

eHealth

Objective

- To promote the use of eHealth technologies, including telehealth, electronic health records, and health information exchange, in Nebraska.

Description

eHealth technologies include telehealth, electronic health records, and health information exchange. Nebraska is nationally recognized for its efforts to establish a statewide telehealth network. The State of Nebraska will build upon the success of the Nebraska Statewide Telehealth Network and the strength of the partnerships formed during its development as it begins to address issues related to the adoption of electronic health records and health information exchange.

Telehealth is the provision of health care, patient education, continuing medical education, and administrative services using telecommunications. Nebraska has established one of the most extensive telehealth networks in the country, connecting the state's rural hospitals, regional medical centers, public health departments, and the State of Nebraska. The major functions of the Network are to improve quality and access to care, particularly in rural Nebraska; to provide patient, provider and community education; and to provide another communication source in the event of a natural, man-made or terrorist emergency.

The Nebraska Statewide Telehealth Network is a collaborative effort led by the Nebraska Hospital Association. Partners include:

- Nebraska Hospital Association
- Nebraska hospitals
- Nebraska Public Health Departments
- University of Nebraska Medical Center
- Universal Service Administrative Company
- University of Nebraska System
- Nebraska Information Network
- Nebraska telecommunications companies
- Central Nebraska Area Health Education Center
- Northern Nebraska Area Health Education Center

- Nebraska Panhandle Area Health Education Center
- Nebraska Medical Association
- Nebraska State Government
 - Lieutenant Governor's Office
 - Nebraska Public Service Commission
 - Nebraska Division of Communications
 - Nebraska Health and Human Services System
 - Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Section
 - Office of Rural Health
 - Nebraska Information Technology Commission
 - Nebraska Office of the Chief Information Officer
 - Nebraska Department of Education
- Nebraska Educational Telecommunications Commission

Electronic Health Records are the building blocks of an interoperable health information system. An Electronic Health Record (EHR) is a longitudinal electronic record of patient health information, including patient demographics, progress notes, problems, medications, vital signs, past medical history, immunizations, laboratory data and radiology reports. EHR systems can also provide evidence-based decision support, quality management, and outcomes reporting. Health Information Exchange is the exchange of healthcare information electronically across organizations within a region or community. At its most basic level, Health Information Exchange can act as a delivery service among providers. Fully implemented Health Information Exchanges link patient information from disparate providers into a unified personal health record, allowing providers to access a patient's complete medical history and allowing patients to take a more active role in their care.

President Bush has made the adoption of health information technology including electronic health records a national priority. Federal entities have taken the lead in establishing eHealth standards. Because health care is primarily delivered regionally, states and regions are taking the lead in the implementation of health information exchange systems. Many states have formed advisory groups to assess the current adoption of eHealth technologies in the state and to make recommendations on how the state should promote the adoption of eHealth technologies.

Benefits

The Nebraska Statewide Telehealth Network is improving patient outcomes and expanding continuing education opportunities for health professionals. Approximately 1,000 patient consultations were conducted over the network between July 1, 2005 and June 30, 2006. Mental health consultations and teleradiology are the services most often provided via the network. Telehealth helps patients reduce travel time and costs. In some cases, telehealth supports the mental and emotional health of patients who may not be willing or able to receive care the traditional way.

The Nebraska Statewide Telehealth Network is improving the operation of government in several ways. The system has greatly enhanced bioterrorism and public health preparedness. On February, 23, 2006 over 70 sites participated in the Avian Bird Flu Conference lead by U. S. Health and Human Services Secretary Mike Leavitt. The telehealth network is also generating significant savings in staff time and mileage costs, saving hospitals and public health departments over \$750,000 in staff time and nearly \$700,000 in mileage costs between January 2005 and May 2006.

The widespread adoption of electronic health records and health information exchange is expected to reduce health care costs for employers, reduce costs and increase efficiencies for third party payers, and to improve the quality of health care.

Action Plan

Current Action Items

Action items dealing with the Nebraska Statewide Telehealth Network will be discussed with the newly established governing board of the telehealth network. Probable action items will deal with supporting efforts to address sustainability and interoperability, addressing operational and technical support issues, facilitating continued testing of the Health Alert Network.

Action items dealing with the proposed eHealth Council will be approved by the NITC on Feb. 22.

Completed Action Items (2005-2006)

1. The Telehealth Network Education Committee has encouraged the delivery of health education through the telehealth network.