# Interoperability, Health Information Exchange & Infrastructure

**HiMSS** *North America*

**HIMSS Recommendation**

The Healthcare Information & Management System Society (HIMSS) recommends that Congress focus on opportunities to support widespread, secure health information exchange (enabled through technical interoperability) which is critical to realizing the full potential of health IT to improve the delivery of healthcare, achieve better health outcomes and reduce costs.

**HIMSS Definition**

"Interoperability means the ability of health information systems to work together within and across organizational boundaries in order to advance the effective delivery of healthcare for individuals and communities."

**Background**

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act, passed as part of the 2009 federal stimulus package, created financial incentives for eligible professionals and hospitals to adopt and use certified electronic health record (EHR) technology. The "Meaningful Use" Program includes several categories of requirements, including requirements for health information exchange (HIE). The HITECH Act also included significant funds to support the development of HIE infrastructure in the United States.

Adoption of health IT and the ability to exchange relevant clinical and business information are essential components of the nation's healthcare transformation strategy. Meaningful Use Stage 2 attempts to increase the program's focus on information exchange. Interoperable health IT also can support innovative healthcare payment models that incentivize higher quality, help control costs and promote system sustainability. These models include value-based purchasing, shared savings/risk models, bundled payments and accountable-care organizations, all of which require health IT infrastructure and information exchange capabilities.

Since the implementation of the HITECH Act, rates of adoption of EHR technology have increased significantly. At the same time, there has been is a tremendous amount of work happening in the public and private sectors aimed at facilitating more robust health information exchange. However, a number of challenges remain that require public/private collaboration, further study and, in many cases, changes in current policy.

**HIMSS Position Excerpt from 2017-2018 Public Policy Principles**

Our policy recommendations include:

A.) All individuals, their families, and healthcare providers should be able to send, receive, find and use electronic health information in a manner that is appropriate, secure, timely and reliable to support their health and wellness.[2]

B.) Health information must be accessible[3] and able to follow the individual. The ability to efficiently and securely exchange health information among healthcare stakeholders, in a form that also allows for the data to be consumed discretely and in a manner that enables clinical decision support, is fundamental to promoting patient safety, achieving quality outcomes, facilitating care coordination and transitions of care, and controlling costs.

C.) Interoperability should support the combination of administrative and clinical data to enhance transparency and enable value-based payment.

D.) Achieving nationwide interoperability across the health IT ecosystem will require stakeholders to agree to and follow a common set of standards, services, policies and practices that facilitate the appropriate exchange and use of health information nationwide. Nationwide interoperability should not limit competition.

E.) Testing and certification programs, such as ConCert by HIMSS and IHE' Conformity Assessment, can increase market confidence in the interoperability and safety of health IT products, accelerate the development and commercialization of technology, and enable standards developers, technology developers and users to evaluate technical implementations for inconsistencies and unexpected behaviors among other issues.

F.) The ONC Health IT certification criteria development process should be enhanced, expanded, and applied openly and transparently, with extensive provider and vendor input.

G.) Healthcare is one of the sixteen critical infrastructure sectors identified by federal, state, and local governments. Policy advancements and program development should reflect that IT is the backbone of the U.S. healthcare infrastructure supporting medical research, care delivery, public health, and a number of other national priority areas. Investments in health infrastructure should ensure all communities have access to the economic and technology advantages of health IT. Current restrictions overlook the value of information that is not gathered during a traditional video-based telemedicine visit. Patient-generated health data is routinely highlighted as an important enabler of patient-centered care models.