



Beacon Community ProgramSM

Awardee of The Office of the National Coordinator for
Health Information Technology

The Beacon Community Program goals include building and strengthening a health information technology infrastructure; improving health outcomes, care quality, and cost efficiencies; and spearheading innovations to achieve better health and health care.

Delta BLUES Beacon Community

Overview of the Delta BLUES Beacon Community

The Mississippi Delta is an 18-county area between the Mississippi and the Yazoo Rivers that is bordered to the north by Memphis, TN and to the south by Vicksburg, MS. The region consistently ranks among the most disadvantaged areas in the nation, with more than one third of its population living in poverty. Furthermore, the area suffers from poor health outcomes relative to other counties in the state. Approximately 13 percent of Mississippi Delta residents have diabetes. This region lacks the sufficient number of health care providers to effectively address this condition on a large scale, particularly primary care providers and those delivering specialized services (e.g., endocrinologists).

The Delta BLUES (Better Living Utilizing Electronic Systems) Beacon Community will build on past successes implementing health information technology (health IT) in the region. Largely due to efforts spearheaded by the Delta Health Alliance, this region boasts above-average implementation of electronic health records (EHRs) within health care facilities. This achievement, combined with initiatives to improve specialty care access via telemedicine technology that links rural providers to larger regional or academic systems, provides the Delta BLUES Beacon Community with a unique platform on which to build new regional efforts to improve care delivery and outcomes.

Goal of the Program

The goals of the Delta BLUES Beacon Community are to achieve targeted and sustainable improvements in diabetes care through a range of interventions designed to improve quality, cost, and population health for persons diagnosed with diabetes in the Mississippi Delta. As of May 2011, health IT-enhanced clinical interventions are underway in 5 of the 18 counties, with a defined spread strategy to reach additional areas. Specifically, these interventions include:

- Supporting patients to better understand and utilize the medications that their physicians prescribe through the exchange of patients' health information with pharmacists who are providing telephonic support to patients on managing their medication regimen
- Establishing effective discharge protocols by coaching patients through transitions of care and electronically sharing hospital visit information with primary care providers to actively follow up with patients when they return to their home environment to reduce hospital readmissions rates due to poor management of diabetes and failures in follow-up care
- Implementing evidence-based computerized clinical decision-support systems in the primary care clinics and engineering workflow processes that allow clinicians to utilize them effectively in patient care

Using Health Information Technology to Make a Difference

The Delta BLUES Beacon Community is facilitating the use of nationally accepted guidelines in clinical care and utilizing EHRs to improve care delivery in the Mississippi Delta. The program will also help to build the infrastructure for health information exchange (HIE) in collaboration with broader statewide exchange efforts that will connect providers with each other and with local hospitals, allowing providers and their patients to more effectively and cooperatively improve disease management and transitions of care across health care settings.

The implementation of EHRs and exchange capabilities provide an opportunity to redesign clinical processes throughout the health care settings in the area:

- Promoting best practices in chronic disease management and care transitions
- Improving monitoring systems for diabetes control
- Enhancing patient education efforts so that patients and their care managers have the information they need to manage their conditions
- Enabling providers to achieve meaningful use of EHRs
- Ensuring that health information can flow reliably and securely among authorized parties
- Improving effectiveness and efficiencies in the practice setting including better patient outcomes

A Team Approach

The Delta Health Alliance (DHA) is a partnership founded by Delta State University, Mississippi State University, Mississippi Valley State University, University of Mississippi Medical Center, and Delta Council. Other partners include Capps Center for Workforce Technology, Mississippi Hospital Association, Mississippi Primary Health Care Association, University of Mississippi, University of Southern Mississippi, and the Mississippi State Department of Health, which is the recipient of a CDC grant directed toward improved care for diabetic patients in the region. The DHA staff also works with the Mississippi Regional Extension Center to educate providers who use EHRs on the application of best practice solutions and care guides to improve care delivery for diabetic patients.

Improvements for Patients and the Community

The use of EHRs and HIE by primary care providers, pharmacists, and hospitals in the Mississippi Delta are improving:

- Access to medical histories electronically. Providers will have faster access to necessary and accurate information, thereby ensuring better coordinated patient care.
- Patient engagement in caring for their health. Clinic-based case managers, health coaches helping patients manage post hospital discharge plans, and pharmacists delivering medication therapy management services are supporting patients becoming active, engaged partners in their health.
- Access to specialty medicine. Telemedicine technology is enabling providers and patients in the Delta to consult with specialists outside the region to ensure that patients have full access to the care they need when they need it.

