Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange

The Nationwide Health Information Network is broadly defined as the set of standards, specifications and policies that enable the secure exchange of health information over the Internet. This program 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. The Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange is the first community that implemented these standards, specifications and policies in production.

Organizations that participate in the Exchange are accountable for the privacy and security of the patient data. By signing the Data Use and Reciprocal Support Agreement (DURSA), a comprehensive, multiparty legal agreement that outlines the roles and responsibilities of Exchange participants, they are obligated to have measures in place to protect the data.

This Exchange has connected a diverse set of federal agencies and private organizations that need to securely exchange electronic health information. These entities currently include:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)
- Community Health Information Collaborative (CHIC)
- Department of Defense (DoD)
- Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
- HealthBridge
- Kaiser Permanente
- Marshfield Clinic
- MedVirginia
- Regenstrief Institute
- Social Security Administration (SSA)
- Southern Pines Women's Health Center

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In 2011, it is expected that over twenty organizations, many of which link multiple provider practices, will be securely sharing live health information as part of the Exchange.

Early Successes

The Exchange consists of federal and private entities that played a key role in the development of the foundational components required for exchange. These participants have recognized some significant benefits by participating in the exchange. For example:

- Through its relationship with MedVirginia, SSA has been able to reduce turnaround time for medical disability determinations from an average of 84 days to 46 days – a 45% improvement. Of these, a determination was made in 161 cases (about 3.1%) within 48 hours of receipt.
- The DoD, VA, Kaiser Permanente and MedVirginia have been able to improve coordination of care for thousands of active military and veteran patients who receive medical attention across these systems of care.
- Regenstrief Institute is sharing de-identified patient data for over 80% of Indiana's population with the CDC to support influenza and pneumonia tracking. This will enhance CDC's ability to track and manage disease outbreaks across the country.

Participation in the Exchange

Although non-federal entities can only participate in the Exchange currently through a federally-sponsored contract, that has not impeded the growth of the Exchange. Through federal sponsored contracts, additional participants currently include:

- SSA – awarded contracts to 15 organizations
- ONC Beacon Communities
- ONC State HIE Cooperative Agreements
- CDC
- CMS C-HIEP Project
- Other federal contracts related to Nationwide Health Information Network implementation

Organizations that are interested in exchanging data with the Exchange should:

1. Determine whether the existing functionality meets its needs:
   - Does the organization have a need to exchange summary patient records for care coordination?
   - Does the organization need to submit state public health reporting information to CDC?
   - Does the organization wish to provide summary records to SSA for disability determination purposes?

2. If the organization requires any of the functionality listed above, does it have a contract with one of the sponsoring federal agencies noted above?
   - If so – the organization should coordinate through the sponsoring agency.
   - If not, the organization should coordinate through one of the existing vehicles, such as states, beacon communities, SSA awardees or an existing Exchange production participant.

Organizations that are interested in participating in the Exchange are encouraged to review the numerous resources available at http://healthit.hhs.gov/nhin. The specifications, testing resources, legal agreements and accountability measures are all publicly available.

The Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) believes that with broad implementation, the secure exchange of health information using Nationwide Health Information Network standards, services and policies will help improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare for all Americans.

For more information about participation in the Exchange, interested entities should email nhin@hhs.gov.

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