

ISSUE

The Indian Health Service (IHS) uses secure information technology (IT) to improve health care quality, enhance access to care, reduce medical errors, and modernize administrative functions consistent with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) IT initiatives.

BACKGROUND

Information technology is essential to effective quality health care delivery and efficient resource management in the IHS. Health care is information-intensive and increasingly dependent on technology to ensure that appropriate information is available whenever and wherever it is needed.

The IHS IT infrastructure includes people, computers, communications, and security that support every aspect of the IHS mission. The IT infrastructure incorporates government and industry standards for the collection, processing, storage, and transmission of information. The IHS IT program is fully integrated with the agency's programs and is critical to improving service delivery across the Indian health system.

The Resource and Patient Management System (RPMS) is the IHS enterprise health information system. The RPMS suite includes dozens of clinical and administrative applications that support a full range of health care and business operations at Indian health system locations across the country. Local RPMS data are used to evaluate clinical quality as well as population and public health status. Aggregate data is used to report on clinical performance measures to Congress. The IHS also maintains a centralized database of patient encounter and administrative data for statistical purposes, performance measurement for accreditation, and public health and epidemiological studies. The IHS participates in HHS enterprise-wide initiatives to improve IT infrastructure and works with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other federal partners to develop software and share technology resources.

STATUS

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act of 2009 promotes Meaningful Use of Certified Electronic Health Record (EHR) technology by establishing EHR certification criteria and a program to provide financial incentives to providers and hospitals that implement and use EHR in a meaningful way. The IHS was the first federal government health system to develop a certified EHR that met Meaningful Use Stage 1 requirements, such as electronically capturing health information and computerized provider order entry. The IHS is now focused on maintaining and further developing its certified EHR to meet Meaningful Use Stage 2 requirements.

In support of national priorities, IHS is facilitating the secure exchange of health information by participating in the eHealth Exchange. This project will improve the quality of care for Indian patients by making critical health information available electronically to all health care providers, regardless of location. IHS is expanding its broadband infrastructure to provide rural sites with improved access to health IT, e-mail, telehealth services, and educational resources for patients and providers.

OPTIONS/PLANS

The IHS is working with Tribes and other organizations to further enhance IT systems to allow better clinical, management, and administrative capabilities. Strong relationships with our tribal partners, other government agencies, and leading-edge technology vendors will ensure that IHS IT systems remain current and compliant with industry standards, government mandates, and best practices.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For referral to the appropriate spokesperson, contact the IHS Public Affairs Staff at 301-443-3593.

