The Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology

ONC's Office of Interoperability and Standards

Overseeing U.S. Health IT Initiatives Including the S&I Framework, the Nationwide Health Information Network, the EHR Certification Program, the Direct Project, and Managing the Federal Health Architecture and CONNECT Program

The Office of Interoperability and Standards (OIS), a division within the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC), provides the leadership and direction that supports the secure and seamless exchange of health information in compliance with the national health IT agenda.

Among its many responsibilities, OIS:

- Advances the development, adoption and implementation of health information technology standards nationally through public and private collaboration
- Promotes the development of performance measures related to the adoption of interoperable health IT standards
- Works HHS offices to evaluate mechanisms for harmonizing security and privacy practices in an interoperable health IT architecture

The OIS has broad responsibility for the Standards and Interoperability (S&I) Framework, the Nationwide Health Information Network, the EHR Certification program, the Direct Project, and it manages the Federal Health Architecture (FHA) and the CONNECT program.

Below you'll find more information about some of the programs managed by OIS that will be demonstrated during HIMSS 2011.

S&I Framework

The S&I Framework is an open government initiative that uses integrated processes, tools and resources with the goal of developing and supporting specifications guided by the healthcare and technology industry. As it matures, the S&I Framework will contain a set of integrated content and technical specifications that supports the interoperable exchange of healthcare information.

Launched on Jan. 7, 2011, the S&I Framework recently went through a call for participation that ended on Jan. 31. ONC is looking for volunteers to collaborate on interoperability challenges critical to meeting Meaningful Use objectives for 2011.

The Framework supports national health outcomes and healthcare priorities, including Meaningful Use, the Nationwide Health Information Network, the Virtual Lifetime Electronic Record (VLER) and the ongoing mission to create better care, improve population health and achieve cost reduction through delivery improvements.

For more information about the S&I Framework, visit http://jira.siframework.org/wiki/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=4194700.

Nationwide Health Information Network

The Nationwide Health Information Network is the set of standards, services and policies that enable secure health information exchange over the Internet. The network provides a foundation for the exchange of health information across diverse entities, within communities and across the country, helping to achieve the goals of the HITECH Act.

A group of federal agencies, local, regional and state-level health information exchange organizations (HIOs) and integrated delivery networks has been helping to develop the network standards, services and policies.

Today, these organizations are exchanging live health information in support of patient care, public health reporting, and disability determination through the Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange. Organizations currently on the Exchange include the Social Security Administration, MedVirginia, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Defense, Kaiser Permanente, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Regenstrief Institute, HealthBridge, Community Health Information Collaborative, and Marshfield Clinic, and more organizations are in the process of onboarding to the Exchange.

For more information about the Exchange, please visit http://healthit.hhs.gov/nhin.

CONNECT

CONNECT is an open source software gateway that allows health organizations to securely exchange health-related information using nationally recognized standards – whether across the street or across the country. Originally built by more than 20 federal agencies through the Federal Health Architecture (FHA), CONNECT uses Nationwide Health Information Network standards and governance as a framework to connect providers, insurers, federal agencies, states and others involved in supporting health and healthcare.

Today the CONNECT solution is available as an open source offering to any organization wishing to use it to further their health IT interoperability needs – free of charge. The CONNECT open source community is made up of more than 2,000 individual organizations and is managed by FHA and ONC. The CONNECT software and the community are "open" in every sense of the word. The software development process, technology needs definition and even the software itself are open to the community for discussion, improvement and contribution.

For more information about CONNECT, visit http://www.connectopensource.org.

Direct Project

Launched in March 2010 as a part of the Nationwide Health Information Network, the Direct Project was created to specify a simple, secure, scalable, standards-based way for participants to send authenticated, encrypted health information directly to known, trusted recipients over the Internet. The Direct Project has more than 200 participants from over 50 different organizations. These participants include EHR and PHR vendors, medical organizations, systems integrators, integrated delivery networks, federal organizations, state and regional health information organizations, organizations that provide health information exchange capabilities, and health information technology consultants.

The Direct Project focuses on the technical standards and services necessary to securely push content from a sender to a receiver. When these services are used by providers and organizations to transport and share qualifying clinical content, the combination of content and Direct-Project-specified transport standards may satisfy some Stage 1 Meaningful Use requirements. For example, a primary care physician who is referring a patient to a specialist can use the Direct Project to provide a clinical summary of that patient to the specialist and to receive a summary of the consultation.

In February 2011, the Department of Health and Human Services and the White House announced the first live, production uses of Direct specifications for sending medical records securely among providers. Additionally, EHR and PHR vendors announced support for Direct, meaning that they will soon be able to support files from any other Direct-compliant system from other vendors. These developments are aimed at reducing the projected time necessary to make it possible for care givers and patients to securely and simply request and receive health records over the Internet.

For more information about the Direct Project, please visit http://directproject.org.