

# Measuring Meaningful Use: A Major Opportunity to Accelerate Change by Clarifying Priorities

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The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act requires adoption of measures for the “meaningful use” of health IT in order to unlock billions of dollars in incentives. After years of growing support for health IT adoption that improves healthcare, this is the time to get specific about what results these investments should return.

## Defining Meaningful Use

The imperative to measure meaningful use represents a shift in focus to benefits and results. Not surprisingly, a very high-stakes debate is in full swing.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has conducted listening sessions to help formulate meaningful use measures, while the National Committee on Vital and Health Statistics held hearings in late April. AHIMA advises that measures:

**Reflect the end goals.** Health IT is a means to improving quality, cost, and health system performance. Meaningful use should focus on use of the information, not the technology.

**Be incremental.** IT systems and the know-how to use information are evolving rapidly. Meaningful use should therefore be viewed as a road map to be stepped up over the next several years. Initial criteria should be based on what is achievable with current technology.

**Leverage the standards, certification,** and information exchange progress of recent years. The definition of meaningful use and how it is measured should build on the approaches taken by the Certification Commission for Healthcare Information Technology, the Healthcare Information Technology Standards Panel, and the American Health Information Community. Measurement should not create reporting burdens for providers.

**Be auditable.** How meaningful use is measured and reported must minimize manipulation and mitigate the risk of fraudulent reporting.

**Be relevant to consumers.** Tax payers are funding these investments as a prerequisite to effective health reform. More broadly, this is an extraordinary opportunity to be transparent and to increase public recognition of the challenge and opportunity of an interconnected health system and the progress that is being made.

Joshua Seidman describes the importance of this last point in his article “The Big Gamble.” Seidman advises high-level policy work must lead to understandable, usable, meaningful information for consumers.

Jill Burrington-Brown addresses the growing role of patient-centered information in “Information Therapy.” More consumers are using personal health records, and more are using IT to interact with physicians and the healthcare system overall.

While these are still early days for patient-centered health IT, it is clear that consumers will play the central role in transforming the healthcare system—and that ultimately they will judge meaningful use.

For HIM, this is a time of extraordinary opportunity and unprecedented resource constraints. In “Thinking Lean in Healthcare” Robert James Campbell offers health information managers a management tool and philosophy that focuses on process improvement and change management. Lean thinking can be used to improve overall organizational functioning without eliminating manpower.

The definition and measures of meaningful use represent a major policy opportunity to accelerate change by clarifying short-term priorities. Large-scale change requires clarity of purpose and careful sequencing of change. Meaningful use is an opportunity to get all stakeholders on a common path without stifling innovation and demonstrate health IT's value proposition to consumers.

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