

# Testing Health Record Banking

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by **Chris Dimick**

Washington State's experiment in consumer-controlled health records has moved into a pilot phase, transforming the health record banking model from theory to testing. In March the Washington State Health Care Authority (HCA) announced the launch of three pilot sites that will try out the feasibility of a permanent statewide health record bank network.

Health record banks centrally store copies of consumers' health records, which providers "deposit" into the accounts. Consumers control which providers can contribute information to their accounts and which providers and individuals can view their records.

This model of exchange, where many providers send patient information to one central location, is seen as an alternative to the many-to-many exchange model, where several organizations directly exchange copies of patient records. If the pilot project is successful, Washington State hopes to show by example that health record banks are the ideal model for nationwide information exchange, says Juan Alaniz, health record bank pilot project manager for HCA.

A main goal of the pilot is to show that health information can get into the hands of patients and providers, Alaniz says, which will reduce redundant medical procedures and improve the quality and safety of care provided. "By having this information available, I think that we are arming consumers with valuable information they can use in a timely basis," he says.

## Three Pilot Sites

The Washington State pilot is the first large-scale testing of the health record bank model. The test contains three projects across the state, which will target 18,000 participants who have specialized healthcare needs, such as chronic-illness patients, families with children, and caregivers.

The banks are managed by local community healthcare facilities, which identified and recruited patients to take part in the pilot, Alaniz says. The state contributed \$1.7 million to the pilot, with participant healthcare communities also pitching in funds.

The three pilot sites are in the following locales:

- Bellingham, run by St. Joseph Hospital Foundation and the Critical Junctions Institute
- Cashmere, run by Community Choice Healthcare Network
- Spokane, run by Inland Northwest Health Services

Participating providers will begin by loading five types of "high value" data into the bank accounts: medication history, immunization records, allergy information, family history, and a health status synopsis.

## A Quick Trial

The pilot will end in July, when a preliminary results analysis will be conducted, Alaniz says. The project will test the financial sustainability of the banks, their ability to provide public health data, and how the banks should be organized and governed.

But most importantly, the pilot is meant to see if consumers and providers find health record banks valuable and would sign up for a fully integrated, statewide health record banking system. "If it is of no value to consumers or providers, then we certainly don't want to do this," Alaniz says.

At the end of the pilot, the health record banks will continue to operate if funding can be secured. The goal is to have the banks financially self-sustainable by 2011.

The pilot banks run PHR programs from Microsoft HealthVault and Google Health. Each pilot site had its choice between the two programs, which Alaniz describes as PHRs “on steroids.” When patient data are uploaded into the bank, the information is automatically organized in specialized ways useful to patients and providers.

Using existing PHR products saved HCA the cost of developing software. In addition, the banks benefit from the companies’ work to make the interfaces consumer friendly, says Alaniz. If the health record bank project were to advance, Alaniz says banks would have their choice between using existing products and developing platforms from scratch.

## Public Results

Washington State officials plan to share the information they obtain from the pilots with interested parties. HCA has already talked with Oregon and New York state officials about sharing pilot data. For more on HCA, see [www.hca.wa.gov/hit](http://www.hca.wa.gov/hit).

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