



Federal Health Architecture

The Federal Health Architecture (FHA) was formed to coordinate health IT activities among the more than 20 federal agencies that provide health and healthcare services to citizens. FHA and its participating federal partners are helping build a federal health information technology environment that is interoperable with private sector systems and supports the President's plan to enable better point-of-service care, increased efficiency and improved overall health in the U.S. population.

FHA, together with its federal partners, addresses the requirements of Executive Order 13410 to achieve secure, interoperable health information exchanges within the federal government and its consortia. FHA serves a coordinating and convening role across the federal agencies to support alignment of health information technology (IT) investments. This has led to the CONNECT Gateway project, the Federal Health Interoperability Modeling (FHIM) initiative, Federal Health Information Planning and Reporting (FHIPR) and other projects aimed at coordinating across federal agencies.

The Power of Working Together: Successes from 2011

Federal Health IT Standards Organization Participation: FHA facilitated federal input for standards issues with cross-agency implications, representing 14 federal agencies, including the Department of Defense (DoD), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), CDC/National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), Food and Drug Administration (FDA), Indian Health Statistics (HIS), National Cancer Institute (NCI), National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Library of Medicine (NLM), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). FHA coordinated federal needs in standards development and identified priority areas of interest related to standards participation.

Federal Health Interoperability Modeling and Standards: FHA initiated this effort to develop a comprehensive, integrated set of standards that fully support health information interoperability, including semantic interoperability. Included in this initiative is information modeling, the goal of which is to produce a logical, health information model that supports semantic interoperability and that is built by harmonizing information from the individual federal partners and standards organizations. This logical model may continue to use the Health Level 7 (HL7) Reference Information Model (RIM) as its reference model while evaluating the inclusion of the National Information Exchange Model (NIEM).

Federal Health Information Planning and Reporting (FHIPR): FHA created the FHIPR initiative to provide health IT specific guidance to agencies for the purposes of planning health IT investments and reporting to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). FHA provides guidance for agencies to help them identify and select health IT solutions that align to national health IT interoperability guidelines and standards. In addition, the FHIPR initiative provided a health information survey tool that was distributed quarterly to the participating federal agencies.

CONNECT Gateway: The CONNECT Gateway is a FHA initiative to develop a software gateway to link federal agencies and other organizations to the Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange ("Exchange"). The CONNECT health information exchange software was built in open source to keep the cost low and make the solution widely available. More than half of Exchange participants are using CONNECT to participate in the Exchange, though there are additional solutions from the private sector that can also be used for participation. As long as all the exchange solutions deploy Nationwide Health Information Network standards and specifications, cross-platform connectivity is possible. In 2011, CONNECT 3.2.1 was released to the community, providing advanced features to enable exchange. CONNECT 3.3 is currently in development, targeted for release in March 2012.

Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange: The Exchange represents the standards, services and policies necessary to support using the internet to exchange health information in a secure and private manner. Initially established as a program under the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) in 2004, the goals of the Exchange were to improve the quality and efficiency of healthcare by establishing a mechanism for nationwide health information exchange. The Exchange went through a prototyping and trial implementations phase where an architecture and set of specifications were developed to provide a common, secure and trusted network to enable the exchange of health information among private networks and federal health networks. The effort effectively integrated specifications, implementation guidelines, compliance, interoperability verification, and network operations with a strong trust fabric to allow for interoperable health information exchange. Federal partners participating in FHA have been instrumental in moving the Exchange forward and promoting a thriving community of interoperable organizations.

Looking to the Future

FHA will focus efforts in 2011 on high-impact activities aimed at propelling interoperability to new levels of awareness and adoption – both for the federal agencies as well as organizations doing business with the federal government. Fiscal year 2012 will include activities such as:

Interoperability Architecture: FHA will identify and prioritize initiatives that will comprise the FHA architecture and modeling strategy and plan. FHA will participate in the Standards & Interoperability (S&I) Framework, and will transition the Federal Health Information Model to a shared model as part of the Framework. FHA initiatives may include, aligning the Federal Health Architecture with NIEM's Information Exchange Package Documentation (IEPD) where applicable; initiating an effort to facilitate and encourage the use of modular architecture and openly available models of information, data dictionaries, and standardized vocabularies; and improving access to existing FHA enterprise architecture repository for all FHA partners.

CONNECT: FHA will continue to support the federal partners and the CONNECT community in implementing CONNECT releases. CONNECT release 3.3 will implement federal partner priorities with strategic features, performance improvements, maintenance fixes and software updates. Federal partners will work with FHA to identify, define and prioritize requirements, features and functions beyond the capabilities of CONNECT 3.3 for which support is required.

Also in Fiscal Year 2012, the CONNECT program will transition from an ONC-managed software development program to a distributed development program. Through FHA, federal partners will develop a transition plan, with the goal of effecting transition by December 2012. FHA will develop a concept of operations and strategy for a new governance, open source code development and release management model. FHA will identify options for custodial agents to assume and manage the CONNECT code base, and FHA will work with federal partners and the identified custodial agent to define the scope of work, transition schedule and contractual arrangements needed to transition the code base.

Nationwide Health Information Network Exchange: Fiscal Year 2012 priorities include: the on boarding of new Exchange members and providing the support needed for the network operations; transitioning the governance of the Exchange to a private entity; outreach and adoption activities to establish the common network; refining directed exchange standards; specifications for provider directories; certification and authentication; and additional Exchange specifications for meaningful use stage 2. ONC will continue to provide coordination and guidance of the standards, specifications, validation, and policies affecting the Exchange, and ONC will steward these operational aspects of the Exchange until they are self-sustaining. FHA will support the transition of the Exchange with policy, managerial, technical and communications expertise.



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