

**HIE EHR INTEROPERABILITY**

Initiative begins efforts to better link providers, public health agencies

By Joseph Goedert November 04, 2016, 2:45 p.m. EDT 3 Min Read



Nineteen A-List healthcare stakeholders have launched The Digital Bridge Initiative in a quest to use automated systems to significantly improve communication between providers and state or local public health agencies.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is funding the effort, and the Public Health Informatics Institute and Deloitte Consulting are serving as the program management office. Deloitte will be leading the technical architecture to get information to flow between providers and public health.

“The barrier has been that public health is federated—governed by state and local jurisdictions—so it is difficult for public health to speak with one voice,” says Vivian Singletary, director of the Public Health Informatics Institute and principal investigator for the project.

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The goal is to leverage electronic health record technology and automate the submission of reportable diseases to public health agencies. Today, providers have to take an extra step to recognize that there is a reportable disease that should be sent to public health and the initiative is designed to ease reporting burdens, Singletary explains.

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Most providers have an EHR so the idea is to have the records system recognize certain diagnostic codes, lab results and prescriptions, and automatically trigger a report to public health, or fall back to the EHR simply triggering a reminder to submit the report.

A technical architecture workgroup of stakeholders is starting work on how to accomplish this, and the timetable is aggressive—Stage 3 of the electronic health records program looms, and the hope is that an automated report to public health can be a required capability of EHRs under Stage 3.

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able to share with providers geographic population health data that includes reportable disease prevalence, chronic diseases and what types of interventions can be made.

The vision also would seek to have providers offer more of their data to public health agencies, which could accept the data and link it to interventional opportunities that providers could consider in certain geographic regions or even by ZIP Codes.

The Digital Bridge launched in June 2016 with a meeting bringing together participants to make sure they understood the initiative and to confirm participation. Phase 2 now is underway through January 2017, with workgroups hashing out governance issues and developing workflows and functional requirements. This work also will include studying how the program can become sustainable after Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funding run out, which will necessitate creation of a business case, Singletary notes. Further, a legal and regulatory group will be working on issues that need to be addressed or changed.

Phase 3 will be even more ambitious, with the goal of having five implementation sites up by the end of the third quarter of 2017, with a communication campaign to stakeholders starting afterward.

Participants in Digital Bridge include Allscripts, Association of Public Health Laboratories, Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, Cerner, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, Deloitte, eClinicalWorks, Epic Systems and HealthPartners/Park Nicollet Health.

Also: Kaiser Permanente, Meditech, Minnesota Department of Health, National Association of County and City Health Officials, Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, Partners Healthcare, Public Health Informatics Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and University of Nebraska Medical Center.

More information is [available here](#).

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