

Health, Consolidated

Lifespan and Care New England, the two biggest healthcare networks in RI, have signed an agreement stating their intent to merge. They've submitted a letter of intent and application to the Attorney General's office - the AG, Federal Trade Commission and RIDOH still need to sign off on the project and will be assessing the application, most likely for at least another two months. The combined entity is called the integrated Academic Health System and would also heavily incorporate academic resources from Brown University.

The RI Foundation has publicly submitted an independent assessment and list of recommendations to keep the AHS responsible to the communities it serves and equitable to communities with a variety of healthcare access and affordability needs.

Those supporting the merger cite benefits in quality of care, although the specifics of that seem to rely on the spectrum and geographic availability of care, which already exist with two systems. Other predicted advantages lie in consolidation of purchasing and labor, creating greater financial efficiencies, and in better integration of information and medical records for those patients who otherwise might be crossing from one network to another.

Opponents are concerned about the monopolistic potential of a single network that will control the vast majority of healthcare services, with little competition on prices, few alternative options for patients seeking most types of care, and less competition for employee wages, which might result in lower pay for some categories of employees.

We're sure to hear more about this as the agreement moves through its approval process.