



2025 KNN CONFERENCE

MINNEAPOLIS, MN
SEPTEMBER 10-12, 2025



A Growing Gathering Toward Collective Impact

From September 10-12, 2025, the Kern National Network hosted its fourth annual national conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota, creating an opportunity to come alongside our local partners at the **Mayo Clinic College of Medicine and Science** as well as the **University of Minnesota School of Nursing**.

2025 KNN Conference Local Partners



Centered on the theme ***Shaping the Future Together: Advancing Flourishing for All***, the 2025 conference drew approximately 260 participants from 90 distinct organizations across the country, representing continued growth from the 230 participants from 75 organizations that attended in the year prior. A mix of new and returning individuals and organizations supported dynamic sessions, lively exchange of ideas, and opportunities to understand how work is progressing at different institutions.

Each year, the KNN Conference aims to create a space where participants can learn with and from one another, form new connections or deepen existing relationships, and leave recognizing the importance, power, and collective impact of the movement to advance flourishing. The following conference highlights demonstrate how this year's gathering realized each of those objectives—and ushered in the next phase of the KNN's work and an expanded vision for transformation.

Expansion of Vision and Name Change

The 2025 Conference began with an exciting announcement: During the opening session, KNN Founding Director Cheryl A. Maurana, PhD, shared that the KNN would be expanding its vision and changing its name from the Kern National Network for Flourishing in Medicine to the **Kern National Network for Flourishing in Health**.

Dr. Maurana emphasized that while the KNN's overarching mission of advancing flourishing remains unchanged, this shift marks a deepened commitment to advancing flourishing across the entire health ecosystem—everywhere people learn, work, lead, and receive care. It also better reflects the growing momentum of interprofessional collaboration toward systems-level transformation that is already occurring across the movement.

2025 KNN Conference Participation



260
participants

representing



90
unique
organizations



52%
first-time
attendees

The annual KNN Conference has continued to grow and attract new organizations and individuals while maintaining a strong base of returning participants.

Elevating Partners and Strengthening the Evidence Base

From oral presentations, to workshops, to a poster symposium, the conference agenda incorporated various experience formats to highlight transformational work—including efforts from a number of the 30+ KNN partners nationwide. These institutions and groups—our KNN Catalyst Organizations and Changemaker Groups—have all made a formal commitment to embedding and embodying the KNN Framework elements of character, caring, and practical wisdom toward flourishing into their environments.

For example, Wednesday's opening session, **"Working Across the System to Advance Flourishing for All,"** highlighted interdisciplinary approaches and featured leaders from three KNN partner organizations: Sherry S. Chesak, PhD, MS, RN, of the University of Minnesota and Mayo Clinic; Alice Fornari, EdD, RD, FAMEE, HEC-C, of Zucker School of Medicine and Northwell Health; and Ashley Pavlic, MD, MA, of the Medical College of Wisconsin.



Each shared personal stories that revealed how one's individual purpose can lead to uniting with others to take collective action toward challenging traditional narratives and sparking positive disruption in healthcare. Then, they spoke to how the KNN Framework concepts are coming to life in their organizations—across programs, campuses, and systems. Approaches included a required foundational Good Doctor course that embeds Framework concepts into professional identity formation; an interprofessional center for flourishing in a university system; and an interprofessional character-based development program continuing to expand across a health system.



Among other insights, these leaders emphasized the importance of finding ways to integrate concepts within existing structures, rather than trying to carve out new space in highly time-constrained systems, as well as the power of small everyday practices to shift culture.

Bridging Across Differences Toward Flourishing

In particular, the need to overcome divisiveness and polarization was identified as an integral part of shifting culture. During the opening session on Thursday, the first full day of the conference, Dr. Maurana shared that bridging across differences is "an essential part of sustained work toward more effective healthcare and societal flourishing."

The subsequent main stage session, **"Strengthened by Differences, Connected in Community,"** illuminated the work of KNN partners participating in the KNN's Bridging Across Differences Toward Flourishing work. Several leaders from schools participating in a national demonstration project on bridging joined an interactive panel discussion sharing lessons from this work: Jed Gonzalo, MD, MSc, of Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine; Marcia Wofford, MD, of Wake Forest University School of Medicine; and James Woodruff, MD, of Pritzker School of Medicine at the University of Chicago.

This session explored how bridging practices rooted in character, caring, and practical wisdom offer a depth that goes beyond transactional conflict resolution toward excellence in engaging with others. First, the panelists modeled a values-



based, relational introduction using *Strengths & Skills Cards* (from a deck created by Dr. Wofford and used at Wake Forest) to share a core value or strength they perceive as important for a high-performing healthcare team. The panelists then invited conference attendees to participate in the same exercise at their tables and to capture key takeaways from their conversations.

From there, panelists shared the work being done to advance bridging mindsets and practices within their institutions. One key theme was the recognition that bridging skills and mindsets are not “nice to have” but truly core to professional practice, as healthcare practitioners must frequently navigate complexity, consider differing perspectives and viewpoints, and fully engage with deeply meaningful issues. Discussion also suggested the ways in which bridging is central to caring—which requires us to see others objectively and to fully engage with their needs and the surrounding context. Overall, the session laid the groundwork for conference participants to view their experiences throughout the event through the lens of bringing curiosity, forming connections, and finding common ground.



Amplifying Efforts Across the Nation

With more than 97 peer-reviewed sessions, the conference sparked new dialogue on topics such as transformative leadership paradigms, participatory arts integration, longitudinal professional identity formation, structural and systemic forces, the role of AI in health professions education, and more. In a post-conference evaluation survey, 94% of respondents agreed most sessions they attended made connections to research and evidence or were based on approaches that have been tested and found effective; in this way, the annual conference served to extend and strengthen the evidence base of practices for advancing flourishing.



The conference also created a space to meet new potential collaborators, catalyze ideas, and develop work that may feature in future conferences. For instance, the work Dr. Fornari shared in an opening session originally stemmed from her participation in a session on the Mobilizing Character faculty development experience during the KNN's first national conference. Through ongoing collaboration with the developers, modules from that series have informed and been incorporated into the professional development programming being scaled across Northwell Health.

In addition to novel ideas, participants gained new insights and a deeper understanding of KNN Framework elements, all while experiencing a powerful sense of togetherness and deepening relationships. When asked about the single most valuable takeaway from the 2025 KNN Conference, participants cited a variety of insights—yet many raised the common themes of connection, community, and collective hope for the future; practical tools and

Highlights from Post-Evaluation Feedback on 2025 KNN Conference



92%

gained new insight
and understanding of
Framework concepts

94%

reported most sessions made
connections to relevant research
and evidence and/or were based
on tested, effective practices

96%

indicated the conference
fostered a strong sense of
community and relationships

examples; and new lenses for understanding and addressing complex culture and workforce challenges in their organizations.

Too often, the insights and inspiration gained at conferences can fade as attendees return to their day-to-day responsibilities. To sustain momentum and ensure KNN Conference participants left with a clear action plan, Friday's closing session, **"Shaping the Future Together,"** led attendees through a guided reflection and synthesis of their conference experience. The KNN's theory of change—Connect, Convene, Catalyze, Influence—provided a frame, as National Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Kimara Ellefson, MBA, EdD, asked participants to consider:

- *Where did you make or strengthen connections?*
- *Who are potential allies in your organization?*
- *What actionable ideas have sessions catalyzed?*
- *Where are there existing systems or practices in which you could embed character, caring, and practical wisdom toward flourishing?*

Dialogue with colleagues and tablemates helped reinforce learnings and encouraged participants to leave not only inspired by their experience but also inspired to enact strategies and practices in their settings.

Looking Ahead

We are deeply grateful to the Kern Family Foundation, whose steadfast partnership and transformational investment make the work of the KNN possible. We also would like to express our appreciation for all who contributed to the conference, including our 2025 conference sponsors, the KNN program office team, and our partners, presenters, and participants. Looking ahead, the **2026 KNN Conference** will take place in Pasadena, California, from September 30 through October 2—continuing the intentionality of hosting conferences near our KNN partners.



Select Key Takeaways Shared by Participants

"There are others that enjoy looking positively into the future."

"The versatility of the KNN framework."

"There are so many other people in the world that are curious and interested in Flourishing!"

"Grounding [us] back to our humanity."

"The conference empowered me to cause change, I felt alone in my desire to bring more humanism to medicine."

"Building connections with other teams doing adjacent research projects on the framework. We plan to stay connected and share our progress with one another and learn from one another along the way."

"The framework is easy to understand, intuitive, and I would like to implement it in my work as a physician."

"Collective hope."

"There are new and exciting ways to integrate the KNN framework beyond the medical student learner, to faculty, residents and other professional students. And these offer exciting possibilities."

"1:1, small changes can make a big impact."

"Appreciative inquiry."

"Organize to act with hope for the flourishing of all... in the face of adversity, arduously pursue the common good while encouraging others."

"Growing movement!"

"It was wonderful to see that there are many others committed to doing this work and that made me feel hopeful."



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