

Implementation Project Summary and Impact Analysis

State of Alaska Report

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Alaska HISPC Implementation Project Summary and Impact Analysis Report

Executive Summary:

Alaska, like the rest of the United States, faces challenges in addressing increasing health care costs, improving access to medical care, and ensuring and improving quality medical care for patients. Timely access to essential medical information by providers at the point of care is critical to good outcomes for the patients. A statewide initiative is working to address these challenges by promoting the expansion of the use of electronic health records by Alaska's medical providers and by establishing a statewide electronic health information exchange delivery system to provide critical information when and where it is needed.

Alaska health care leaders and members of the Alaska Telehealth Advisory Council formed the Alaska Regional Health Information Organization to look at innovative technology solutions targeted toward lowering costs and preventing medical errors. To accomplish this goal the Alaska RHIO, with the support of the Alaska Governor's office, successfully competed for a national contract to focus on issues of security and privacy as related to health information exchange. In January 2007, the Alaska RHIO was reorganized as Alaska ChartLink.

The Health Information Security and Privacy Collaboration (HISPC) is part of a national effort to encourage wider adoption of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) and establish a Health Information Exchange (HIE) network in Alaska and throughout the United States. Participation in this national initiative gives a voice to Alaska specific issues, needs, and recommendations in the development of national policies as related to security, privacy and best business practices surrounding interoperability of health information exchange.

Phase I of the HISPC contract provided an assessment of the privacy and security climate in Alaska as it relates to health information exchange. The findings from this assessment determined a number of action steps that needed to be addressed in order for Alaskans to begin exchanging electronic health information. Key areas of action included:

- ~ Legal solutions for enacting legislation related to medical records and the electronic exchange of health information,
- ~ Standardized policies and procedures for use across participating organizations,
- ~ Participation agreements for use by participating organizations and consumers, and
- ~ Education and marketing tailored to consumers and providers encouraging use of electronic health records.

Alaska HISPC Implementation Project Summary and Impact Analysis Report

Phase II of the HISPC contract provided an opportunity for Alaska to implement selected solutions developed during Phase I and to participate in a national collaborative security and privacy think tank. In particular, the Alaska HISPC contract produced three products:

1. Five essential documents providing a standardized approach to the exchange of health information and addressing privacy and security concerns.
2. A Communications Plan and educational materials targeted toward patients, providers, and payers, that addressed the benefits of exchanging critical medical information in a secure manner that ensures patient privacy.
3. A collaborative report developed in conjunction with Guam, Iowa, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Puerto Rico, and South Dakota addressing multi-state inter-organizational agreements for health information exchange.

Volunteers from across the state participated in the HISPC project. Over 250 Alaska citizens participated in stakeholder meetings held in both urban and rural locations. Participants included; healthcare consumers, public, private and federal providers, payers, state and municipal workers, healthcare professionals, lawyers and employers. These dedicated individuals provided valuable insights into the needs, desires and fears associated with electronic health information. The documents created through the exchanges with the citizens of Alaska provide a sound basis for the ongoing development of health information exchange in Alaska.

Alaska HISPC Implementation Project Summary and Impact Analysis Report

V. Conclusion

Phase I of the HISPC contract provided an assessment of the privacy and security climate in Alaska as it relates to health information exchange. The findings from this assessment determined a number of action steps that needed to be addressed in order for Alaskans to begin exchanging electronic health information. Key areas of action included:

- ~ Legal solutions for enacting legislation related to medical records and the electronic exchange of health information,
- ~ Standardized policies and procedures for use across participating organizations,
- ~ Participation agreements for use by participating agreements and consumers, and
- ~ Education and marketing tailored to consumers and providers encouraging use of electronic health records.

Phase II of the HISPC contract provided an opportunity for Alaska to implement selected solutions developed during Phase I and to participate in a national collaborative security and privacy think tank. In particular, the Alaska HISPC contract produced three products:

1. Six essential documents providing a standardized approach to the exchange of health information and addressing privacy and security concerns.
2. A Communications Plan and educational materials targeted toward patients, providers, and payers addressing the benefits of electronic health records, personal health records, and exchanging critical medical information in a secure manner that ensures patient privacy.
3. A collaborative report developed in conjunction with Guam, Iowa, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Puerto Rico, and South Dakota addressing multi-state inter-organizational agreements for health information exchange.

Alaska HISPC Implementation Project Summary and Impact Analysis Report

In addition to the products developed during the HISPC contract, the Alaska partners received additional benefits:

The HISPC project has helped to increase awareness of electronic health records and health information exchange in both consumers and providers throughout the state. Processes are now in place to continue this awareness campaign.

Prior to this project there was no coordinated statewide approach to addressing issues of privacy and security. Standardized policies, procedures, and participation agreements are now available for use statewide.

The collaborative process initiated by HISPC facilitated the exchange of ideas and lessons learned between many states. It was an opportunity for Alaska's Core Team to share and receive "best practice" solutions to privacy and security issues.

The HISPC project created an opportunity for Alaska to advance the HIE and EHR initiatives within Alaska and has opened the door to potential future grant opportunities.