

# Shaping the future of health care through workforce innovation

## SSMHealth. at a glance

SSM Health is a leading nonprofit health system headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, supported by 40,000 team members spread across care delivery sites in Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

### Opportunity

- Support career growth and retention

- Build a reliable talent pipeline for critical roles

- Develop future health care leaders

### Solution

- [FlexPath Funded](#), providing \$5,250 per year in upfront tuition coverage for degree and non-degree learning

- [Hybrid clinical](#) cohorts for high-demand roles such as medical assistants and pharmacy technicians

- [SSM Health Leadership Training Program](#) designed to build patient-centered leadership capabilities across all levels

### Impact

# 100%

retention in critical roles such as medical assistants and pharmacy technicians

# 79%

of participants have a stronger desire to grow their careers with SSM Health

# \$1M+

\$1,082,300 in student debt prevented in 2024

# Background

Across the country, health systems are undergoing profound transformation. From frontline caregivers to specialized clinical professionals, organizations face challenges to retain talent and develop the skills needed to fill critical gaps. In an increasingly competitive labor market, the stakes are high: shortages in essential roles—such as medical assistants and pharmacy technicians—can directly affect safety, quality, and the continuity of patient care.

Recognizing the urgent need to strengthen its workforce, SSM Health, a leading nonprofit health system, has taken a proactive approach to talent development. Retaining critical staff, creating a sustainable talent pipeline, and fostering a workforce culture where all team members can flourish, were identified as key areas of focus.

To support these goals, SSM Health partnered with InStride and introduced an upfront tuition assistance program which removes financial barriers and opens doors for career-aligned learning. Through Flex-Path Funded, team members are empowered to pursue degrees and certifications that align with their professional aspirations, ultimately strengthening SSM Health's workforce today and for generations to come.

*“At SSM Health, we’re committed to making education accessible for all team members, including those who’ve faced barriers in the past. We’ve been able to use programs like FlexPath Funded to help our team members envision new possibilities, opening pathways into critical roles and contributing to a more diverse, skilled and empowered workforce.”*



**Janet Smith-Hill**

Chief Human Resources  
Officer at SSM Health

# The opportunity

## Support career growth and retention

SSM Health team members expressed a strong desire for clear pathways to advance their careers. However, participation in existing education benefits—especially among frontline team members—was lower than desired. Financial constraints, family responsibilities, and the burden of upfront costs were common barriers.

SSM Health sought to remove these obstacles to make education more accessible with the goals of increasing retention, enhancing job satisfaction, and promoting internal career mobility.

## Create a culture where everyone can flourish

When FlexPath Funded launched, SSM Health recognized an opportunity to deepen its commitment to human dignity—a core value rooted in Catholic Social Teaching. Research shows that a representative health care workforce can enhance patient outcomes. By expanding access to education across its health ministry, SSM Health is fostering a culture where every team member can grow, contribute meaningfully, and reach their full potential.

## Build a reliable talent pipeline for critical roles

Like many health care organizations, SSM Health faced persistent staffing shortages in high-demand roles such as medical assistants and pharmacy technicians. While local partnerships helped address some gaps, the organization needed a scalable, systemwide solution to ensure the availability of a steady pipeline of skilled professionals exists across its multi-state network.

## Develop future health care leaders

A growing priority for SSM Health is cultivating leadership at every level—from frontline team members to executive roles. The organization is focused on identifying and empowering “Rising Stars” who can help lead the way in delivering compassionate, high-quality care, and driving long-term transformation.





# The solution



## STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

1

### FlexPath Funded: Upfront tuition support for career advancement

To reduce financial barriers and support employee growth, SSM Health introduced [FlexPath Funded](#) in 2023, a tuition assistance program offering up to \$5,250 per year in upfront coverage for certificate, undergraduate, and graduate programs. This approach enables team members to pursue career-aligned learning without the burden of out-of-pocket costs.

The program supports both academic degrees and professional certifications— including medical billing, pharmacy technician, and Lean Six Sigma, tailored to meet the evolving needs of SSM Health's workforce. Team members also benefit from access to [Personal Education Advisors](#), who provide individualized guidance from enrollment through course completion.

To ensure broad awareness and engagement, SSM Health's communications team leads focused outreach campaigns across multiple channels, helping eligible team members understand and access the program.

*"SSM Health collaborated with InStride to design and implement a workforce education program tailored to our needs. From compliance to learner engagement, they've been with us every step of the way, making implementation seamless and impactful."*



**Janet Smith-Hill**

Chief Human Resources Officer at SSM Health



### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

2

## Streamlined clinical training

To address staffing shortages in high-demand clinical roles, SSM Health implemented [hybrid clinical cohorts](#) that combine online coursework with in-person training. These cohorts focus on roles such as medical assistants and pharmacy technicians, offering:

- Hands-on experience
- Structured career pathways
- Flexible learning formats that accommodate working professionals

*“At SSM Health, we’ve reimagined clinical training to address the unique challenges of today’s healthcare workforce. Our **hybrid clinical cohorts** provide team members with clear, practical paths to grow their skills and move into in-demand careers.”*



**Amber Wood**

Vice President Clinical  
Education & Clinical  
Placement at SSM Health



### STRATEGIC INITIATIVE

3

## Leadership training for future-ready leaders

To develop future-ready leaders, SSM Health has partnered with InStride to develop the **SSM Health Leadership Training Program** designed to build patient-centered leadership capabilities across all levels. The program includes:

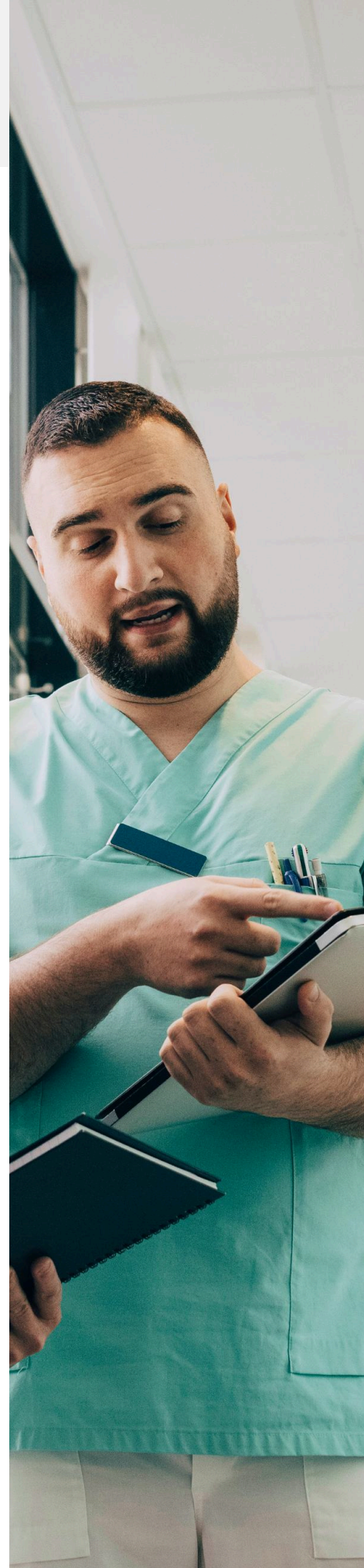
- Cohort-based learning to foster collaboration and peer support
- Contextualized learning aligned with SSM Health's leadership behavioral expectations and real-world health care scenarios
- Practical application through hands-on experience and feedback at care delivery sites

*“The SSM Health Leadership Training Program, powered by InStride, empowers our workforce with the skills, mindset, and real-world experience to lead with compassion, respect, excellence, stewardship, and community. By investing in **contextualized, cohort-based learning**, we're building a resilient leadership pipeline that puts patients at the center of every decision and drives meaningful, system-wide transformation.”*



**Wayne Wright**

Vice President, Talent  
Management at SSM Health





# The impact

With the support of FlexPath Funded, SSM Health is transforming career mobility for their team members. The results below highlight key impacts on participation, retention, and team member experience. The program is helping team members grow their careers, stay longer, and feel more connected to the Mission of SSM Health.

## Participation

Since launching in 2023,

- **1,000+**  
team members have enrolled in the FlexPath Funded program, demonstrating strong early adoption. 87% of enrollees are individual contributors, reflecting strong engagement from frontline team members
- **54 team members completed SSM Health's first two medical assistant cohorts**, with 43 more currently enrolled
- **9 team members completed pharmacy technician certification program**, with 15 more currently enrolled
- **96**  
team members have enrolled in leadership development programs

## Retention

The program is contributing to measurable improvements in workplace stability:

- **19 percentage point increase in retention** among participants compared to non-participants
- **100% retention**  
in critical roles such as medical assistants and pharmacy technicians
- **100% retention of nurses** enrolled in nursing degree programs





## The impact (cont.)

### Team member experience

By eliminating upfront tuition costs, the program has led to:

- **\$1,082,300**  
in student debt prevented by SSM Health in 2024

Team members report greater confidence, pride, and commitment to their roles:

- **79%**  
express a stronger desire to grow their careers within SSM Health
- 76% are more likely to stay with the organization longer
- 92% feel proud to be part of the program



### Affirming the fullness of human dignity

Programs like FlexPath Funded help extend the fullness of human dignity, a hallmark of Catholic Social Teaching, to all team members through the elimination of financial barriers:

*“We have seen broader inclusion of team members that had lower participation rates in other tuition programs. By eliminating upfront tuition barriers, we’ve opened access to higher education for colleagues who might not have otherwise pursued these pathways. As a result, we are enriching our talent pipeline, fostering internal career growth for everyone, and helping to **build a workforce in service to our Mission and in alignment with our Vision** to offer peace, hope and health for every person, family and community, especially those most in need.”*



**Roderick Nunn**

Vice President of Culture and Team Member Experience at SSM Health

# Looking ahead

FlexPath Funded has contributed to SSM Health's holistic efforts at expanding career mobility, improving retention, and supporting workforce diversity. Since launch, the program has created new opportunities for frontline employees, strengthened talent pipelines for critical roles, and provided a meaningful financial benefit by eliminating tuition costs. The early results demonstrate its success as both a workforce solution and a long-term investment in employee growth and organizational sustainability.

## What's next?

- Expanding leadership development programs
- Launching additional clinical cohorts to accelerate training
- Strengthening talent pipelines for long-term workforce stability and patient care excellence

SSM Health's workforce initiative is shaping a more resilient, inclusive, and future-ready organization. By expanding access to education, supporting career mobility, and investing in employee growth, the program is laying the foundation for sustainable workforce transformation.

# Ready to see how you can achieve similar results?

[Get in touch today](#)

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with **your business in mind**