

June 9, 2009

Dear Member of Congress,

The eHealth Initiative (eHI) and the undersigned groups urge you to fully integrate the health information technology provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into the broader health reform discussion as Congress moves forward with legislation this summer. In order to realize the complete benefits of the collection, use and exchange of electronic health information, the implementation of ARRA's health IT section—known as the HITECH Act—must be interwoven with House and Senate reform efforts.

The eHealth Initiative is an independent, non-profit, multi-stakeholder organization whose mission is to improve the quality, safety and efficiency of health care through information and information technology. eHI counts 165 health care stakeholders among its membership, and also works with more than 260 state, regional and community-based multi-stakeholder collaborations which support HIT adoption and health information exchange.

The HITECH Act's key mission is to promote the meaningful use of health information technology, moving the debate beyond technology adoption by a physician or hospital, and instead challenging health care stakeholders to use and exchange the information contained in such systems to improve health care in the U.S.

Health information technology is crucial to the management of information, noted Dr. David Blumenthal, the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, in May 2009, "and we are above all in the health care industry about using information to make decisions. Anything we can do to make the management of information more effective to get better information to the point of key decisions at the right time is going to ultimately improve the quality of those decisions and the products that our health care system produces."ⁱ

We wholeheartedly agree with the sentiments that Dr. Blumenthal expressed. Due to the highly fragmented nature of our current system, clinicians often do not have the information they need for decision-making, nor do those responsible for improving the health of the American population. And patients, the focus of the system, do not have ready access to the information they need to effectively manage their health. The meaningful use and exchange of electronic health information will help reduce medical errors, improve the state of preventative care, enable comprehensive comparative effectiveness research, engage consumers more fully in their own health and treatment, and ultimately galvanize savings and revitalize the provision of care across the delivery system.

But meaningful use cannot occur in a vacuum. In 2008, the Congressional Budget Office noted that the clearest benefits of using health IT had been identified and measured in integrated care systems where health IT was already tied into the functions of the system.ⁱⁱ Any major redesign of our health care system must be grounded in a well-defined relationship with the meaningful use of health information technology in order to achieve that advanced level of interconnectivity and interoperability. A few of the key areas to focus on the integration of HITECH Act provisions include:

ⁱ <http://www.ehealthinitiative.org/assets/Documents/COHEALTHBEATNEWS.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/110/pro.pdf>

- Payment reform that incentivizes quality of care over quantity of care, so that providers begin to directly realize financial benefits from utilizing health IT.
- Promoting preventive care that relies upon the abilities of health IT to aid providers in identifying potential conditions in their early stages and support the provider and the patient in pursuing positive health behaviors.
- Utilizing electronic data gathered through health IT to advance the vast amount of work needed to better understand and then address the causes of disparities, both in the cost and in the provision of care.

Congress' support for reform policies that holistically incorporate health IT and the provisions of the HITECH Act will lay the foundation for a higher quality, safer, more accessible, and more efficient health care system. But if the adoption and meaningful use of health IT is viewed as a separate endeavor from health reform, the likelihood will only increase that the money spent to encourage health IT adoption and information exchange will be squandered due to our failure to leverage the capacity of electronic health information and tools to enable and accelerate health reform that is built on the foundation of health information.

Ultimately, meaningful use of health IT will dictate whether long-term health reform in the U.S. succeeds or fails. Speaking before the House Ways and Means Committee in July 2008, Peter Orszag, then-director of the Congressional Budget Office, testified that the U.S. annually spends up to \$700 billion on health care which may constitute unnecessary or duplicative spending, and that reducing such nonessential spending will require the full use and integration of health IT into broader health reform. "One can think of health information technology as the foundation or the gateway to capturing that \$700 billion opportunity," Orszag explained. "It will not be sufficient by itself, but it is necessary to put in place a more universal system of health information technology in order to capture the opportunities that we have before us."ⁱⁱⁱ

The eHealth Initiative and the undersigned organizations stand ready to work with Congress to further address specific areas where the health reform agenda can integrate health IT and the provisions of the HITECH Act to foster the widespread use and exchange of electronic health information. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at Jennifer.Covich@ehealthinitiative.org.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Covich Bordenick
Chief Operating Officer and Interim CEO
eHealth Initiative

Co-Signing Organizations:

- Altarum Institute
- American Health Information Management Association
- American Health Quality Association
- CareEntrust

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://waysandmeans.house.gov/hearings.asp?formmode=view&id=7548>

- Center for Information Therapy
- DocSite
- EmblemHealth
- GE Healthcare
- HLTH Corporation and WebMD Health Corp
- Healthcare Quality Strategies, Inc.
- IBM Corporation
- Ingenix
- Inland Northwest Health Services
- Kaiser Permanente
- Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative
- National Association of County & City Health Officials
- Oxcyon, Inc.
- Patient360
- PricewaterhouseCoopers' HIT Practice
- RedwoodMedNet
- Thomson Reuters

The eHealth Initiative (eHI) is an independent, non-profit multi-stakeholder organization whose mission is to improve the quality, safety and efficiency of healthcare through information and information technology. eHI engages multiple stakeholders including clinicians, consumer and patient groups, employers and healthcare purchasers, healthcare IT suppliers, health plans, hospitals and other providers, laboratories, pharmaceutical and medical device manufacturers, pharmacies, public health agencies, and state and community-based organizations, to reach agreement on and drive the adoption of common principles, policies, strategies and actions that improve the quality, safety and efficiency of health care through information technology that are responsible, practical, sustainable, responsible to stakeholder needs—particularly those of patients—and build and maintain the public's trust.