

MASSACHUSETTS LAUNCHES eHEALTH PILOT PROJECTS

Three Communities Will Set the Future Course For Improving Patient Care Using Health IT

Brockton, Mass. – (May 13, 2005) – The Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative (MAeHC) launched three pilot projects today, first-in-the-nation large-scale demonstrations to test community-wide implementation of electronic health records for use in patient care. Support and interest are growing locally and nationally for bringing the efficiency, safety, and effectiveness of information technology to the health care system. The MAeHC initiative is one of the nation's leading and most ambitious efforts in this area.

At a meeting in Brockton to officially kick-off the pilot projects, Dr. David Brailer, National Coordinator for Health Information Technology at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Senator Edward Kennedy, and Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney joined representatives of the three pilot communities and the members of the Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative in expressing support for the effort.

The work of MAeHC will offer lessons for other communities and other states as they embark on projects to improve the quality, safety, and cost-effectiveness of health care through widespread use of clinical information technology systems. The projects will not only be technology proving grounds, they will also test practical solutions for solving the many challenges that health information exchange entails, including the need for protection of privacy and confidentiality.

These first demonstration projects will proceed over the next 24 months to 36 months. Collectively, the initiative will outfit the practices of more than 600 physicians, supplying electronic medical records, decision support tools, and clinical data exchange capabilities to support the care of more than a half a million people in nearly 200 sites. The project's aim is to study and demonstrate the effectiveness and practicality of implementing electronic health records in community practice settings. The goals are to improve the quality, safety, and cost-effectiveness of care in a way that is financially sustainable and respectful of patient privacy.

"The Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative has great potential for reorganizing medical care in the computer age and making good care far more widely available and affordable for all citizens. It's a model of cooperation among hospitals, insurers, foundations, community groups and the state government. Its creation is a tribute to their leadership and vision, and I commend them for putting the health of the people of the Commonwealth first," Senator Kennedy said.

The expansion of electronic health records has strong support from the Romney administration. "Adopting electronic health records will save lives, hold down costs and keep Massachusetts at the forefront of healthcare innovation," said Governor Mitt Romney. "The three pilot programs launched today will yield tremendous insight into this promising technology and have a positive impact on how we deliver healthcare services in the future."

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“The fundamental transformation that we will begin in these three communities can only happen with the trust and guidance of all stakeholders,” said Mr. Tripathi. “MAeHC is committed to incorporating state-of-the-art technologies and processes to create a system that is trusted by clinicians and patients alike.”

Participants within each community include local hospitals, physician practices, long-term care facilities, nursing and home health care agencies, and community health centers. The selected communities were chosen for their local leadership, and the commitment of the local health care community to using IT to improve health care delivery. These participants will be excellent models for expanding EHR adoption across the state, due to the diversity of their populations, geography, and IT maturity.

Mr. Tripathi noted that the pilot projects are the first step toward achieving the MAeHC vision of universal adoption of electronic health records across the entire state. “These pilot projects are just the beginning. MAeHC will be actively looking beyond the pilot projects to share the lessons, infrastructure, expertise, and arrangements that we create for the pilots with all other communities in the Commonwealth.”

The Massachusetts eHealth Collaborative was formed in 2004 as an initiative of the physician community to bring together the state’s major health care stakeholders to establishing an EHR system that would enhance the quality, efficiency and safety of care in Massachusetts. The value of electronic health records is widely acknowledged, but the significant capital and time required to implement such a system are frequently cited as significant barriers to adoption. It has been estimated that universal statewide adoption of EHRs would cost roughly \$1 billion. The Collaborative is fortunate to have a \$50 million commitment from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts to fund its demonstration project phase. By pooling the resources, talent, and experience of its 34 member organizations and communities throughout the state, the Collaborative hopes to achieve a major leap forward in realizing its vision of better care for the Commonwealth.

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