



Connection Information for Your Members

This tool kit is intended to be a resource for you, your organization, and your members. As the deadline for connection to NC HealthConnex—North Carolina’s state-designated health information exchange—approaches, we encourage you to use these communication tools to educate your members about NC HealthConnex and how to connect.

North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA)

Updated January 12, 2017



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. It 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.

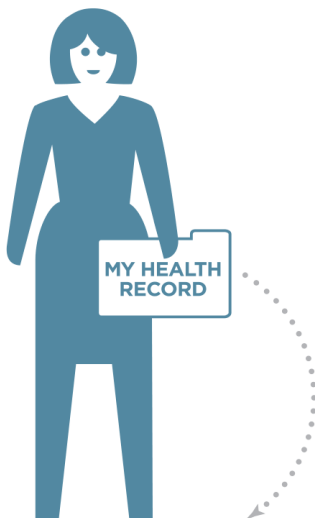
Notwithstanding the voluntary nature of HIEs, legislation requires that all health care providers who receive State funds (e.g. Medicaid, State Health Plan, etc.) for the provision of health care services connect to NC HealthConnex by certain dates in 2018 and 2019 in order to continue to receive payments for services provided. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57.) The following outlines the current deadlines:

- Hospitals as defined by G.S. 131E-176(3), physicians licensed to practice under Article 1 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes, physician assistants as defined in 21 NCAC 32S .0201 and nurse practitioners as defined in 21 NCAC 36 .0801 who provide Medicaid services and who have an electronic health record system shall connect by June 1, 2018.
- All other providers of Medicaid and state-funded services shall connect by June 1, 2019.
- Prepaid Health Plans (PHPs), as defined in S.L. 2015-245, will be required to connect to the HIE per their contracts with the NC Division of Health Benefits (DHB). PHPs are required to submit encounter and claims data by the commencement of the contract with NC DHB.
- LMEs/MCOs are required to submit claims and encounter data by June 1, 2020.

Since the new HIE network began operating in March 2016, NC HealthConnex has connected over 1,200 health care facilities. More than 132 million clinical messages are processed monthly, enabling more than 16,000 providers to query over 4 million unique patient records.

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.



NC HealthConnex
Powering Health Care Outcomes



**DOCTOR ABLE
TO IMPROVE
DIAGNOSES**



**ER DOCTOR
AND CARE TEAM
ABLE TO QUICKLY
ACCESS YOUR
HEALTH HISTORY**



**LESS CHANCE
OF HARMFUL DRUG
INTERACTIONS**



**AVOIDANCE OR
REDUCTION OF
DUPLICATE
MEDICAL TESTS**



**A NEW DOCTOR ABLE
TO REVIEW YOUR
HEALTH HISTORY PRIOR
TO YOUR VISIT**



**DOCTOR WARNED
OF POTENTIAL ALLERGIC
REACTIONS**



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? Deadlines are soon.

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 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) 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 by certain dates in 2018 and 2019 in order to continue to receive payment for services provided. The following outlines the specific deadlines for connection:

- Hospitals as defined by G.S. 131E-176(3), physicians licensed to practice under Article 1 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes, physician assistants as defined in 21 NCAC 32S .0201 and nurse practitioners as defined in 21 NCAC 36 .0801 who provide Medicaid services and who have an electronic health record system shall connect by June 1, 2018.
- All other providers of Medicaid and state-funded services shall connect by June 1, 2019.
- Prepaid Health Plans (PHPs), as defined in S.L. 2015-245, will be required to connect to the HIE per their contracts with the NC Division of Health Benefits (DHB). PHPs are required to submit encounter and claims data by the commencement of the contract with NC DHB.
- LME/MCOs are required to submit claims and encounter data by June 1, 2020.
- 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 4 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.

Benefits of NC HealthConnex include:

- Efficient access to comprehensive patient records at the point of care
- Elimination of duplicative tests
- Improved coordination across levels of care
- Improved diagnoses and treatment plans
- Access to secure, encrypted email through Direct Secure Messaging
- Access to public health registries
- Access to a growing provider directory of secure email addresses of physicians across the state
- 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, and to begin your connection process, visit NCHealthConnex.gov, send email to hiea@nc.gov or call 919-754-6912.



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 in compliance with NC State Law?

SUBHEAD:

Connecting **[insert specific vertical]** to NC’s Health Information Exchange

One of the goals of a transformed health care system is for nearly 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 4 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 NC HealthConnex.

What’s the law?

State law (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57) 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 by certain dates in 2018 and 2019 in order to continue to receive payment for services.

- Hospitals as defined by [G.S. 131E-176\(3\)](#), physicians licensed to practice under [Article 1 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes](#), physician assistants as defined in [21 NCAC 32S .0201](#) and nurse practitioners as defined in [21 NCAC 36 .0801](#) who provide Medicaid services and who have an electronic health record system shall connect by June 1, 2018.
- All other providers of Medicaid and state-funded services shall connect by June 1, 2019.
- Prepaid Health Plans (PHPs), as defined in [S.L. 2015-245](#), will be required to connect to the HIE per their contracts with the NC Division of Health Benefits (DHB). Clarifies that PHPs are required to submit encounter and claims data by the commencement of the contract with NC DHB.
- LME/MCOs are required to submit claims and encounter data by June 1, 2020.

This law was updated in the most recent legislative session (NCSL 2017-57) to provide more time for connectivity for providers not currently utilizing an electronic health record for patient care. 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.

The law also allows a study to be conducted on the feasibility of some providers to connect and share patient information. The General Assembly directed the NC HIEA, in partnership with DHHS and the State Health Plan, to conduct a feasibility study that will consider the following with respect to health care providers who fall under the mandate but who do not have the technology to connect:

1. The availability of connection, exchange and data submission standards established by the Office of the National Coordinator for Information Technology within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
2. The adoption of national standards for the connection, exchange and data submission standards by provider type.
3. Cost estimates by provider type to connect and submit data to the HIE and any availability of federal or State funds to meet connection or submission requirements.
4. Data captured in the treatment of patients, segmented by provider type.
5. Activity of other states and payor plans with respect to the establishment of an HIE Network.
6. Alternatives to the connection and submission of demographic, clinical, encounter and claims data through the HIE Network.

The results of the study will be presented to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology at the beginning of the legislative short session.

[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 portal depending on the type of connection.

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
- Elimination of duplicative tests

- Improved coordination across levels of care
- Improved diagnoses and treatment plans
- Access to secure, encrypted email through Direct Secure Messaging
- Access to public health registries
- Access to a growing provider directory of secure email addresses of physicians across the state
- HIPAA-compliant automated sharing with other providers

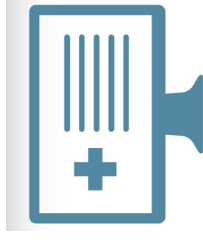
[The NC HIEA](#) works directly with its technical partner, SAS Institute, to continually audit, strengthen and optimize NC HealthConnex. This helps to ensure the highest levels of patient security, data security and participant satisfaction.

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.



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 electronic health record 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.

State law (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57) 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 by certain dates in 2018 and 2019 in order to continue to receive payment for services.

The first deadline is June 1, 2018, and impacts hospitals as defined by [G.S. 131E-176\(3\)](#), physicians licensed to practice under [Article 1 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes](#), physician assistants as defined in [21 NCAC 32S .0201](#) and nurse practitioners as defined in [21 NCAC 36 .0801](#) who provide Medicaid services and who have an electronic health record system.











For more detailed information about the state's requirements, 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/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 like: prescriptions, allergies, lab results, test results, conditions and diagnoses.
-  Having access to NC HealthConnex helps health care providers work more closely with other providers, make better care decisions and reduce the chance of medical errors.
-  NC HealthConnex helps prevent the spread of disease through faster reporting of health threats to public health departments.
-  The NC HIEA was created by the North Carolina General Assembly to oversee and administer the state-designated HIE (NCGS 90-414.7), NC HealthConnex.
-  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. Participant users can receive notifications about significant patient events that include:
 - Inpatient admission
 - Inpatient discharge
 - Patient admission to ER
 - Final laboratory result
 - Final microbiology result
 - Final radiology report


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


Current data elements available in NC HealthConnex include:


- Allergies
- Encounters
- Immunizations
- Medications
- Problems
- Procedures
- Results


 North Carolina state law requires that all health care providers who receive State funds (e.g. Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan, etc.) for the provision of health care services connect to NC HealthConnex by certain dates in 2018 and 2019 in order to continue to receive payments for services provided. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57)

- Hospitals as defined by [G.S. 131E-176\(3\)](#), physicians licensed to practice under [Article 1 of Chapter 90 of the General Statutes](#), physician assistants as defined in [21 NCAC 32S .0201](#) and nurse practitioners as defined in [21 NCAC 36 .0801](#) who provide Medicaid services and who have an electronic health record system shall connect by June 1, 2018.
- All other providers of Medicaid and state-funded services shall connect by June 1, 2019.
- Prepaid Health Plans (PHPs), as defined in [S.L. 2015-245](#), will be required to connect to the HIE per their contracts with the NC Division of Health Benefits (DHB). Clarifies that PHPs are required to submit encounter and claims data by the commencement of the contract with NC DHB.
- LME/MCOs are required to submit claims and encounter data by June 1, 2020.

 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.

 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 for 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 Institute, to build the technical connections to NC HealthConnex and to ensure the highest level of patient and data security.

###



Frequently Asked Questions

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

A. A health information exchange 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 towards 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. Who is "required" to connect to NC HealthConnex?

- Hospitals, physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners who provide Medicaid services and who have an electronic health record system shall connect by June 1, 2018.
- All other providers of Medicaid and state-funded services shall connect by June 1, 2019.
- Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations (LMEs/MCOs) are required to submit encounter and claims data by June 1, 2020.
- Providers who do not receive state funding for the provision of health care services may also connect to the NC HIE on a voluntary basis to support whole person care.

Q. What law requires me to connect?

A. Recently enacted legislation requires that all health care providers who receive State funds (e.g., Medicaid, NC Health Choice, State Health Plan, etc.) for the provision of health care services to connect to NC HealthConnex by certain dates in 2018 and 2019 in order to continue to receive payments for services provided. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57)

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 EHRs that are 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. The NC HIEA has also created a technology specification and minimum data target that can be found [here](#). This document can also be used to ensure that your EHR vendor can meet our technology standards.

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 at least twice 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 would 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](#), now aligned with federal standards – the Data Use and Reciprocal Support Agreement or DURSA--allows providers full use of the NC HealthConnex current and future value-added features as well as provide for 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 a 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. 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.

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 the nhealthconnex.gov website. 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 Legal Team
Mail Service Center 4101
Raleigh, NC 27699-4101

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

A. Health Information Exchanges are operating across the country and accept all patient data for the purpose of whole person care. To date, all NC HealthConnex participants send all patient records for this same purpose. However, if your practice simply wants to comply with the statutory mandate in the HIE Act by submitting the required data to NC HealthConnex, please complete [the Submission-Only NC HIEA Participation Agreement](#). Please note, this agreement does not allow your organization to query NC HealthConnex for patient data, exchange data with other participants, submit data to registries to meet Meaningful Use or to access any of the value-added features offered by the NC HIEA.

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. 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
- Problems
- Procedures
- Results

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 portal other participating health care providers with whom they share a patient. Additionally, NC HealthConnex has established connectivity to the Georgia HIE, GaHIN, through the eHealth Exchange. Testing is underway with the VA HIE, and we are actively planning to add connections to other neighboring states.

Messaging Services - Participants can easily send encrypted messages between other HISP providers through NC HealthConnex's direct secure messaging service. Through our partnership with Orion Health and DirectTrust, NC HealthConnex and its participants have access to a directory of over 16,000 (and growing) secure messaging addresses, and it will be available to participants in a .csv format.

Registry Services -The NC HIEA is a proud partner with the North Carolina Division of Public Health (NCDPH) and is working alongside this agency to deliver public health registry reporting for full participants through the NC HealthConnex connection.

- **NCIR** - Bi-directional routing of patient immunization information through a common NC HealthConnex interface. This is only available to Participants who complete the NCIR onboarding process with the Immunization Branch of NCDPH.
- **ELR** - Electronic reporting from laboratories to the NC Division Public Health of laboratory reports which identify required reportable communicable diseases and conditions.
- **Diabetes** - The NC HIEA is pleased to announce that effective June 1, 2018, the NC Diabetes Specialized Public Health Registry will be available to accept 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 diabetes specialized registry is available to full participants of NC HealthConnex.

Notification Services - Users with the highest level of access can receive notifications about significant patient events within the clinical portal once a patient/provider relationship is established. Additionally, NC HIEA is in testing with two pilot participants for clinical alerts delivered via EHR integration.

Data Quality - The NC HIEA is developing a robust data quality program. More information coming soon.

Work Groups - Work Groups are an important component to the NC Health Information Exchange Authority's (NC HIEA) strategy to gather stakeholder input as we work 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 the HIE Task Force, Specialized Registries, Behavioral Health, and Dental.

Q. What type of information can I expect to receive from NC HealthConnex on the patients that I serve?

A. Participants will receive patient information from other provider organizations with whom they share a relationship such as laboratory results, diagnostic studies and clinical documents. Current data elements available in NC HealthConnex include:

- Allergies
- Encounters
- Immunizations
- Medications
- Problems
- Procedures
- Results

Q. Do you have a list* of EMR systems that support connection to NC HealthConnex?

- Allscripts
- Amazing Charts
- Athena Health
- AYM Technologies
- Centricity
- Cerner
- CureMD
- DAS Health/Aprima
- eClinicalWorks
- eMD
- eMed Solutions, LLC
- EPIC
- Evident- Thrive
- Greenway
- ICAN Solutions, Inc
- Integrated Imaging
- McKesson Practice Partners
- Medical Transcription Billing Corporation
- Medinformatix
- Meditech
- MicroMD
- Netsmart
- NextGen
- Office Ally
- Office Practicum
- Patagonia Health
- Physician's Computer Company (PCC)
- Practice Fusion Cloud
- Praxis
- Prognosis
- Reli Med Solutions
- SRS
- SuiteMed
- Tangible Solutions
- The Echo Group
- Therap
- Trimed Tech
- Valant
- Waiting Room Solutions

**This list is not exhaustive as we continue to grow and work with new vendors. To ensure that your vendor can meet our standards, please have them review our [Technology Specifications Document](#).*

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

A. The NC HIEA takes its role as steward of patient data very seriously and gives credentials to the participant's assigned Participant Account Administrator. The Participant Account Administrator grants the health care provider access based on his/her specific role within the health care organization. NC HealthConnex is configured with various clinical views that end users can access. Not all views need to be accessed by all users, and access can be based on sensitivity of information or relevance to the user. User groups and roles are used to control this access.

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

A. Alcohol or substance abuse programs that receive any type of federal assistance as outlined in 42 C.F.R. 2.12 cannot generally disclose data through an HIE if the data would: 1. identify a patient as an alcohol or substance abuser, and 2. if that 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. Providers can disclose that information in the event of an emergency if the requesting physician 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. 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 HIPAA Privacy and Security Rule requires that providers receive written authorization from a patient before psychotherapy notes can be disclosed to another party with some exceptions (45 C.F.R. 164.508). The written authorization form must comply with 45 C.F.R. 164.508(c) and must be retained by the provider. The Rule defines "psychotherapy notes" as follows:

Psychotherapy notes means notes recorded (in any medium) by a health care provider who is a mental health professional documenting or analyzing the contents of conversation during a private counseling

session or a group, joint or family counseling session and that are separated from the rest of the individual's medical record. Psychotherapy notes exclude medication prescription and monitoring, counseling session start and stop times, the modalities and frequencies of treatment furnished, results of clinical tests and any summary of the following items: Diagnosis, functional status, the treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis and progress to date.

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

A. Once you sign a Participation Agreement with the NC HIEA, we provide 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. As soon as an Opt-Out form is received in the mail, it goes into processing. 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 what is considered 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 personal health information (PHI) from NC HealthConnex. The State also has the authority to audit the activity of organizations that receive PHI (Protected Health Information) 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 Authority 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 and 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. 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.

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 personal 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 that is being entrusted to NC HealthConnex for the purposes of health information exchange and as outlined by the General Assembly. As a State entity, health care providers can rest assured that the State 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 can 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, as well as public health activities, registries and reporting. As an 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 as this supports care coordination.

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

A. Currently, there is no fee to connect. The NC HIEA is funded by the State of North Carolina with a goal to be receipts supported in the future. The NC HIEA, in consultation with the Advisory Board, decided in December 2016 not to charge a fee for the submission of data to meet N.C.G.S. 90-414.4. The General Assembly believes in the value of a robust state-operated HIE and has committed \$9 million annually to this endeavor. The NC HIEA’s focus for the next 12-18 months is on building connections and helping providers meet the mandate. 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 EHR vendors may charge fees (technical build, maintenance, etc.) to their customers for this connection.

Q. Are there fees to obtain a Direct Secure Message (DSM) Account?

A. There are no fees to obtain a DSM Account [DSM is a secure, scalable and standards-based method for the exchange of Protected Health Information (PHI)]. However, medical providers will need to sign a Participation Agreement to receive credentials. Note: DSM credentials are part of the package of HIE services that includes a technical connection to submit data.

Q. Will I need to join NC HealthConnex if my organization is already participating in the NC HIE run by CCNC?

A. The NC HIE that was taken over by the State in March 2016 is now being called NC HealthConnex. If you signed a participation agreement with the state-operated NC Health Information Exchange Authority that was executed on or after March 1, 2016, you are automatically a participant in NC HealthConnex. Any contracts signed with the former HIE organization managed by CCNC were terminated on February 29, 2016. For you to connect your practice or organization to the new HIE — NC HealthConnex — new contracts between your organization and the NC HIEA must be executed.

Q. What happens if I don't connect?

A. In order to continue to receive payment for health care services paid for by State funds, health care providers will need to demonstrate connectivity to NC HealthConnex by certain dates in 2018 and 2019. Additionally, the General Assembly has authorized the NC HIEA, in consultation with DHHS, to develop an extension process with an end date of June 1, 2020.

Q. What is the extension process?

A. The NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), as part of the Department of Information Technology, in collaboration with the NC Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), has developed a process that allows health care providers to request extensions for their connection to the NC Health Information Exchange Network known as NC HealthConnex. If your organization would like to request a connection extension, you must meet all of the following criteria:

- 1) Have signed an NC HIEA Participation Agreement; and
- 2) Can demonstrate how your organization plans to connect to NC HealthConnex within one (1) calendar year;

If your organization can comply with these criteria and you need to request an extension, please complete the form found on the nhealthconnex.gov website. *Note: This process is not a request for a waiver/exemption from the state's requirements, but an extension of time to meet the state's requirements.*

Q. I don't have an EHR, am I exempt from the law?

A. No. Providers who have not yet acquired an electronic health/medical record (EHR/EMR) for their practice, have been given until June 1, 2019, to procure, implement, and onboard to NC HealthConnex. This process can take between 12-18 months.

Q. I am a health care provider who does not collect clinical information from my patients. Am I exempt from the law?

A. No. However, the NC General Assembly directed the NC HIEA, in partnership with DHHS and State Health Plan, to conduct a feasibility study to understand the type of providers impacted by the HIE Act, the data collected and how it could be used in the HIE for patient care, as well as alternative methods of connection and data transport. The results of the study will be made available in April 2018.

Q. Where can I find more information?

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



NC HealthConnex Connection Extension Process

The NC HIEA, in consultation with DHHS, has developed an extension process for providers to formally submit a request for an extension of time to meet the requirements set forth in the HIE Act. It is effective as of January 2017. *Note: This information is background on the process. Please share the form (pdf attachment) with your members. It is not a waiver to exempt a provider from the HIE Act.*

Legislative Requirements:

NCGS 90-414.4(a2) Extensions of Time for Establishing Connection to the HIE Network. The Department of Information Technology, in consultation with the Department of Health and Human Services, may establish a process to grant limited extensions of the time for providers and entities to connect to the HIE Network and begin submitting data as required by this section upon the request of a provider or entity that demonstrates an ongoing good-faith effort to take necessary steps to establish such connection and begin data submission as required by this section. The process for granting an extension of time must include a presentation by the provider or entity to the Department of Information Technology and the Department of Health and Human Services on the expected time line for connecting to the HIE Network and commencing data submission as required by this section. Neither the Department of Information Technology nor the Department of Health and Human Services shall grant an extension of time (i) to any provider or entity that fails to provide this information to both Departments or (ii) that would result in the provider or entity connecting to the HIE Network and commencing data submission as required by this section later than June 1, 2020. The Department of Information Technology shall consult with the Department of Health and Human Services to review and decide upon a request for an extension of time under this section within 30 days after receiving a request for an extension.

Process:

- Prospective NC HealthConnex participants must complete the extension process “presentation,” which will consist of a form (See Form in attachments. You may share this form with your members or direct them to the nhealthconnex.gov web page. It must be completed and submitted electronically.)
- The NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) will make a preliminary decision on approval based on:
 - The provider’s deadline
 - If they have signed a Participation Agreement (PA) to enable the connection
 - If they have included a statement on how they plan to connect to NC HealthConnex
- The NC HIEA and DHHS will review and communicate the decision to the provider within 30 days of request

Other Criteria:

- Extension may only be requested within six months of the relevant deadline, i.e. December 1, 2018, for June 1, 2019, deadline.
 - Extensions will last for one calendar year
 - Further extensions may be requested at later dates if the participant will not be connected within the original extension period
 - All connections must be made by June 1, 2020. Therefore, no extension periods may be granted that would result in connection dates past June 1, 2020.

Connection Extensions Originated by DIT:

- DIT proposes that all participants who (i) have signed a Participation Agreement; (ii) are engaged in the onboarding process with SAS; (iii) are still waiting to be connected by their connection deadline due to external factors, e.g. vendor delay, etc. be granted a 90-day extension by DIT.



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.