

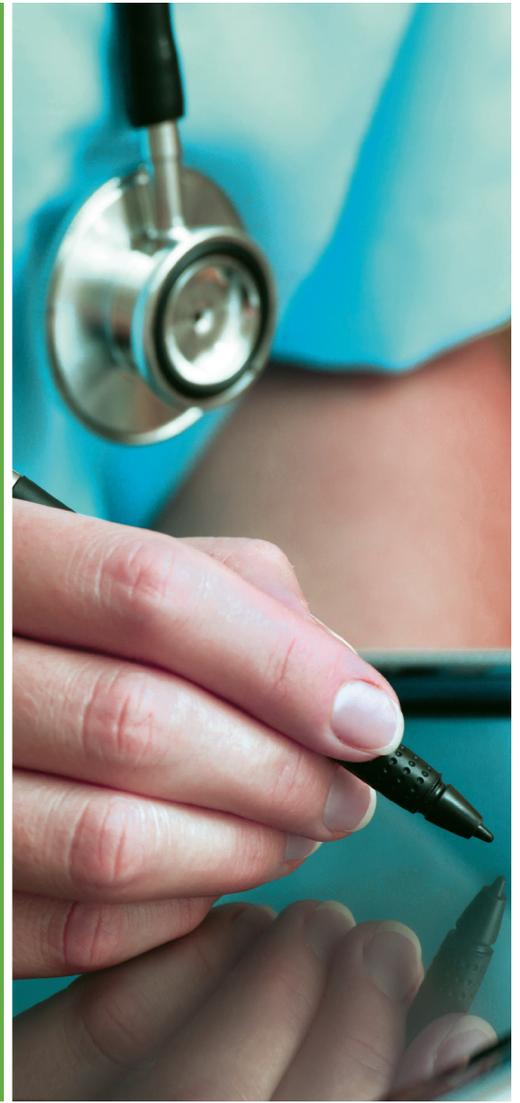


Health Project

The Role of Health IT in Supporting
Health Care Transformation:

Building a Strong Foundation

for America's Health Care System



June 2011



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

Executive Summary

This report is part of the Bipartisan Policy Center's Health Information Technology (IT) Initiative.

The Health IT Initiative is exploring the effective use of health IT to (1) simplify and help ameliorate complex health system problems, (2) support the need for coordination of efforts at all levels, and (3) disseminate best practice strategies. The purpose of this report is to frame and encourage a conversation about the state of – and need for – effective implementation and utilization of health IT to support delivery system, payment and insurance reforms in the United States.

Policymakers and health industry stakeholders across the political spectrum understand the imperative of using health information technology (IT) to ensure more affordable, accountable and higher quality health care in the United States. This bipartisan consensus embraces the strong belief that health IT is a – if not the – most important infrastructure component to address the primary challenges confronting the American health care system– rising costs, eroding coverage, and inconsistent quality. Coaxing the system into the “information age” will be critical to making long overdue progress on all of these fronts.

Health reforms designed to address our nation's most pressing health care issues can be enhanced considerably by the effective use of health IT:

- **Delivery System and Payment Reforms.** Poor communication and data sharing across multiple care settings leads to poor quality and wasteful, inefficient care. Delivery system reforms will spur innovation in the health care sector by encouraging more coordinated and accountable care, while payment reform will control rising health care costs by aligning reimbursement policy with medical outcomes and value. Neither of these reforms can be maximized or achieved in a timely manner without a more networked, IT-enabled health care system that works well in both rural and urban settings. Providing patients and all members of their care team with access to meaningful health care information, while effectively managing privacy and security, is a critical part of reforming the system.

- **Prevention and Wellness Initiatives.** Focusing on prevention and wellness is necessary to improve the public's health

and address the fundamental health issues driving chronic disease. Health IT will enable greater access to health information, empower and encourage consumers to assume personal responsibility for their health, and help to meet prevention and wellness goals.

- **Insurance Market Reforms.** The implementation of insurance market reforms and the establishment of exchanges to secure access to coverage and provide choice of plans can be enhanced dramatically through the effective use of IT platforms and technology. Health IT can support these changes by enabling a streamlined point of access for consumer enrollment, eligibility determinations and the distribution of plan and general consumer information to support decision-making about insurance coverage options.

The Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health (HITECH) Act of 2009 is the primary catalyst for the effective and widespread use of health IT to support improvements in health and health care delivery. Resources from HITECH are helping to address many of the commonly cited barriers to health IT adoption, including the need for financing, implementation assistance, and assurance about the usability, interoperability and sustainability of health IT products. Assessing, analyzing, and ultimately overcoming these challenges must start with a significant understanding of the current landscape of health IT implementation activities, successes, and problems.

The Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) report, *Building a Strong Foundation for America's Health Care System: The Role of Health Information Technology*, provides insight into

the current landscape of health IT, explores the myriad of activities taking place to support better use of IT in health care, examines the role of health IT in health care transformation, and assesses progress made to date and the barriers to achieving successful implementation.

The report also outlines key recommendations to support effective leveraging of health IT to address health care system challenges:

- Improving coordination and alignment of health IT and reform efforts to identify opportunities for synergy and develop shared solutions for common needs;
- Integrating lessons learned from early implementation efforts associated with large-scale programs to address unanticipated needs and issues;
- Enhancing strategies for engaging consumers in reform efforts through the use of health IT and emerging consumer technologies; and
- Increasing focus and public-private sector collaboration on two areas critical to achieving improvements in health and health care delivery through IT:
 - Expanding implementation assistance and workforce training to support the meaningful use of health IT, particularly for small physician practices, small hospitals and clinics that support rural and underserved populations.
 - Collaborating on the development and execution of a multi-faceted strategy for achieving thoughtfully designed, privacy-protected health information exchange in the U.S.

To help accelerate progress on these and other critically important IT implementation issues, the BPC Health Information Technology Initiative is launching a Task Force on Delivery System Reform and Health IT. Led by BPC Health Project Co-Leaders and Former Senate Majority Leaders Tom Daschle and Bill Frist, and comprised of a range of nationally recognized and respected health system experts and leaders, the Task Force will identify ongoing efforts and best practices for encouraging coordinated, patient-centered, and accountable care. The Task Force will also make recommendations for aligning current health IT efforts to best utilize scarce public and private sector resources in support of new care delivery models that will improve the quality of care for all Americans.

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Janet Marchibroda, Chair of the Bipartisan Policy Center Health Information Technology Initiative, with contributions from the BPC leaders and staff.

A copy of the full report is available on the web at www.bipartisanpolicy.org/projects/health-project