

Health Information Technology

The Issue

Broad adoption of Health Information Technology (HIT) will lead to improved health care outcomes, significant healthcare savings, reduced medical errors, and better access to health information. Widespread use of available health information technologies effectively can transform the U.S. healthcare system. Some estimates indicate that health information technology could save our nation's health care system tens billions of dollars a year (one estimate is \$80 billion dollars a year), as well as help to prevent misdiagnosis or improper treatment, thereby saving lives and improving care. Just as important, widespread use and analysis of electronic health information can be easily shared, searched, measured and analyzed to help the medical community determine what treatments and drugs are most effective, and at what cost.

Background

The federal government is expanding efforts to improve the quality, safety and efficiency of health care by putting forth a number of initiatives at the national and regional levels to promote the adoption of HIT and regional health information organizations. As part of this, the federal government will be providing nearly \$20 billion in stimulus funds to help accelerate the adoption of electronic health records and the health information exchange. Physicians, hospitals and rural clinics stand to benefit from these added federal funds.

In response, West Virginia is developing a strategic plan for health information technology. The plan is being developed by stakeholders from throughout state government and the health care industry, and key components of the plan include:

Accelerating the Adoption of Health Information Technology: Six priorities are outlined all focused on accelerating the adoption of electronic medical records (EMR) and related health information technologies by the provider community. The priorities recognize the need for a well coordinated effort to ensure that providers are informed purchasers of technology and their investments translate into meaningful use in daily work.

Fostering Health Information Exchange: In order for the benefits of use of technology to be fully realized there needs to be efficient, affordable and reliable exchange of information. This plan incorporates the work of the West Virginia Health Information Network ensuring that a viable and robust exchange supports flow of information across the health care system.

Ensuring Broadband Infrastructure is Available to Support Technology: The rural geography of West Virginia coupled with the population dispersion presents unusual challenges ensuring that adequate infrastructure is able to support technology in communities. Four priorities are offered aimed at encouraging infrastructure investments in the state.

Creating Useable and Accessible Statewide Data: The adoption of technology allows for strategic use of data for planning and improvement of health care services. Seven priorities are presented aimed at ensuring data is readily available for decision support. This includes strategies for encouraging voluntary reporting and transparency of data.

Develop the Work Force: The acceleration of adoption of technology will present challenges to the work force. As a result four priorities are offered for the purpose of ensuring the work force is trained and available to support efficient use of technology. This plan also presents a vision for West Virginia playing a role as a national resource for training of professionals in health information technology.

Ensuring Financial Viability and Sustainability: Finally, the plan recognizes that West Virginia will need strong partners in order to ensure that the financing of this vision, plan and its priorities is viable and sustainable. The plan recognizes that the financing strategies cannot be a burden assumed entirely by any single stakeholder and will need to be a collaborative effort shared across the health care system.

In addition, other efforts are underway in West Virginia that seek to advance the use of telehealth services and telemedicine applications, allow for e-prescribing and expand distance-learning and training opportunities not only for health care workers but also for the public's health education.

The Chamber's Position

The West Virginia Chamber of Commerce supports expanded and collaborative efforts to develop policies and programs that will position West Virginia as a leader in the use of health information technologies and to facilitate the following:

1. Adoption and implementation of electronic health records (EHRs), including.
 - The implementation of e-prescribing that is integrated with the EHR.
 - The adoption of systems providing clinical decision support, disease surveillance and reporting and health alerts related to homeland security.
 - The adoption of systems providing automatic drug-drug interaction and allergy alerts and preventive medicine alerts.
 - The adoption of web-based, public-utility model electronic medical record systems that will reduce the cost and complexity of adoption by physicians, particularly in rural practices and centers.
2. Collection and use of clinical data for overall quality improvement and health care management and cost-effectiveness.
3. Expanded use of telehealth services and telemedicine applications.
4. Improvements in advanced broadband connectivity and wireless, including cellular/3G, capabilities throughout West Virginia.

The Chamber also encourages lawmakers to consider providing financial incentives to assist greater adoption of electronic medical record systems, particularly by rural primary care centers and physician practice groups.

Finally, the Chamber also calls on these initiatives to ensure that the development or selection of any system(s) comply with emerging national standards and that the confidentiality of patient specific protected health information be done in compliance with state confidentiality laws and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 and any amendments and regulations under the act.