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# Health Information Technology To Advance Excellence in Health Care



**Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality**

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**HEALTH IT**



## Health Information Technology at AHRQ

AHRQ's health information technology (health IT) initiative is part of the Nation's 10-year strategy to put modern information technology to work in the health care sector. By developing secure and private electronic health records for most Americans, and making health information available electronically when and where it is needed, health IT can improve the quality of care, even as it makes health care more cost-effective.

In September 2004, AHRQ awarded \$139 million in contracts and grants to over 100 communities, hospitals, providers, and health care systems in 40 States to develop statewide and regional networks, promote access to health IT, and encourage adoption of health IT. These projects constitute a real-world laboratory for examining health IT at work. The goals of AHRQ's health IT initiative are to:

- Help clinicians deliver higher quality, safer health care.
- Put the patient more squarely at the center of health care.
- Stimulate planning and implementation of health IT, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- Identify most successful approaches and barriers to implementation.
- Make the business case for health IT by evaluating costs and benefits.



## Statewide and Regional Networks

AHRQ awarded contracts totaling \$25 million to the States of Colorado, Indiana, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Utah to develop statewide and regional networks allowing health care providers, laboratories, major purchasers of health care, public and private payers, hospitals, ambulatory care facilities, home health care providers, and long-term care providers to use health IT to communicate and share information. The goals of these projects are to:

- Implement information and communications technologies to enable clinicians to assess patient information at the point of care.
- Develop a health information exchange that interconnects local health information infrastructures.
- Plan, develop, implement, and evaluate a patient indexing system to facilitate sharing of patient data between public and private health care sectors.
- Plan, implement, and evaluate a State-based regional data sharing and interoperability service connecting health care entities across counties.
- Expand and enhance a current statewide network to electronically exchange patient information.



## **Building the 21st Century Health IT Infrastructure**

Over 100 grants totaling \$96 million will promote access to health IT by helping communities, hospitals, providers, and health care systems plan, implement, and demonstrate the value of health IT.

Planning projects are supporting the development of the health IT infrastructure and data-sharing capacity among clinical provider organizations in their communities by:

- Conducting needs assessments and feasibility studies.
- Developing plans to implement electronic health records.
- Creating patient data information sharing systems.
- Building telehealth and telemedicine systems.
- Providing point-of-care access to patient information and treatment guidelines.



Implementation projects are supporting community-wide and regional health IT systems by:

- Integrating patient data with clinical decision support databases, pharmacy and laboratory data, and emergency systems.
- Developing networked computerized physician order entry.
- Helping identify and prevent adverse drug events.
- Developing chronic disease treatment systems, including diabetes patient registries.
- Creating clinical decision support systems.

Value demonstration projects are evaluating how the adoption of health IT will:

- Impact quality, safety, and resource use in large integrated delivery systems.
- Advance the effectiveness of Web-based patient education tools.
- Improve patient transitions between health care facilities and home.



## Helping Rural and Small Communities

Health care providers in rural and small communities often face special challenges in providing quality patient care due to a lack of resources, geographic isolation, and a shortage of providers and facilities. A number of projects are developing and implementing health IT in rural regions to:

- Assess unique barriers to IT implementation.
- Utilize telemedicine and telehealth networks.
- Integrate patient information with pharmacy, laboratory, scheduling, and health insurance information.
- Improve the safety, quality, and satisfaction of both patients and providers.
- Foster partnerships and collaborations.



## The AHRQ National Resource Center

The AHRQ National Resource Center for Health Information Technology (the National Resource Center) will encourage adoption of health IT by sharing the knowledge and findings that result from the real-world laboratory created within AHRQ's health IT initiative. AHRQ awarded an \$18.5 million, multi-year contract to NORC at the University of Chicago to establish and operate the National Resource Center.

Through the National Resource Center, AHRQ can help providers prepare and incorporate health IT into the health care system. As the repository for the research findings that result from these projects, the National Resource Center will provide direct technical assistance and consulting services to individual projects to help develop and use health IT, with a particular focus on supporting challenges facing health IT implementation in rural and small community settings.



- With its grants and contracts, AHRQ is stimulating investment in health IT projects, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- Through its systemic evaluation of these projects, AHRQ will help identify what works best, what barriers exist, and how clinicians and hospitals can successfully incorporate health IT.
- As a trusted source of information for health care providers, AHRQ will maintain the National Resource Center to provide information and offer technical assistance to help providers successfully make the leap to health IT.

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For further information, please contact us by e-mail at [healthit@ahrq.gov](mailto:healthit@ahrq.gov).

For a complete description of the health IT research projects and programs at AHRQ, please see the Program Brief, *Health Information Technology Programs*, AHRQ Pub. No. 05-P013 at <http://www.ahrq.gov/research/hitfact.htm>.

