On January 12, 2016, Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards signed an executive order to expand the state's Medicaid program. Despite ample evidence that health care coverage saves lives and improves health outcomes, many individuals expressing opposition to the expansion hypothesized that coverage would not translate into access to medical care because clinicians would not take Medicaid insurance. In an effort to monitor whether coverage resulted in access, the Louisiana Department of Health created a dashboard to track the numbers of individuals covered by Medicaid and what services recipients were receiving. The department focused on the most meaningful and immediately impactful health care services: utilization of primary care visits, cancer screenings, mental health care, and substance use disorder visits.

The Healthy LA Dashboard was built internally by a department team and drew on claims and other data to generate real-time informatics on Medicaid utilization. By breaking down information into parish (or county) levels, citizens, news media, and legislators have been able to find data on the local effects of Medicaid expansion. The dashboard demonstrated unprecedented levels of access to care in all regions of the state and may have played a part in the overwhelming public support (76%) for the expansion. The promising outcomes displayed on the Healthy Louisiana Dashboard, for example, show that 82,229 women had received screening for breast cancer and more than 47,000 adults in the expansion population had received colon cancer screenings as of February 3, 2020.

The dashboard has allowed Department of Health staff to prioritize quality measures and address gaps in health care utilization. The focus on managing toward and measuring primary care utilization and health disparities has resulted in significant progress in these areas. The same staff that created the Medicaid dashboard also created a dashboard to document the numbers of individuals being treated by the state's unique subscription model that gives individuals receiving Medicaid and in the correctional system unlimited access to the lifesaving drugs that eliminate hepatitis C. According to the Hep C Free Louisiana dashboard, 3,363 persons have received treatment in Louisiana in the past year, compared with only a few hundred in 2016.

Recently, the Louisiana Department of Health used these skill sets and went live with another dashboard in response to the current coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis. This dashboard may be the most important one that has been built to date. In collaboration with the Office of Public Health, state and private laboratory results of COVID-19 tests are mapped on a dashboard to better communicate to the public the fast spread of the disease. The dashboard also includes real-time ventilator, intensive care unit, and total bed capacity. In the midst of a public health crisis, this dashboard allows the governor, clinical systems, and other local, state, and national policy makers to react quickly and enact effective responses when and where they are needed. The COVID-19 dashboard allows the public to better understand the extent of the problem and serves as an immediate resource for news media. The dashboard is being used as a commanding call to action to help combat the crisis that is quickly overtaking not only the New Orleans metropolitan region but the entire state. The dashboard has helped Governor Edwards to communicate about the large numbers of those infected and helped the public to understand why measures such as school and business closures and stay-at-home orders are needed.

Accurate measurement is critical for effective management. As we face one of the most challenging public health crises our nation has ever seen, measurement is even more important.
team who builds dashboards at the Louisiana Department of Health consists of policy experts, medical professionals, and experts in data management. Their work has been truly vital to our state and should be replicated across the nation. The dashboard they created has helped to illustrate the extent and rapid spread of COVID-19 in Louisiana and serves perhaps the most important purpose a dashboard can have: to inform the deployment of resources to prevent avoidable loss of life. In the longer term, these types of dashboards will surely be used to help monitor progress in the war against our viral enemy, so that life as we knew it before this crisis can gradually regain its hold.

ARTICLE INFORMATION
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