



Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society

September 2011

Recommendation to Congress

2011 HIMSS Policy Summit Asks #1:

In order to improve the quality of your constituents' healthcare while also reducing its costs, such as through elimination of duplicative care, Congress should continue its strong bipartisan support for Health Information Technology.

Problem

Health Information Technology (IT) is an essential, foundational element of any serious attempt to transform our Nation's healthcare delivery system. While our nation is engaged in a long-term debate over how to reform our healthcare system, there continues to be widespread, bipartisan support for efforts to move away from a delivery and payment system that rewards volume, toward a system that rewards efficiency and quality outcomes by enabling providers and patients to access the right information at the right time. Robust health IT is essential to achieving any meaningful delivery and payment reforms, enabling timely and accurate collection and dissemination of the patient information in a privacy-protected and secure manner. In these times of significantly restricted resources, Congress should continue its bipartisan leadership and support for system-wide adoption of private and secure health IT to enhance the nation's healthcare system and reduce costs.

Background

Building on the system-wide adoption of electronic health records (EHR) and exchanging electronic information via standards-based health information exchanges (HIE), a health IT-enabled transformation of American healthcare will enable dramatic enhancements in research; improve clinical care; implement necessary payment reforms; and significantly enhance the nation's population health management. Such enhancements will not only improve the quality of healthcare by ensuring readily available and accurate health information to guide clinical decision making and patient and family choices, but will improve coordination of care among healthcare stakeholders¹ and reduce medical errors, simplify business processes, and save resources.

Previous Congresses and Administrations under the leadership of both political parties have recognized the enormous potential value of health IT. Recognizing the urgent need for the nation to modernize healthcare delivery with health IT as a central enabler, President George W. Bush, through a 2004 Executive Order, established the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC). Under the Department of Health and Human Services, ONC is charged with developing standards for EHRs and a nationwide interoperable health IT infrastructure.

Building on President Bush's national leadership in supporting solutions that maximize the potential of health IT, President Obama continues to make health IT a top national priority. Federal legislation encourages the adoption of EHRs and the technological infrastructure that allows for near real-time exchange of clinical information. The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act established a program to offer financial incentives and associated infrastructure

support for the adoption and meaningful use of interoperable EHRs by eligible providers and eligible hospitals.

Published research by well-respected analysts has established that national investment in a technologically advanced healthcare information infrastructure will result in significant return on investment and quality improvements for the country. A RAND Corporation study cited by the Congressional Budget Office estimated approximately \$80 billion in annual healthcare savings as a result of nationwide adoption of health IT.ⁱⁱ These savings, derived from use of health IT, will be the result of better clinical management, elimination of redundant diagnostics tests, an increase in provider productivity, and reductions in fraud and abuse.

As recognized by the authors of the HITECH Act, health IT adoption has the potential to greatly reduce healthcare disparities, facilitate clinical research, promote early detection and prevention, manage chronic diseases, and expand available resources and capabilities.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, the benefits of health IT must be made available to currently underserved populations such as minorities, inner-cities, and rural communities. This broad application of health IT should include the ability to fully employ telemedicine, electronic prescribing, use of mobile devices, and expansion of other technology to improve the access and quality care to underserved communities where it would otherwise not be available.

Health IT has fully demonstrated the potential to improve and simplify healthcare and achieve financial and administrative priorities such as accurate and efficient billing, payment reform, coordination of benefits, and elimination of fraud and abuse. Fundamentally, health IT improves efficiency by eliminating paper work for providers and patients, expanding access to care, and building a healthier future for the nation.^{iv}

Health IT not only has the potential to control and reduce healthcare costs but also to improve the quality of care for individual patients and the nation. Electronic health records improve patient care by giving the provider accurate and complete information about a patient's health, providing evidence-based clinical decision making tools, facilitating integration of the patient's healthcare delivery team, and enabling coordination of care across multiple healthcare settings.

Solution

HIMSS recommends that:

In order to improve the quality of your constituents' healthcare while also reducing its costs, such as through elimination of duplicative care, Congress should continue its strong bipartisan support for Health Information Technology.

ⁱ Executive Order 1335: "Incentives for the Use of Health Information Technology and Establishing the Position of the National Health Information and Technology Coordinator," authorized by President George Bush in 2004.

ⁱⁱ "Evidence of the Costs and Benefits of Health Information Technology". Congressional Budget Office, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ "The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act". Signed into law by President Obama in 2009.

^{iv} "Improving Patient Care and the Nation's Healthcare System," Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology.