

Transitioning from NwHIN Exchange to Healthway

Save to myBoK

By Lou Ann Wiedemann, MS, RHIA, CPEHR, FAHIMA and Julie Dooling, RHIT

The Nationwide Health Information Network (NwHIN) was originally defined as a “set of standards, services, and policies” by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) in 2007. Further changes were established in February 2009 as a part of the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act, with the intent of setting up a foundation for how health information would be exchanged in the US.

But recent events in the healthcare industry have impacted the NwHIN, which was initially operated by ONC as a departmental program. The biggest changes have come in the NwHIN Exchange portion of the program. NwHIN Exchange was initially launched as a group of federal agencies and private organizations that contracted together to use NwHIN HIE protocol to securely exchange electronic health information. Exchange participants helped to develop the standards and policies used by the exchange through the experience they gained with live data transfer. But in a move to foster continued growth in health information exchange efforts, ONC officials began transitioning the NwHIN Exchange to a public-private partnership in September 2012.

In addition to operational changes, the NwHIN started operating under the new name eHealth Exchange in October 2012. Healthway, Inc. was then named as the new non-profit public-private partnership created to operationally support eHealth Exchange and develop its growth. These changes could mark 2013 as a banner year for health information exchange (HIE).

The HIE private sector market has seen much growth in recent years. While state-designated entities and regional health information organizations continue to operate and develop their role in newly evolving territory, the “enterprise”-or integrated delivery network-HIEs are also being formed. These private HIEs may share the same electronic health record (EHR) technology or contract with a HIE technology vendor to provide integration services between different technologies that enable the exchange of health information. The transfer to Healthway and a sustainable public-private initiative will mark a significant milestone in HIE development. The demonstration of a secured, trusted, and interoperable exchange of information on a nationwide scale-between all types of HIEs-is paramount to the future of healthcare.

Initiative Creates High Hopes for Data Exchange

The “meaningful use” EHR Incentive Program and healthcare payment reform models such as accountable care organizations (ACOs) are driving increased adoption of EHR and HIE technology. The overarching goal is a successful path to sharing and delivering health information at or near the point of care.

Healthway expects to double participation in 2013 and expected to end 2012 with 40 partners. In order to further foster growth, four federal agencies-the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Department of Defense, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of Veterans Affairs-as well as numerous non-federal agencies, are expected to share patient information through Healthway. This base would set Healthway on its journey through a transition period and goal of being sustainable by 2014. Healthway selected the Certification Commission for Health Information Technology to perform the testing and certification of EHRs and HIEs that wish to connect to the nationwide health information network or eHealth Exchange.

In August 2012 the eHealth Exchange Coordinating Committee appointed three representatives to serve as the Healthway Board of Directors. These individuals, along with an executive director and up to nine elected board members, will provide direction to the partnership. The Healthway Board has no oversight responsibilities with respect to the Exchange, but will serve under a master services agreement. eHealth Exchange has adopted a vision to “improve the health and welfare of all Americans by supporting health information exchange” and expects to foster cross-industry collaboration with respect to HIE. Any organization meeting certain criteria can participate in the Exchange. Onboarding requirement specifications include:

- Verification that the organization can satisfy provisions in the Data Use and Reciprocal Support Agreement
- Review Exchange operating policies and procedures
- Ensure that the organization meets Exchange eligibility criteria
- Ensure the organization's system meets Exchange technical requirements
- Complete and submit an application

Healthway Adds Participation Fees

One significant change within the Exchange is the addition of a fee structure. In the original setup under the ONC, it was free to join and participate in the NwHIN. However, there is now an application process and associated fees for participation. The participant fee is proportionate to an organization's annual revenue, and for academic or governmental organizations the fees are associated with annual operating budgets. Fees allow organizations 12 months of eHealth Exchange connectivity, as well as infrastructure support. However, organizations that provided financial support to the Exchange prior to December 31, 2012 were eligible for a fee discount.

One of Healthway's core values is to "cultivate trust and protection of information exchanged." Ensuring trust and protection of health information is at the forefront of the healthcare industry. Sharing information with a variety of federal and private organizations will be the beginning of success for eHealth Exchange. To learn more, visit www.healthwayinc.org.

References

Terry, Ken. "Interoperability Initiative Poised To Transform Healthcare." *Information Week*. October 17, 2012. <http://www.informationweek.com/healthcare/interoperability/interoperability-initiative-poised-to-tr/240009172>.

Lou Ann Wiedemann (lou-ann.wiedemann@ahima.org) and Julie Dooling (julie.dooling@ahima.org) are directors of HIM practice excellence at AHIMA.

Article citation:

Wiedemann, Lou Ann; Dooling, Julie A. "Transitioning from NwHIN Exchange to Healthway" *Journal of AHIMA* 84, no.2 (March 2013): 42-43.

Driving the Power of Knowledge

Copyright 2022 by The American Health Information Management Association. All Rights Reserved.