tools are often used differently than originally intended (e.g., for covariates rather than prediction) and highlighted ongoing questions about validation, standardization, and best practices for using comorbidity indices across diverse data environments.

HCSRN Job Board

Looking for a rewarding job in health research? Check out the [HCSRN Job Board](#) to browse career opportunities. We list faculty and staff positions at HCSRN research centers and academic institutions as a service to the research community.

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