



NC HealthConnex
Powering Health Care Outcomes

Downloadable Tool Kit

Information for Your Members

This tool kit is intended to be a resource for you, your organization, and your members. We encourage you to use these communication tools to educate your members about NC HealthConnex, how to connect, and the value of participating in the health information exchange.

North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA)

Updated January 2022



TOOL KIT

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Background

A health information exchange (HIE) is a secure electronic network that gives authorized health care providers the ability to access and share health-related information across an information highway. An HIE exists to improve health care quality, enhance patient safety, improve health outcomes, and reduce overall health care costs by making health information available securely whenever health care providers need it. North Carolina's state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex—operated by the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA)—provides a secure statewide network for health care providers in North Carolina to share important patient health information and improve patient care.

The NC HIEA was created by the North Carolina General Assembly to oversee and administer the state-designated HIE (NCGS 90-414.7). The NC HIEA receives input and advice from an Advisory Board consisting of patients, hospital systems, health care providers, technology experts, public health officials, and other key stakeholders to continuously improve NC HealthConnex and move toward more efficient and effective care across the state.

Notwithstanding the voluntary nature of HIEs that are in operation nationwide, N.C. legislation requires that all health care providers who receive State funds (e.g. Medicaid, State Health Plan, etc.) for the provision of health care services connect to NC HealthConnex in order to continue to receive payments for services provided. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57, NCSL 2018-41, NCSL 2020-3, and NCSL 2021-26) The following outlines the current deadlines:

- Providers that were mandated to connect by October 1, 2021, were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.
- Providers with an original deadline of June 1, 2021, (ambulatory surgical centers, dentists, state lab, pharmacies, and state health care facilities) were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.

Note: See Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4.(e) for certain providers now designated as “voluntary” to connect.

This extension of time will allow the large queue of health care providers in active onboarding to complete the connection process. Since the new HIE network began operating in March 2016, NC HealthConnex has connected more than 7,000 health care facilities. More than 120 million clinical messages are processed monthly, enabling more than 60,000 providers to query over 14 million unique patient records.

Important Note Regarding the Mandate: Please note that there are more than 5,000 facilities in onboarding at this time. Providers should continue to connect as we have no guarantees of additional extensions, and as noted below, the General Assembly is requiring compliance reports by March 1, 2022.

NC HealthConnex is committed to its mission: to connect health care providers to safely and securely share health information through a trusted network to improve health care quality and outcomes for all North Carolinians.

The information in this tool kit will help you communicate with your members about NC HealthConnex, its benefits, the associated timelines for connection, and how to connect.

North Carolina's state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex, delivers added value to conversations happening at all levels in the health care industry. It breaks down information silos between providers, achieves greater outcomes for patients and creates efficiencies in state-funded programs.

What are participants saying?

"The emergency ADT feed from NC*Notify I reviewed yesterday was timely. When I went into NC HealthConnex to pull the CCD, I was able to get some valuable information regarding the physical condition of the client, which could then be shared with the direct care staff in the program as the guardian failed to let us know when she dropped the child off for treatment." Behavioral health participant

"Many of our patients are referred to other facilities for specialty care or are hospitalized at locations other than our small inpatient unit. Staff spend a significant amount of time calling other doctors' offices and hospitals requesting notes. NC HealthConnex has allowed our staff to be more well informed about the care our patients receive at other facilities." Acute care hospital participant

"At our clinic, we see many patients that have visited the ED and have been hospitalized for chronic medical conditions. The documents we receive directly from NC HealthConnex allow us to have all of the information we need at our fingertips. There is no interruption of workflow to request records, rescheduling patients until we have all of the information we need, or even having to track down specialist referral notes. Those providers are in the system and are sending the data that we need via NC HealthConnex! The other side to this is the emergency department and hospital providers have access to the information we are sharing since our doctors are not on call at all hours. The continuity of care is incredible! We love it!" Free and charitable clinic participant

"When new or current patients come in and have been seen in other medical offices or hospitals, it is great to have the advantage of getting the current medical records for the physicians in advance." Pediatrician's office

"The ability of this work to reduce the duplication of testing (blood tests and radiology). The cost savings component of this could be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars just in the obstetrical work." County health department

"We utilize the HIE for continuity of care due to post-hospitalization/post-ED-visit discharges, and data gathering for closing care gaps for our ACO, our insurance payer programs (such as BQPP), and Medicaid MU quality measure reporting." Children's and multispecialty clinic

"I was able to confirm that a patient of mine who had several outstanding referrals to different care organizations had not rescheduled her appointments as planned – this saved time for me and the medical records staff from having to log into three separate Epic systems to get the same information." Independent physician's office





Sample Email

The following email can be used to provide a general overview of NC HealthConnex to your members. Where indicated, please provide specific information about your organization.

SUBJECT LINE:

Is your practice connected to NC HealthConnex?

EMAIL BODY:

One of the goals of a transformed health care system is for near real-time clinical and demographic data to be available to all health care providers involved in a patient’s care so they can securely share information for more efficient and effective health care decisions.

In North Carolina, this vision includes [insert specific vertical].

NC HealthConnex allows participants to access their patients’ comprehensive records across multiple providers as well as to review labs, diagnostics, history, allergies, medications, and more. This results in decreased redundancy; more efficient, accurate diagnoses, recommendations, and treatment; and improved coordination across all levels of care. This information can be viewed via a web-based clinical portal or through the participants’ EHR if it is fully integrated with NC HealthConnex.

State law (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57, NCSL 2018-41, NCSL 2020-3, and NCSL 2021-26) requires that all health care providers who receive any state funds for the provision of health care services (e.g. Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan, etc.) connect and submit patient demographic and clinical data to NC HealthConnex in order to continue to receive payment for services provided. The following outlines the specific deadlines for connection:

- Providers that were mandated to connect by October 1, 2021, were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.
- Providers with an original deadline of June 1, 2021, (ambulatory surgical centers, dentists, state lab, pharmacies, and state health care facilities) were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.

Note: See Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4.(e) for certain providers now designated as “voluntary” to connect.

This extension of time will allow the large queue of health care providers in active onboarding to complete the connection process.

Important Note Regarding the Mandate: Please note that there are more than 5,000 facilities in onboarding at this time. Providers should continue to connect as we have no guarantees of additional extensions and, as noted below, the General Assembly is requiring compliance reports by March 1, 2022.

Benefits of NC HealthConnex include:

- Efficient access to comprehensive patient records at the point of care with providers in North Carolina, as well as 22 states and the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs
- Elimination of duplicative tests, improved diagnoses, and treatment plans
- Improved coordination across levels of care through NC*Notify, the event notification service
- Access to the N.C. Controlled Substances Reporting System (CSRS) and COVID-19 lab data
- Access to secure, encrypted email through Direct Secure Messaging and a growing provider directory of secure DSM addresses of physicians across the state
- Access to public health registries and required reporting channels
- HIPAA-compliant automated sharing with other providers

The NC HIEA is committed to its vision of linking all North Carolina health care providers, enabling participants to access information to support improved health care quality and outcomes.

For more information, visit NCHealthConnex.gov, send an email to hiea@nc.gov, or call 919-754-6912.

Quick Links

[NC HIEA's Suite of Services](#)

[NC HealthConnex and Promoting Interoperability](#)

[How to Connect](#)

[Training and Resources](#)



Sample Newsletter

The following sample newsletter can be used to provide a general overview of NC HealthConnex to your members. Where indicated, please provide specific information about your organization.

HEADLINE:

Are you taking advantage of the state-designated health information exchange?

SUBHEAD:

Connecting [insert specific vertical] to the State-Designated Health Information Exchange, NC HealthConnex

One of the goals of a transformed health care system is for near real-time clinical and demographic data to be made available to all health care providers involved in a patient’s care so that they can securely share health information concerning that patient with each other.

In North Carolina, this vision includes [insert specific vertical].

North Carolina’s state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex, was created in 2015 by the North Carolina General Assembly to help bridge the gap between disparate systems and health care networks to support whole patient care. With 14 million unique patient records and growing, NC HealthConnex is working to connect the state’s health care providers to deliver a holistic view of a patient’s record. The North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) is the agency managing the statewide health information exchange, NC HealthConnex.

What’s the law?

State law (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57, NCSL 2018-41, NCSL 2020-3, and NCSL 2021-26) requires that all health care providers who receive any state funds for the provision of health care services (e.g. Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan, etc.) connect and submit patient demographic and clinical data to NC HealthConnex in order to continue to receive payment for services. This law was updated in the most recent legislative session (NCSL 2021-26) to provide more time for connectivity for providers in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This extension of time will allow the large queue of health care providers in active onboarding to complete the connection process.

- Providers that were mandated to connect by October 1, 2021, were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.
- Providers with an original deadline of June 1, 2021, (ambulatory surgical centers, dentists, state lab, pharmacies, and state health care facilities), were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.

Note: See Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4.(e) for certain providers now designated as “voluntary” to connect.

Important Note Regarding the Mandate: Please note that there are more than 5,000 facilities in onboarding at this time. Providers should continue to connect as we have no guarantees of additional extensions and, as noted below, the General Assembly is requiring compliance reports by March 1, 2022. Connecting to NC HealthConnex can take up 12 months, depending on the EHR software.

[INSERT ASSOCIATION QUOTE IF APPROPRIATE.]

What is exchanged in NC HealthConnex?

NC HealthConnex is a tool to link disparate systems and existing HIE networks together to deliver a holistic view of the patient record. It will allow participants to access their patients' comprehensive records across multiple providers as well as to review labs, diagnostics, history, allergies, medications, and more. This results in decreased redundancy; more efficient, accurate diagnoses, recommendations, and treatment; and improved coordination across all levels of care.

Patient health information is automatically uploaded or linked from a participating provider's electronic health record (EHR). The information is then standardized and aggregated across care sites, allowing clinicians to seamlessly access their patients' information either from within their EHR or within the NC HealthConnex web-based clinical portal depending on the type of connection.

NC HealthConnex has connected more than 7,000 ambulatory facilities, 130 hospitals, 60,000 providers, and 22 border and interstate health information exchanges over the past six years.

What does health information exchange mean for you?

The health care delivery and payment transformation that is occurring at both the state and federal level underscores the need for health care providers in every corner of the state to work together to improve patient care. Benefits of NC HealthConnex include:

- Efficient access to comprehensive patient records at the point of care with providers in North Carolina, as well as 22 states and the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs
- Elimination of duplicative tests, improved diagnoses, and treatment plans
- Improved coordination across levels of care through NC*Notify, an event notification service
- Access to the N.C. Controlled Substances Reporting System (CSRS) and COVID-19 lab data
- Access to secure, encrypted email through Direct Secure Messaging and a growing provider directory of secure DSM addresses of physicians across the state
- Access to public health registries and required reporting channels
- HIPAA-compliant automated sharing with other providers

[The NC HIEA](#) works directly with its technical partner, SAS, to continually audit, strengthen and optimize NC HealthConnex. This helps to ensure the highest levels of patient security, data security and participant satisfaction.

The NC HIEA is committed to its vision of linking all North Carolina health care providers, enabling participants to access information to support improved health care quality and outcomes. For more information, visit NCHealthConnex.gov.

Quick Links

[NC HIEA's Suite of Services](#)

[NC HealthConnex and Promoting Interoperability](#)

[How to Connect](#)

[Training and Resources](#)

[Who's Connected](#)



Envelope Stuffer

ARE YOU IN COMPLIANCE WITH NC STATE LAW? Connecting to NC's State-Designated Health Information Exchange



In today's health care landscape, it is becoming more difficult to provide high-quality, whole-person care while maintaining a successful business operation.

NC HealthConnex is the state-designated health information exchange and is managed by the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA). It compiles patients' health information from disparate sources to build a more comprehensive view of the patient's electronic health records and facilitates conversations between authorized health care providers by allowing them to exchange health-related information statewide with providers who share a treatment relationship with a patient. NC HealthConnex allows you to: review labs, diagnostics, history, allergies, medications, and more. This results in less duplicative testing; more efficient, accurate diagnoses, recommendations, and treatment; and improved coordination across all levels of care. Additional value-added services include COVID-19 lab testing results and immunization reporting, direct secure messaging, patient encounter alerts, public health reporting, and assistance meeting CMS Promoting Interoperability requirements.

State law (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2020-3 and NCSL 2021-26) requires that all health care providers who receive any state funds for the provision of health care services (e.g., Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan) connect and submit patient demographic and clinical data to NC HealthConnex in order to continue to receive payment for services by January 1, 2023. Note: See Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4.(e) for certain providers now designated as "voluntary" to connect.

The extension of the Statewide HIE Act deadline until January 2023 allows health care providers additional time to complete the technical onboarding process without being out of compliance with the act. Participants need to reach out before the deadline to get connected. NC HIEA will report on progress by mandated Medicaid and State Health Plan providers not yet connected to the legislature in March 2022 as required by state law. Accelerating connection to NC HealthConnex will make this initiative as impactful as possible for the health care community.



For more detailed information about NC HealthConnex, please visit nhealthconnex.gov.



Fact Sheet

The NC HIEA and NC HealthConnex

-  Health care providers across North Carolina recognize that information about their patients is not easily available to other providers who may be treating them in disparate locations. This can lead to redundancy, unnecessary testing, avoidable complications, and frustrating experiences.
 -  NC HealthConnex provides a secure, statewide network for health care providers in North Carolina to share important patient health information and improve patient care.
 -  NC HealthConnex is intended to improve health care quality and outcomes, enhance patient safety, and reduce overall health care costs by enabling health information (via electronic health records, or EHRs) to be available securely whenever health care providers need it.
 -  The network combines information from all participating health care providers to create a more complete health record for patients in the NC HealthConnex network. This includes important information such as prescriptions, allergies, lab results, test results, conditions, and diagnoses.
 -  The NC HIEA was created by the North Carolina General Assembly to oversee and administer the state-designated HIE, NC HealthConnex.
 -  NC HealthConnex helps prevent the spread of disease through faster reporting of health threats to public health departments.
 -  The NC HIEA takes patient health data privacy and security seriously. In accordance with HIPAA regulations and state law, the NC HIEA has entered into and will enter into Business Associate Agreements with all organizations that will receive personal health information (PHI) from the HIE.
 -  Once a patient/provider relationship is established, NC HealthConnex participants can receive information pertaining to patient care such as laboratory results, diagnostic studies, and clinical documents. Additionally, participants may choose to enroll in NC*Notify, a subscription-based service that notifies providers as their patients receive services across the care continuum.
- Based on admission, discharge, and transfer data received from more than 130 participating hospitals, plus encounter data from more than 7,000 ambulatory care settings, NC*Notify real-time event notifications provide care teams with valuable information that spans geographic and care settings and supports state and federal efforts to focus on patient-centered care.
-  Benefits to patient care from NC HealthConnex include:
 - Improved diagnoses
 - More coordinated care between providers
 - Stronger trust in health care providers with communication across health care teams
 - Reduction in duplicate testing
 - Less risk of avoidable complications
 - Improved satisfaction/experience
 - No more relying on hard copies of tests and information from other health care providers



North Carolina state law requires that all health care providers who receive State funds (e.g., Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan) for the provision of health care services connect to NC HealthConnex in order to continue to receive payments for services provided. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57, NCSL 2018-41, NCSL 2020-3, and NCSL 2021-26)

- Providers that were mandated to connect by October 1, 2021, were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.
- Providers with an original deadline of June 1, 2021, (ambulatory surgical centers, dentists, state lab, pharmacies and state health care facilities) were given a deadline extension to January 1, 2023.

Note: See Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4.(e) for certain providers now designated as “voluntary” to connect. This extension of time will allow the large queue of health care providers in active onboarding to complete the connection process.



The NC HIEA follows the highest information security standards available. Information is always encrypted at rest and in transit. Additionally, the environment is SOC 2 compliant.

All data is protected, stored, and accessed only for purposes permissible under federal and state law. The state does not allow data it receives to be used or disclosed for commercial purposes or any other purpose other than those set forth in G.S. 90-414.4(a) or G.S. 90-414.2. 2015-241, s. 12A.5(d).



The NC HIEA is working with an industry leader, SAS, to build the technical connections to NC HealthConnex and to ensure the highest level of patient and data security.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What is a health information exchange, and who is the NC HIEA?

A. A health information exchange (HIE) is a secure and electronic network that gives authorized health care providers the ability to access and share health-related information across a statewide information highway. It exists to improve health care quality, enhance patient safety, improve health outcomes, and reduce overall health care costs by enabling health information to be available to health care providers about their patients' health history.

The North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) was created by the North Carolina General Assembly to oversee and administer the state-designated HIE (NCGS 90-414.7). We will receive input and advice from an Advisory Board consisting of patients, hospital systems, physicians, technology experts, public health officials, and other key stakeholders to continuously improve the HIE network, now called NC HealthConnex, and to move toward more efficient and effective care.

Q. What is NC HealthConnex and who does it support?

A. NC HealthConnex is a secure electronic network that facilitates conversations between health care providers, allowing them to access and share health-related information across North Carolina.

Created by the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGS 90-414.7), NC HealthConnex is the state-designated health information exchange and is managed by the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) housed within the N.C. Department of Information Technology.

Q. What law requires me to connect?

A. Legislation requires that all health care providers who receive state funds (e.g., Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan) for the provision of health care services to connect to NC HealthConnex in order to continue to receive payments for services provided. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57, NCSL 2020-3, and NCSL 2021-26). *Note: See Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4.(e) for certain providers now designated as "voluntary" to connect.*

Providers who do not receive state funding for the provision of health care services may also connect to NC HealthConnex on a voluntary basis to support whole person care.

Q. How do I connect to NC HealthConnex?

1. The first step in connection is reviewing and signing the Participation Agreement. The Participation Agreement is the contract that governs the data sharing between your practice and the NC HIEA. This agreement can be easily found on our website with instructions for completion. For more information, visit our [How to Connect Webpage](#).
2. The second step is to have the technology in place. The NC HIEA Participation Agreement requests that EHRs be minimally capable of sending HL7 messages, version 2 and higher. EHR products that are ONC certified for Meaningful Use for the for Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Incentive Programs are preferred.

NOTE: For those providers who are not currently utilizing an electronic health record system (EHR/EMR) in their practice, the average time for procurement (6-9 mos), implementation (3-6 mos), and onboarding to NC HealthConnex (3-4 mos) is 12-18 months.

Q. What does connected mean?

A. To meet the state’s mandate, a Medicaid provider is “connected” when its clinical and demographic information pertaining to services paid for by Medicaid and other state-funded health care funds are being sent to the NC HealthConnex daily — either through a direct connection to NC HealthConnex or via a hub (i.e., a larger system with which it participates, another HIE with which it participates, or EHR vendor). Participation agreements signed with the designated entity need to list all affiliate connections.

Q. What is the Participation Agreement?

A. The Participation Agreement is the legal contract that governs the data sharing between your practice and the NC HIEA. This agreement can easily be found on the NC HealthConnex website with instructions for completion. The [NC HIEA Full Participation Agreement](#), which is aligned with federal standards – the Data Use and Reciprocal Support Agreement or DURSA – allows providers full use of NC HealthConnex’s current and future value-added features, as well as fulfills the state’s requirement for the submission of clinical and demographic data. The [Submission Only Participation Agreement](#) enables a provider to submit the clinical and demographic data required by law in a one-way technical connection in order to be in compliance. However, this agreement will prohibit all other data exchange services including HIE query/data exchange and clinical registries.

Q. Who is required to sign a Participation Agreement—individual providers or Health Care Entities?

A. It is the Health Care Entity that signs the Participation Agreement on behalf of their practice or facility. Individual providers who are part of health care system or larger practice should ensure that their organization is a participant. For a complete list of participants, visit nchealthconnex.gov.

Q. Where can I find out if my organization is connected or has signed a Participation Agreement with NC HealthConnex?

A. The NC HealthConnex website provides a list of those who are connected and those who have signed an agreement [here](#).

Q. What are participating entities?

A. Participating entities are entities that a participant has control over, entities that are under common control with a participant, or entities that share information systems with a participant. A participating entity of a participant may also be a natural person or business entity with whom the participant has a direct or indirect business or employment relationship, including any person or entity provided a license or right to access and use any of a participant’s EHR product, software, and/or services. Participating entities may elect to submit HIE data through NC HealthConnex to NC HIEA under a single participant or as multiple separate participants. It is very important that each organization lists all their participating entities. These entities include separate facilities and locations. For example, some of our large connected health systems have more than 300 listed participating entities.

Q. Who in our organization needs to sign the Participation Agreement, and where does he or she sign the agreement?

A. The staff member who has the authority to sign contractual agreements on behalf of your practice, facility, or organization can sign the PA. Please see the instructions on your specific agreement for where the signatory must sign the agreement.

Q. Do I need to email a signed Participation Agreement and mail a hard copy? Or can I just send the signed Agreement by email?

A. The Participation Agreement is a form-fill pdf document made available on nchealthconnex.gov. The NC

HIEA prefers for this agreement to be completed and submitted electronically to hiea@nc.gov. If a participant would also like to send the entire completed and signed Participation Agreement in hard copy, you can mail it to the address below. Email is preferred. We do not require two copies. The physical mailing address is as follows:

NC Health Information Exchange Authority
Mail Service Center 4101
Raleigh, NC 27699-4101

Q. Can't I just submit clinical and demographic data paid for with state funds?

A. HIEs are operating across the country and accept all patient data for the purpose of whole person care. To date, more than 80% of NC HealthConnex participants send all patient records for this same purpose. However, if your practice wants to comply with the statutory mandate in the HIE Act by submitting the required data to NC HealthConnex that is acceptable, you will need to work with your EHR vendor to filter the data. Please note that the Submission Only Agreement does not allow your organization to query NC HealthConnex for patient data, exchange data with other participants, demonstrate active engagement with the NC HIEA registries to meet CMS Meaningful Use requirements, or to access any of the value-added features offered by the NC HIEA.

Q. What type of patient information can I access on NC HealthConnex?

A. NC HealthConnex participants can receive information about their patients with whom they have a relationship. This information, which is currently housed within provider organizations such as laboratory results, diagnostic studies, and clinical documents, can be viewed via a web-based portal or within your EHR if a bidirectional connection has been established with that vendor. Current data elements available in NC HealthConnex include allergies, encounters, immunizations, medications, procedures, problems, results, and single-sign on to the NC*Notify dashboard and CSRS portal.

Q. What are the benefits of joining NC HealthConnex?

A. NC HealthConnex exists to improve health care quality, enhanced patient safety, improve health outcomes, and reduce overall health care costs by enabling health information to be readily available to health care providers and clinical staff across the state. It empowers providers with near, real-time clinical information that links to colleagues across NC and travels seamlessly and securely to their practice, ultimately helping to reduce medical errors and duplicative procedures.

Q. What are the value-added features for full participants to utilize?

A. **Exchange Services** – NC HealthConnex enables full participants to query via their EHR or via a web-based clinical portal other participating health care providers with whom they share a patient. Additionally, NC HealthConnex has established connectivity to two national networks to enable interstate data sharing - the eHealth Exchange, which is query based and pulls CCDs, and the Patient Centered Data Home, which pushes ADT alerts based on patient zip code when patients present in out-of-state health systems.

Messaging Services – Participants can easily send encrypted messages between other HISP providers through NC HealthConnex's direct secure messaging service. Through our partnership with Secure Exchange Solutions and DirectTrust, NC HealthConnex and its participants have access to a directory of secure messaging addresses, available to participants in a .csv format.

Registry Services –The NC HIEA partners with the North Carolina Division of Public Health (NCDPH) to deliver public health registry reporting for full participants through their NC HealthConnex connections.

- COVID-19 Vaccine Management System – This cloud-based solution enables vaccine management and data sharing across the care continuum. NC HealthConnex receives COVID-19 vaccine administration data

from points of care and offers connectivity to CVMS and patient matching across sources to enhance vaccine data. This data exchange reduces the need for manual data entry directly into CVMS.

- N.C. Immunization Registry – Bi-directional routing of patient immunization information through a common NC HealthConnex interface is only available to participants who complete the NCIR onboarding process with the NCDPH’s Immunization Branch.
- Electronic Laboratory Reporting – Electronic reporting from laboratories to the NCDPH of laboratory reports identifying required reportable communicable diseases and conditions.
- N.C. Diabetes Specialized Public Health Registry – This registry accepts electronic submissions from eligible hospitals, eligible critical access hospitals, and eligible professionals, according to the standards required to meet the definitions of Meaningful Use Stage 3 and Modified Stage 2. Submission to the N.C. Diabetes Specialized Registry is available to full participants of NC HealthConnex.

Notification Services – NC*Notify is a subscription-based service that notifies providers as their patients receive services across the care continuum. Based on admission, discharge, and transfer data received from more than 130 participating hospitals, plus encounter data from more than 7,000 ambulatory care settings, the NC*Notify real-time event notifications provide care teams with valuable information that spans geographic and care settings and supports state and federal efforts to focus on patient-centered care.

Data Quality – The NC HIEA places a significant emphasis on NC HealthConnex’s data integrity. The Data Quality program is foundational and has a direct impact on all of NC HealthConnex’s value-added services.

Work Groups – Work groups are an important component of the NC HIEA’s strategy to gather stakeholder input while working to help providers meet the state’s requirements for connection, as well as develop use cases to promote adoption and use of NC HealthConnex. The NC HIEA current work groups include Behavioral Health, Dental, and Use Case.

Q. Which electronic health records systems support connection to NC HealthConnex?

A. [These electronic health records vendors](#) are live and submitting data to NC HealthConnex. This list is not exhaustive. NC HealthConnex is continuing to grow and work with new vendors. To ensure that vendors can meet NC HealthConnex standards, review the [technology specifications](#), and discuss them with your vendor.

Q. How do NC HealthConnex participants gain access to the clinical portal to view patient records?

A. The participant account administrator for your organization is responsible for managing the creation of user accounts. Please contact your participant account administrator to request access to the NC HealthConnex portal or a direct secure messaging account. If you do not know your participant account administrator, please contact the N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority Help Desk team at HIESupport@sas.com or (919) 531-2700.

Q. What is the difference between a uni-directional and bi-directional connection/integration?

A. Organizations that have opted for a Full Participation Agreement may access NC HealthConnex data via a uni-directional or bi-directional data connection. Organizations with a uni-directional connection/integration to NC HealthConnex may access their patients’ longitudinal patient records via the NC HealthConnex web-based clinical portal. Organizations connected bi-directionally may access NC HealthConnex data via their organizational electronic health records (EHR). NC HIEA can help determine whether your practice participates in a bidirectional exchange with a HIE to support care transitions, which CMS requires to be eligible for the Merit-Based Incentive Payment System. *NOTE: Bi-directional data connections to NC HealthConnex are dependent upon your EHR’s technical capability. Please work with your EHR vendor to determine if this is an option for your organization.

Q. Are there restrictions on submitting substance use data to NC HealthConnex?

A. Alcohol and substance use disorder programs that hold themselves out as or advertise as providers of

substance use disorder treatment and who receive any type of federal assistance as outlined in 42 C.F.R. Part 2 cannot generally disclose data through to NC HealthConnex in the following conditions:

1. If the data would identify a patient as an alcohol or substance abuser
2. If the data was obtained by an alcohol or substance abuse program for treating, diagnosing, or making a referral for the patient's alcohol or substance abuse problem.

Units within a larger health care organization that are covered by 42 C.F.R. Part 2 should also withhold patient data pertaining to substance use disorder patients. However, the remaining clinical data (e.g., general medical information, mental health data, procedures, laboratory tests) can be submitted to NC HealthConnex. Part 2 providers may disclose part 2 information in the event of an emergency directly to a requesting physician if he or she needs the information to treat the emergency condition pursuant to 42 C.F.R. §2.51 or if the patient has authorized the specific disclosure in writing in compliance with 42 C.F.R. § 2.31. This can be done using NC HealthConnex direct secure messaging. Please review 42 C.F.R. Part 2 before disclosing any alcohol or substance abuse information through NC HealthConnex.

Q. Can I share data related to a patient's behavioral health through NC HealthConnex?

A. Yes. Most behavioral health information is permitted to be shared through NC HealthConnex. However, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act does not allow mental health providers to disclose a patient's psychotherapy notes to others unless the patient authorizes the disclosure.

Although participants cannot submit Part 2 data or psychotherapy notes to the NC HealthConnex data repository, participants are permitted to share these types of information via direct secure messaging with other participants through NC HealthConnex. The provider sending the message must comply with applicable law and obtain the required consent or authorization from the patient before disclosing the data. Learn more about the [NCHIEA's secure messaging service](#).

Q. How do I provide my patients the ability to opt out?

A. Once you sign a Participation Agreement with the NC HIEA, we give your team a welcome packet, which includes valuable patient education and opt-out materials. Your practice can choose how they would like to include this information into their workflow. However, we encourage providers to include a statement about disclosures made to NC HealthConnex in their Notice of Privacy Practices. Opt-out forms are also readily available online. Once the form is received by our office, it is processed in two business days. We recommend that participants begin patient education as soon as they sign the PA while their facility is in onboarding for the technical connection. The NC HIEA also includes information for patients on its website at <https://hiea.nc.gov/patients>.

Q. How secure is NC HealthConnex?

A. The NC HIEA takes patient health data privacy and security very seriously. The NC HIEA is considered to be a health information organization (HIO) under HIPAA. In accordance with HIPAA regulations and state and federal law, the NC HIEA has entered into and will enter into Business Associate Agreements or HIPAA-compliant agreements with all organizations (e.g., covered entities) that will receive protected health information (PHI) from NC HealthConnex. The state also has the authority to audit the activity of organizations that receive PHI from the NC HealthConnex network. The NC HIEA follows the highest information security standards available. Information is always encrypted at rest and in transit. Additionally, the environment is SOC 2 compliant.

Q. What are the policies in place in the event of a breach?

A. The NC HIEA recognizes the vital role that information technology has in the health care industry,

specifically health information exchange. NC HIEA and its participants have a shared responsibility to protect our cyber resources and citizens' electronic health care records. The NC HIEA has Privacy and Security policies that detail the procedures for security, HIPAA, or eHealth Exchange breach in which any incident of unauthorized access to/acquisition of encrypted records or data containing personal information, along with the confidential process, occurs.

The NC HIEA takes its role as a steward of patient data very seriously and abides by the highest security standards as set by federal and state law. Additionally, the NC HIEA will perform regular audits to ensure compliance, follow data specifications standards already set by the eHealth Exchange, and strive to minimize the amount of data shared to what is required to provide safe, quality, affordable care to patients.

Q. Can the NC HIEA sell the data that providers submit about patient care?

A. No. All data is protected, stored, and accessed only for purposes permissible under federal and state law. The NC HIEA takes patient health data privacy and security very seriously and will never use HIE data for commercial purposes.

Q. Can information be shared with organizations that do not participate with NC HealthConnex?

A. You must be a full participant to access information within NC HealthConnex.

Q. I am concerned about my patients' protected health information. How can I be sure that it will remain private and secure?

A. The NC HIEA takes patient health data privacy and security very seriously. In accordance with HIPAA regulations and state law, the NC HIEA has entered and will enter Business Associate Agreements with all organizations that will receive protected health information (PHI) from NC HealthConnex. The state also has the authority to audit the activity of organizations that receive PHI from NC HealthConnex. The NC HIEA follows the highest information security standards available. Information is always encrypted at rest and in transit. Additionally, the environment is SOC 2 compliant.

Q. How will data submitted to NC HealthConnex be used?

A. Patient data will become part of the patient's longitudinal record for the permitted purposes outlined in the Participation Agreement (governing agreement for data use and sharing) and in applicable law. The NC HIEA takes very seriously the responsibility of protecting the data entrusted to NC HealthConnex for the purposes of health information exchange and as outlined by the General Assembly. Health care providers can rest assured that the NC HIEA, as a state entity, is prohibited from using HIE data for commercial purposes. SAS, the state's technology vendor, is also prohibited from using HIE data for commercial purposes and may only use, disclose, or access the data as directed by the state. Permitted uses of HIE data include only those allowable under HIPAA and applicable law, including patient treatment, payment, health care operations, public health activities, registries, and reporting. For example, a clinical event notification will allow a full participant who shares a patient with another health care organization to know where that patient has touched the system because this supports care coordination.

Q. What is the cost of subscribing to NC HealthConnex?

A. Currently, there is no fee to connect. The N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority is funded by the state of North Carolina, with a goal to be receipts-supported in the future. The N.C. General Assembly believes in the value of a robust state-operated health information exchange and has committed annual funding to this endeavor. As we develop a roadmap for future sustainability, fees related to the consumption of value-added features will be vetted thoroughly with all stakeholders and recommended to the General Assembly before any final decisions are made. *NOTE: While there are currently no fees charged by the state for the connection to or use of NC HealthConnex, some electronic health records

vendors may charge fees (e.g., technical build, maintenance) to their customers for this connection.

Q. Are there fees to obtain a Direct secure message account?

A. There are no fees to obtain a direct secure messaging account. Direct secure messaging is a safe, scalable, and standards-based method for the exchange of protected health information. However, medical providers will need to sign a full participation agreement to receive credentials. *NOTE: Direct secure messaging credentials are part of the package of N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority services that includes a technical connection to submit data. For more information, see the [direct secure messaging fact sheet](#).

Q. What if the EHR vendor does not have the technical capabilities to connect to NC HealthConnex?

A. The N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority offers a variety of connection options to NC HealthConnex. However, there are some instances in which an electronic health record vendor does not have the technical capability to connect to NC HealthConnex. In those instances, you will receive correspondence from NC HIEA about this and options for possible next steps.

Q. Where can I find more information?

A. For more information, visit www.nchealthconnex.gov, call the NC HIEA business office at 919-754-6912 or send an email to hiea@nc.gov.

NC HealthConnex Connection FAQs

Q. If my health care organization has completed a participation agreement but does not yet have a “live” connection, should I request an extension of the deadline to January 1, 2023? Is there a form to fill out?

A. No forms or additional applications are required. Signing a participation agreement and actively engaging in the onboarding process with your technical vendor demonstrates a good-faith effort to meet the extended deadline of January 1, 2023. This extension of time allows the large queue of health care providers in active onboarding to complete the connection process. Please continue your active efforts to complete onboarding. Connecting to NC HealthConnex can take up to 12 months, depending on your organization’s electronic health records software. There are no guarantees of additional time extensions to statutory deadlines, and a report of providers who have not connected is due to the General Assembly in March 2022.

Q. Does the January 1, 2023, deadline automatically extend to all health care providers who had a June 1, 2020, or October 1, 2021, deadline?

A. Yes. All health care providers who had an October 1, 2021, deadline now have until January 1, 2023, to meet the statutory requirement.

If your health care organization has not signed a participation agreement with the NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), it is highly recommended to begin the process now as there are currently more than 5,000 health care facilities in onboarding. For more information, please join one of the monthly [How to Connect Calls](#).

If your organization has executed a participation agreement with the NC HIEA and is already in active onboarding, please be advised that you are expected to continue the technical integration. Failure to continue onboarding efforts will cause your organization to lose its place in the onboarding queue.

If your organization has executed a participation agreement with the NC HIEA but has not started the onboarding process, be advised that the NC HealthConnex technical team will contact your organization when technical discussions are to begin with your practice. Please contact hiea@nc.gov with questions about your organization or if your organization needs additional guidance regarding instructions it has already received from NC HealthConnex or its technical team.

Q. Does the January 1, 2023, deadline apply to local management entities/managed care organizations that had an October 1, 2021, deadline?

A. No. The January 1, 2023, extension does not include local management entities/managed care organizations.

Q. I have not completed a participation agreement with the NC HIEA. When should I begin this process now that the deadline has been moved to January 1, 2023?

A. The NC HIEA encourages all providers and organizations impacted by the [Health Information Exchange Act](#) and related session laws passed by the General Assembly to begin the process now to initiate their good-faith effort to meet the state’s reporting requirements. Currently, more than 5,000 facilities are in onboarding, and it can take up to a year to complete the connection process.

Q. Where can I find more information?

A. For more information, visit www.nchealthconnex.gov, call the NC HIEA business office at 919-754-6912 or send an email to hiea@nc.gov.

Q. My health care organization is in queue to complete onboarding. How long before we can expect to be live in production so that we can fully participate in the state's health information exchange?

A. The NC HIEA's technical connections team is working with more than 200 disparate electronic health records vendors to build technical integrations to NC HealthConnex. Currently, [more than 80 EHRs are live in production](#). Currently, on-premises connections take 3-4 months and cloud roll-ons take 2-4 weeks. Full participants may request expedited access to the clinical portal during the COVID-19 public health crisis to enable more informed treatment decisions at the point of care. To request access, please reach out to NC HIEA's SAS Help Desk at HIESupport@sas.com or (919) 531-2700.

Q. Does the connection mandate apply to providers and organizations who do not have an electronic health record (EHR) system, but who otherwise provide services to Medicaid beneficiaries and/or other State-funded health care program beneficiaries?

A. Yes. Providers and organizations that are subject to condition-of-payment connection mandate in [N.C. Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4](#) are not exempt from the mandate because they do not presently maintain an electronic health record. To connect and submit data to NC HealthConnex, a provider or organization must have an EHR that is minimally capable of sending HL7 messages, version 2 or higher. The NC HIEA is working with more than 200 electronic health records vendors, including [vendors submitting data](#). We encourage you to procure an EHR as soon as you are able so that you can begin the connection and onboarding processes. Connecting to NC HealthConnex can take up 12 months, depending on your EHR software.

Q. If I'm an in-network provider with State Health Plan for Teachers and State Employees and decide to not connect to NC HealthConnex, will I be able to bill my patients directly to recoup payments that I would have received if I had connected to the health information exchange?

A. No. An in-network provider with State Health Plan for Teachers and State Employees who renders health care services, including prescription drugs and durable medical equipment, and does not connect to NC HealthConnex is prohibited from billing State Health Plan or a plan member more than would be billed if the provider was an NC HealthConnex Participant. See [N.C. Gen. Stat. § 90-414.4\(b1\)](#). Providers participating in the State Health Plan network should reach out to the State Health Plan with questions regarding this provision at BCBSNC Provider Services at 1-800-777-1643 or providerupdates@BCBSNC.com.

Q. Do updated statutory deadlines to the Statewide Health Information Exchange Act's connection mandate affect the [hardship extension process](#) that the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) facilitates?

A. Before Session Law 2021-26 extended certain providers' NC HIEA connection deadline to January 1, 2023, the N.C. General Assembly passed Session Law 2019-23 in June 2019. The earlier session law modified the Statewide Health Information Exchange Act and gave NCDHHS the authority to grant a temporary hardship extension to classes of providers for whom acquiring and implementing an electronic health record (EHR) system and connecting to the HIE network would constitute an undue hardship. The hardship extension delay gave certain eligible providers and practices until as late as December 31, 2022, to connect to the NC HIEA.

Now, pursuant to both Session Laws 2019-23 and 2021-26, the operative deadline for many providers and their organizations to connect to NC HealthConnex and submit mandated data is January 1, 2023. Providers and entities with questions about the Hardship Extension process should contact the NC DHHS Division of Health Benefits Provider Ombudsman at Medicaid.ProviderOmbudsman@dhhs.nc.gov.



NC HealthConnex Suite of Services

In addition to the core functionality of the NC HealthConnex health information exchange infrastructure, we offer full participants additional services designed to integrate more complete patient information into care delivery.

Exchange Services – NC HealthConnex enables full participants to query via their EHR or via a web-based clinical portal other participating health care providers with whom they share a patient. Additionally, NC HealthConnex has established connectivity to two national networks to enable interstate data sharing – the eHealth Exchange, which is query based and pulls CCDs, and the Patient Centered Data Home, which pushes ADT alerts based on patient zip code when patients present in out of state health systems.

Messaging Services – Participants can easily send encrypted messages between other HISP providers through NC HealthConnex’s direct secure messaging service. Through our partnership with Secure Exchange Solutions and DirectTrust, NC HealthConnex and its participants have access to a directory of secure messaging addresses, available to participants in a .csv format.

Registry Services – The NC HIEA partners with the N.C. Division of Public Health (NCDPH) to deliver public health registry reporting for full participants through their NC HealthConnex connections.

- COVID-19 Vaccine Management System – This cloud-based solution enables vaccine management and data sharing across the care continuum. NC HealthConnex receives COVID-19 vaccine administration data from points of care and offers connectivity to CVMS and patient matching across sources to enhance vaccine data. This data exchange reduces the need for manual data entry directly into CVMS.
- N.C. Immunization Registry - Bi-directional routing of patient immunization information through a common NC HealthConnex interface is only available to Participants who complete the NCIR onboarding process with NCDPH’s Immunization Branch.
- Electronic Laboratory Reporting - Electronic reporting from laboratories to NCDPH of laboratory reports identifying required reportable communicable diseases and conditions.
- N.C. Diabetes Specialized Public Health Registry – This registry accepts electronic submissions from eligible hospitals, eligible critical access hospitals, and eligible professionals, according to the standards required to meet the definitions of Meaningful Use Stage 3 and Modified Stage 2. Submission to the N.C. Diabetes Specialized Registry is available to full participants of NC HealthConnex.

Notification Services – NC*Notify is a subscription-based service that notifies providers as their patients receive services across the care continuum. Based on admission, discharge, and transfer data received from more than 130 participating hospitals, plus encounter data from more than 7,000 ambulatory care settings, the NC*Notify real-time event notifications provide care teams with valuable information that spans geographic and care settings and supports state and federal efforts to focus on patient-centered care.

Data Quality – The NC HIEA places a significant emphasis on NC HealthConnex’s data integrity. The Data Quality program is foundational and has a direct impact on all of NC HealthConnex’s value-added services.

Work Groups – Work groups are an important component to the NC HIEA’s strategy to gather stakeholder input to help providers meet the state’s requirements for connection and develop use cases to promote adoption and use of NC HealthConnex. The NC HIEA’s current work groups include Behavioral Health, Dental, and Use Case.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Navigating through the NC HealthConnex connection process

STEP 1

Submit Participation Agreement

Our team will process your agreement and place your organization in the queue for connection. Find [detailed instructions](#) for completing the participation agreement.

STEP 2

Executed Participation Agreement & Welcome Packet

Our team will return your organization's executed participation agreement along with the NC HealthConnex Welcome Packet to begin the onboarding process.

STEP 3

Suite of Services Enabled

Full participants can request access to the NC HealthConnex clinical portal by contacting the NC HealthConnex SAS Help Desk at HIESupport@sas.com. For any other [services](#), please contact the NC HIEA at HIEA@nc.gov.

STEP 4

Training and Patient Education

The NC HIEA offers [multiple training opportunities](#), either virtually or on-site, as well as [free patient education brochures](#). To request training, please submit the [Training Request Form](#).

STEP 5

SAS Technical Discussions

Our team members, including our technical partners at SAS will reach out to you to start a technical kick-off. SAS will work directly with your EHR vendor throughout development to connect your organization.

STEP 6

Keep in Touch

Throughout onboarding, it's vital that your organization's point of contact maintain consistent communication with our technical team. This will be imperative to ensure your connection is completed successfully.

STEP 7

Go Live

Once your organization's technical connection is complete, you will receive an email announcing your connection to NC HealthConnex is live, and providers will begin to see your organization's data in the clinical portal.

STEP 8

Ongoing Support

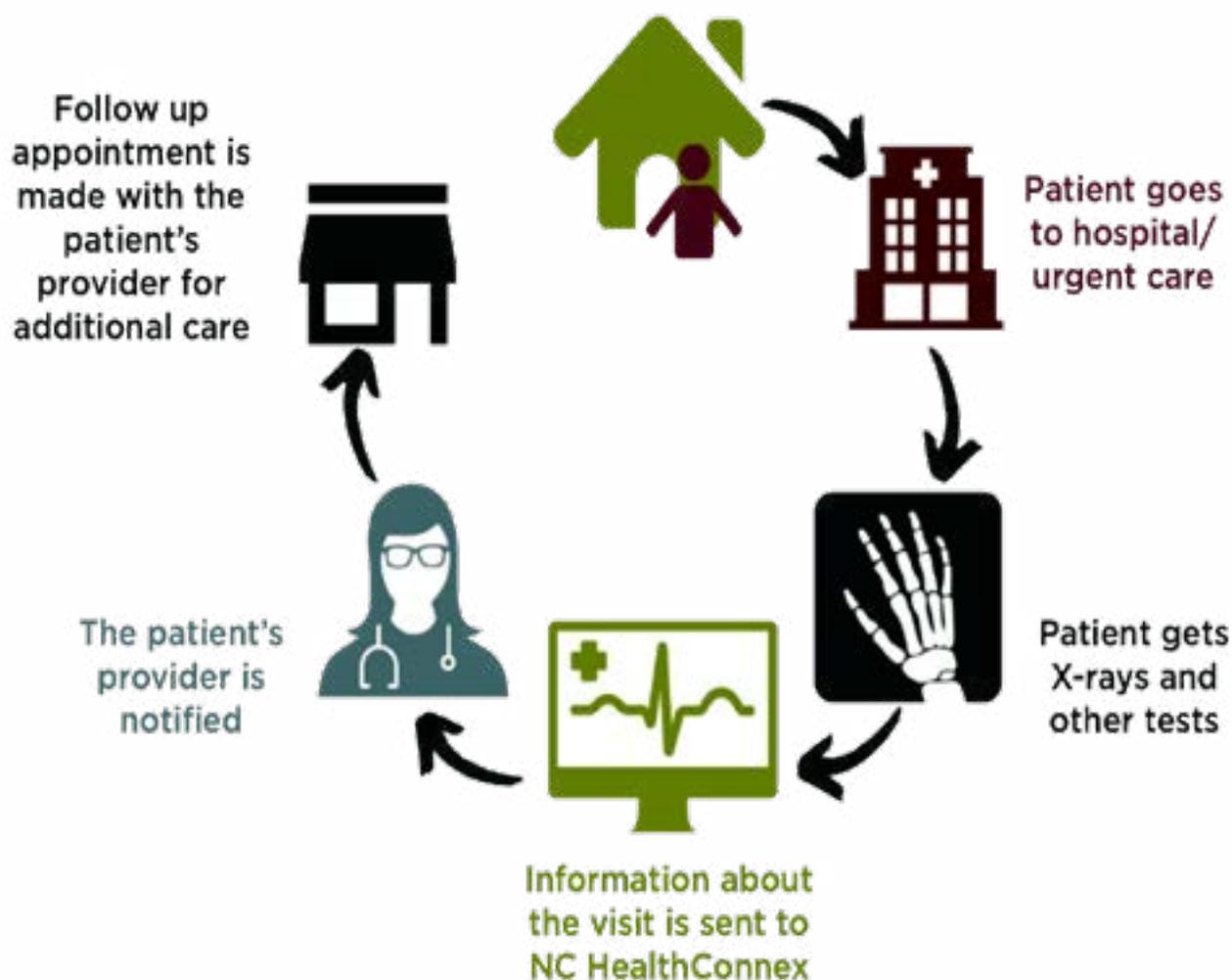
We and our partners at SAS are here to help. Throughout the entire lifecycle of your connection, including post-connection, we can assist your health care organization in using this tool for improved patient care. Reach out to the NC HealthConnex provider relations team at HIEA@nc.gov or the SAS Help Desk at HIESupport@sas.com for assistance.

Have questions? The NC HIEA has answered some of the most frequently asked questions about participation in NC HealthConnex and how to connect. Visit [our website](#) to find answers to these questions and what it means to participate in the state health information exchange.

What is NC*Notify?

The NC Health Information Exchange Authority

NC*Notify is a subscription-based service that notifies providers as their patients receive services across the care continuum. Based on admission, discharge, and transfer data received from more than 100 participating hospitals plus encounter data from more than 6,000 ambulatory care settings, the NC*Notify real-time event notifications provide care teams with valuable information that spans geography and care settings and support state and federal efforts to focus on patient centered care.



North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority State of North Carolina

Department of Information Technology

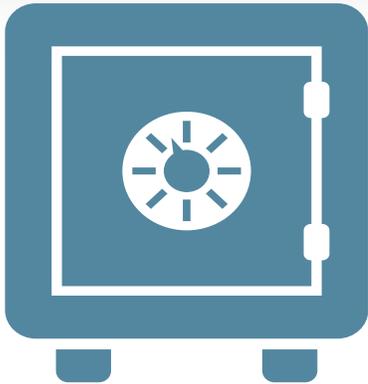
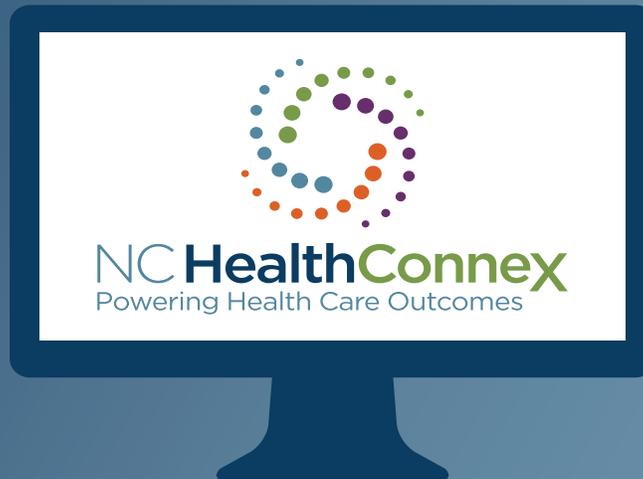
919-754-6912

hiea@nc.gov

www.nchealthconnex.gov

Electronic Health Record Selection Tips

The NC Health Information Exchange



IT'S SAFE AND IT'S SECURE. IT HAS TO BE.

The NC Health Information Exchange Authority (HIEA) recognizes the importance of all health care providers having access to mental health and substance use treatment records in their daily health care practice. However, federal laws and regulations prevent the NC HIEA from receiving and/or managing certain types of mental health or substance use treatment data without patient consent related to disclosures of such data.

42 C.F.R. Part 2 prohibits certain health care providers from disclosing data that would identify a patient as having a substance use disorder (SUD), unless the patient consents to the disclosure or the disclosure is permitted under Part 2. See C.F.R. 2.12(b) and consult with your legal counsel to determine if you are covered by this regulation.

TECHNOLOGY IN PLACE

The NC HIEA Participation Agreement requests EHRs that are minimally capable of sending HL7 messages, version 2 and higher. The first step is to have the ability to send HL7 messages (version 2.0 and higher) to enable the technical connection and data submission to NC HealthConnex. EHR products that are ONC certified for Meaningful Use for the for Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Incentive Programs are preferred. We are continuously connecting to additional vendors who are capable of sending HL7 or CCD messages, and they will be added to the website as they go live.



While there are currently no fees charged by the State for the connection to or use of NC HealthConnex, some EHR vendors may charge fees (technical build, maintenance, etc.) to their customers for this connection.

1

The first step is to have the ability to send HL7 messages to enable the technical connection and data submission to NC HealthConnex.

2

For a list of connected vendors and their capabilities, see below.

<https://hiea.nc.gov/providers/electronic-health-record-information>

3

Network with other providers in your field to learn from their experiences.



For Additional Information

Website:
NCHealthConnex.gov

Email:
hiea@nc.gov

Phone:
919-754-6912

Any information provided in this document regarding federal regulations does not constitute legal advice. Please consult with your legal counsel to determine if you are affected by the regulations discussed above.