

# Alaska Health Information Exchange 2019 Progress & Recommendations Report



Prepared by the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services'  
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## Introduction

In 2010, SB 133 passed creating Alaska's Health Information Exchange (HIE) "to improve the safety, cost effectiveness, and quality of healthcare in Alaska"<sup>1</sup> by connecting electronic health records (EHRs), public health registries, and auxiliary health systems. The goals of the HIE are to allow patients to move freely within Alaska's health care system, providers to effectively manage their care, and the state to perform disease surveillance activities for public health. Ultimately, the HIE is meant to address the triple aim of healthcare:

1. Improving the patient experience of care (including quality and satisfaction);
2. Improving the health of populations; and
3. Reducing the per capita cost of health care.<sup>2</sup>

This report is prepared each December for the Alaska State Legislature as required by AS 18.23.315. This statute requires that this report contains an update of Alaska's health information exchange system, and a specific set of recommendations for long-term participation and financial support by the state. The following report summarize the HIE's current status, work during the calendar year 2019, and recommendations for 2020.

## Progress Made in 2019

In 2019, there were 67 participating organizations which represent over 2,000 providers connected to the HIE. Users include 18 hospitals, 11 Federally-Qualified Health Centers, and 38 behavioral health providers. Additionally, there were over 4,000 users of direct secure messaging, which is an encrypted email service to replace paper-based methods like fax or mail for patient records. During 2019 healthConnect Alaska, the HIE contractor, laid the foundation for new improvements planned for 2020. Progress made during 2019 by healthConnect included:

- Completed technology overhaul/migration implementation, adding new and transitioning all previous participants.
- Integrated several modules to facilitate data exchange:

<sup>1</sup> Paskvan, Sen. Joe. (2009). Sponsor Statement SB 133. *26<sup>th</sup> Alaskan Legislature*. Retrieved December 26, 2019 from: [http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get\\_documents.asp?session=26&docid=3310](http://www.akleg.gov/basis/get_documents.asp?session=26&docid=3310).

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Healthcare Improvement. (2012). IHI Triple Aim. *IHI Triple Aim Initiative*. Retrieved December 26, 2019 from: <http://www.ihl.org/Engage/Initiatives/TripleAim/Pages/default.aspx>

- Ambra image exchange
- Med Fill prescription history
- Event notifications
- Began several projects:
  - Behavioral health landing page
  - Social determinants of health collection and requirements gathering
  - Alaska Uniform Response Online Reporting Access (AURORA) integration
  - Prescription drug monitoring program (PDMP) integration
  - Connected single sign-on for common electronic health record (EHR) systems: Cerner, Epic, Athena, Qualifacts, and SAM-L 2.0
  - Onboarded Qualifacts EHR users
  - Onboarded numerous behavioral health providers
- Expanded staff to include a licensed physician assistant, registered nurse, and behavioral health workflow specialist for enhanced behavioral health assistance capacity. Added training staff dedicated to onboarding participants and creating online training guides. Hired dedicated outreach staff to focus on both existing and new participants.
- Expanded marketing and communications footprint including overhauling the healthConnect/HIE website, increasing social media presence, adding blog posts/webinars, and exhibited/spoke at local conferences.
- Collaborated with other state and regional HIEs to identify mechanisms to save costs while increasing service availability.

In 2019, the department signed a new contract with healthConnect, continuing their decade-long role managing the HIE. The new contract period started in July 2019 and will continue until September 2020. The department executed its first amendment from July 1 to Sept. 30, 2019, which included five deliverables:

1. Behavioral health unified landing page integration
2. Integration of social determinants of health
3. Staff augmentation for adoption, utilization, and onboarding activities
4. HIE-AURORA (emergency medical systems) system onboarding
5. Prescription drug monitoring program data interface

## Upcoming Activities and Recommendations

In line with the department's 2020 funding request to the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the following activities will be included in the second contract amendment with healthConnect, due to be executed in January 2020:

1. Enhanced Public Health Reporting: enhanced functionality for immunization reporting, AURORA and vital statistics integration to the HIE
2. Connection services to improve care coordination
3. PDMP connectivity

The department is closely monitoring this contract in order to complete these activities under enhanced federal funding at a 90% federal and 10% state match. This enhanced match is in effect until September 2021, upon the sunset of the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act.

Given the sunset of the enhanced HITECH funding in 2021, the department is engaged in sustainability planning activities to ensure the continued support of the HIE. The department's recommendations and goals are as follows:

- Plan transition to Medicaid funding. The department has contracted services for a HITECH to Medicaid funding transition plan for strategic maximization of federal funds. The goal of this plan and of the activities below encourage robust, long-term participation and financial support.
- Develop robust public health reporting. Successful public health reporting requires modernization of department disease registries and connection to the HIE, which are planned for the upcoming calendar year. The department has identified three potential pilot projects to test new database software, Microsoft Dynamics, with the plan to deploy this software across the department if testing is successful. Existing modernized registries, such as the PDMP, AURORA, and vital statistics, have been identified as potential connections for the HIE.
- Connect behavioral health providers. In conjunction with the changing landscape of the 1115 behavioral health waiver and resulting Administrative Services Organization, the department is evaluating the best method to connect behavioral health providers. This work will provide for additional care coordination among patients with substance-use disorders. To provide optimal care coordination, tasks include collecting social determinants of health data, with the department's goal of leveraging this information for Public Health Nursing and the Division of Behavioral Health to improve patient outcomes.
- Engage stakeholders. The Alaska Hospital and Nursing Home Association (ASHNHA) notified the department of its intent to divest of the HIE in November 2019. Hospital data is critical for the success of the HIE. The department is actively engaged in soliciting stakeholder needs, which includes regular meetings with ASHNHA in particular and CMS when needed. Promoting interoperability and patient care coordination are shared priorities for both partners. Such stakeholder feedback will be implemented as a defined set of priorities for the HIE and healthConnect Alaska. Also, this feedback will be used to update the current fee schedule as needed.

These recommendations serve as a starting point to address the many challenges faced by Alaska's HIE and HIEs across the country. Alaska's HIE continues to face several challenges to sustainability in terms of adoption, return on investment, and rapidly-changing technology. Maximizing federal dollars to support meaningful health information exchange in Alaska will be crucial over the next year.

## Conclusion

Much work has been completed by healthConnect to set the stage for 2020. The upcoming year will build on a foundation of connections and maximize existing data exchange infrastructure to ensure the best patient care in Alaska. In consultation with the HIE board, stakeholders, and the public, the department is committed to providing a meaningful, useful, and central part of information exchange for Alaskans.