



*Advancing health and wellness
through information technology*

What is Arizona Health-e Connection?

Established in January 2007, Arizona Health-e Connection (AzHeC) is a statewide non-profit organization whose mission is to lead Arizona's establishment of health information infrastructure (HII), which includes support of health information exchange (HIE) and adoption of health information technology (HIT), such as clinician office electronic health records. Arizona Health-e Connection is neither a regional health information organization (RHIO) nor an information exchange, but instead provides strategic direction for the establishment of successful health information infrastructure in Arizona through:

- Serving as an educator and statewide clearinghouse for information
- Researching and developing statewide policies, and model legal agreements
- Supporting health information exchange and provider adoption of health information technology

History

Arizona Health-e Connection grew out of an August 2005 gubernatorial executive order and the subsequent work of hundreds of Arizona individuals and institutions. Within six months of the executive order, a blue-ribbon steering committee, working with eHealth Initiative (eHI) of Washington D.C., and Arizona volunteers, delivered a five-year plan - known as "The Roadmap" - for establishing the state's e-health infrastructure.

The Roadmap called for development of infrastructure on a regional basis, with provision of shared infrastructure components as necessary by a statewide non-profit organization. This statewide entity would also provide leadership for educating Arizonans on e-health, developing statewide policies and agreements, and promoting clinicians' adoption of electronic medical records, e-prescribing, and other health information technology.

Arizona Health-e Connection was founded in January 2007 to provide this leadership, and chose Brad Tritle as its first executive director in September 2007. It currently maintains offices within the Arizona Medical Association (ArMA) building in Phoenix. Educational efforts include its annual Western States Health-e Connection Summit & Trade Show in the spring of each year, which provides an overview of national, state, and regional e-health activities to health care, government and business leaders, as well as consumers.

National Attention

Arizona Health-e Connection has gained attention nationally for its early leadership, focus on action, and the cooperation of a broad base of stakeholders.

"Arizona gets it," Robert Kolodner, former head of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, told stakeholders at the 2007 Summit. "You have in fact embodied that idea of fostering collaborations and bringing to the table a wide spectrum of stakeholders, all of whom have to be involved."

The Council of State Governments, which supports policy development efforts of the three branches of government in all fifty states, awarded Arizona Health-e Connection its coveted Innovations Award, not only for its unique and effective approach, but for its ability to be duplicated by other states.

First Initiatives—2007-2008

Arizona's early identification of privacy and security concerns as a major concern in the establishment of health information exchange led to the state being an early recipient of a federal grant to participate in the Health Information Security and Privacy Collaborative (HISPC), funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ) within HHS. Due to Arizona's results-oriented approach, it has received several additional rounds of funding, co-chairing the multi-state collaborative to

address the sharing of electronic health information across state lines, and serving on the steering committee for the national project.

Arizona's stakeholder cooperation has also attracted the attention of the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), the HHS agency which administers both programs, in its efforts to transform Medicaid. In early 2007, CMS awarded Arizona's Medicaid agency, the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS) an \$11.7 million grant to build a health information exchange and utility, in order for Medicaid to participate in the Roadmap implementation. An additional CMS grant of \$4.4 million was awarded in late 2007, to build a clinical decision support toolbox in conjunction with the health information exchange and utility. AHCCCS leadership chairs CMS' multi-state collaborative committees on both health information exchange and electronic health records.

In March 2008, HHS released its report on the role of states in establishing health information infrastructure, entitled *State Level Health Information Exchange*. Arizona, together with other states, participated in the HHS study, presenting at meetings and comparing approaches. The report's findings recommend that other states follow the steps taken by Arizona.

Harvard Business School has recently published a case study on Arizona Health-e Connection, *Modern Healthcare* featured it as a cover story, and additional media coverage ranges from the *New York Times* to *Healthcare IT News*, the *Arizona Republic*, and others. According to Janet Marchibroda, former CEO of eHealth Initiative, other states continue to follow Arizona's model of stakeholder cooperation.

Stakeholder Cooperation and a Ground-Up Approach

The stakeholder cooperation of existing and future Arizona Health-e Connection members is necessary to establish a workable statewide infrastructure. Without individual provider adoption electronic health records, and local and regional stakeholder education and participation, a statewide effort cannot succeed. In 2006, Arizona established the Rural Health Information Technology Adoption (RHITA) program within the Government Information Technology Agency (GITA) to fund rural implementation of the Roadmap recommendations. In 2007, seven grants were provided to rural hospitals, community health centers, and behavioral healthcare providers. The 2008 monies were applied to facilitate further HIE and HIT efforts in rural Arizona. Across the country, as in Arizona, stakeholder discussions have led to the discovery that local providers are more likely to buy in to a project when they have participated early in the project's development.

AzHeC is working closely with regional stakeholders and initiatives, such as the Southern Arizona Health Information Exchange (SAHIE), along with individual meetings with organizations in rural and metro Arizona, to further collaboration, and create continuity. It has also established a Council of Initiatives, which is a forum for initiatives and programs from around Arizona to exchange ideas, and leverage resources.

As eHealth Initiative's former CEO Janet Marchibroda states, "Healthcare is really local. Each state and each community has individual needs and wants to meet."

How can I learn more, or become involved?

Visit www.azhec.org to communicate with and join the organization, attend our annual Summit & Trade Show as well as other exciting educational events, and sign up for email newsletters! Be sure to visit our website often!