



# Leveraging Collaboration in the Greater Kansas City Metro IRIS Network

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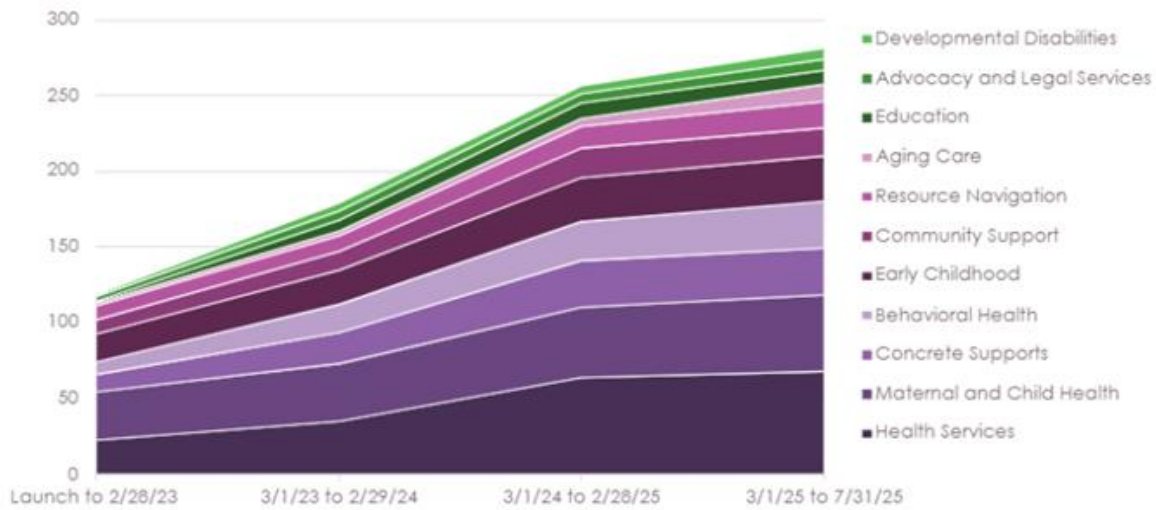
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Mandi LaRue, local leader with the Greater Kansas City (KC) Metro IRIS Network, and Loretta Severin, with the IRIS Team, presented at the Kansas Public Health Association's Annual Conference in September 2025. Their presentation *Building Bridges: Leveraging Collaboration in a Community-Led Network* describes how the Greater KC Metro Network implemented partner-centered engagement strategies and change management practices to foster a sense of shared network ownership between partners and local leaders.

## **Partner Engagement Strategies**

With a community-wide vision of establishing an interconnected network that reduces family barriers to services, the Greater KC Metro Leadership Team pursued engagement strategies that cultivated investment among partner organizations. By emphasizing the importance of building relationships and making connections that reflect the needs of the community, the Leadership Team worked closely with partners to define and refine this vision over time.

In 2025, the Greater KC Metro Leadership Team collaborated with partners to strategically expand the network by onboarding partner-identified agencies that provide services not currently represented in the network. In doing so, the responsibility of expanding IRIS became a collaborative effort, leveraging partner's insights and relationships to grow the network more organically. Through this intentional growth, Greater KC has steadily increased the number of available partners across each sector type in IRIS (see Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1 Greater KC Metro Partner Growth by Sector**

With their expansion efforts focused on filling gaps in underrepresented sectors, such as aging care and developmental disabilities, the network has become more inclusive and responsive to specific needs, resulting in increased buy-in with partners.

**Success in the Data**

The success of their engagement strategies is reflected in the network’s impact. Between March 2022 and December 31, 2025, the Greater KC Metro Network has engaged over 215 active organizations and strategically diversified its referral landscape to include community resources from all sectors. As a result, collaborating partners have facilitated more than 11,000 referrals, connecting over 7,000 families to services.

The Greater KC Metro’s collaborative approach to network sustainability and expansion centers on the importance of building relationships with their current partners and inviting them to co-design solutions. In doing so, they ensure that the network grows and is maintained in a manner that reflects and supports the actual needs of the community. By leading with a shared vision and centering collaborative decision-making, the Local Leadership Team empowers partners to grow the network and monitor accountability to ensure a more interconnected referral community.