



Welcome Packet

North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority

Dear NC HIEA Participant,

We are excited about your decision to connect to North Carolina's state-designated health information exchange, called NC HealthConnex. To help you in this process we are providing this Welcome Packet that includes a wealth of information to facilitate employee and patient education about your upcoming connection to NC HealthConnex. In the packet you will find:

Initial Announcement Tools

- Sample initial email from CIO/CEO
- Sample employee newsletter announcement
- Talking points to educate employees
- NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) fact sheet

Go Live Announcement Tools

- Sample press release
- Sample senior leader email
- Talking points to educate patients
- Frequently Asked Questions for patients

Patient Education

- NC HIEA Sample Notice of Privacy Practices
- 8.5 x 11 fact sheet (also available via the [NC HIEA website](#) for you to print or provide electronically)
- Waiting room tri-fold brochure order form
- Opt Out form (also available via the [NC HIEA website](#) for patients/providers to access)

Your connection brings us one step closer to achieving the NC HIEA's mission of connecting health care providers to safely and securely share health information through a trusted network so that together we can improve health care quality and outcomes for North Carolinians.

If you have questions or would like to schedule additional training for your team, please contact our team at hiea@nc.gov or (919) 754-6912.

We encourage your feedback on materials contained within this packet and your organization's experience using NC HealthConnex. Feel free to contact me at Sam.Thompson@nc.gov.

Sincerely,



Sam Thompson
N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Executive Director

**N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA)
CIO/CEO Email**

Instructions: You may use this template email to alert your employees.

Dear Colleagues,

We would like to announce that over the next several months we will be working with the N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) and SAS Institute (the NC HIEA's technical contractor) to build a connection from our electronic health/medical record (EHR/EMR) system to North Carolina's statewide health information exchange – NC HealthConnex. The NC HIEA is the state entity that operates NC HealthConnex.

This connection will allow [organization name] to comply with North Carolina law, SL 2015-41 as amended by SL 2017-57, that requires health care providers who receive state funds for the provision of medical services must submit clinical and demographic patient data to NC HealthConnex by certain dates. Much like other health information exchange networks with which we may participate, NC HealthConnex is a secure, standardized electronic system that promotes the access, exchange, and analysis of health information by linking information from separate health care sites to create more complete patient health records.

The NC HIEA will enable our organization to:

- save time and reduce paperwork,
- facilitate more informed treatment decision-making,
- improve care coordination, and
- enable better health outcomes.

Having access to this system will give our clinical staff the information they need to make the best decisions possible when treating our patients. Approved users of NC HealthConnex will be able to share and access important patient health information like drug allergies, prescriptions, immunizations, diagnoses, and lab and test results from participating providers and hospitals statewide.

While we believe the use of systems like NC HealthConnex will improve patient care, patients can choose to opt out of having their information shared in the health information exchange. To educate our patients about this option along with general information about our use of NC HealthConnex, we will be updating our Notice of Privacy Practices and providing educational materials to our patients.

To assist employees in speaking about this new partnership with patients, friends, family, and the community at large, we have attached suggested talking points. For employees and clinicians with direct contact with patients, we will provide additional resources to help educate patients about NC HealthConnex. There will be more information on those opportunities to come.

If you have any questions about this exciting partnership, don't hesitate to contact [desired contact]. I look forward to continuing to expand and enhance the quality of services we offer our patients and community.

N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Announcement for Employee Newsletter

***Instructions:** Sample article to include in the next employee newsletter or internal news posting after the employee email is sent.*

[Organization] Plans Connection to the North Carolina Health Information Exchange – NC HealthConnex

The U.S. health care system is experiencing a technological transformation. With the changes in value-based care reimbursement models, sharing data is going to be imperative. That is why we will be working to connect our electronic medical record system with North Carolina's state-designated health information exchange – NC HealthConnex.

NC HealthConnex is a secure, electronic network that facilitates a conversation between health care providers by linking information from separate health care sites to create a more complete health record of our patients. The system is operated by the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), part of the Data Division of the North Carolina Department of Information Technology. NC HealthConnex will be a valuable tool to help us improve health care quality, enhance patient safety, and reduce overall health care costs by enabling information to be accessed securely whenever our clinical staff needs it.

Although our organization already shares patient information with providers caring for our patients, this process is often performed through fax or mail when the provider is outside of our system. NC HealthConnex empowers providers with near-time access to our patients' medical information from other participating providers when we need it to deliver care in a seamless and secure manner. This is especially important in emergency situations when waiting for a fax or email is not feasible.

As more providers across the state sign up to utilize NC HealthConnex, the more robust the exchange of health information will be, saving time, reducing paperwork, facilitating more informed decision-making, improving care coordination and enabling better health outcomes.

While we believe the use of networks like NC HealthConnex will help ensure North Carolina's patients are receiving safe, integrated and high quality care, patients can choose to opt out from having their health information shared through the health information exchange network. To educate our patients about this option, along with general information about our use of NC HealthConnex, we will be updating our Notice of Privacy Practices and providing educational materials to our patients.

To assist our employees in speaking about this new partnership with patients, friends, family and the community at large, we are providing a list of talking points **[located on our intranet, available from, pasted below, etc]**. For employees and clinicians with direct contact with patients, we will provide additional training and resources to help educate patients about NC HealthConnex and how to use this new tool. There will be more information on those opportunities to come.

The process to connect can take several months depending on the technological configuration requirements. During that time, we can begin training on and using the tools NC HealthConnex provides. We will keep you apprised of the status of this project. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact **[desired contact]**.

Initial NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Talking Points

These talking points should be used to educate and assist staff when speaking about the N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) and the state-designated HIE, NC HealthConnex.

What It Is

- North Carolina's statewide health information exchange – NC HealthConnex, operated by the N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), provides a secure, statewide network for doctors and other health care providers in North Carolina to share important patient health information and improve patient care.

The Need

- Health care providers across the state recognize that information about their patients is not easily available to other providers who may be treating them in disparate locations. Even patient information contained within our local Electronic Health Record system (EHR) remains specific to our network and leaves gaps in patient care.
- As North Carolina strives to improve state-funded health care, it has identified the value a statewide Health Information Exchange (HIE) can provide as one of the tools to enable its success.

Purpose and Intent

- 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 EHRs) to be available securely whenever doctors, nurses and specialists need it.
- The network combines information from all participating health care providers to create a more complete health record for our patients in the NC HealthConnex network. This includes important health information like prescriptions, allergies, vaccinations, lab results, X-rays, test results, conditions and diagnoses.
- Although health information exchange in North Carolina has a complex history, the NC HIEA is modernizing its approach and aims to positively transform the way health care is delivered.
- NC HealthConnex will be available to all providers and is required of any provider receiving state funds for the provision of health care services. (*NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57*)

Efficiency

- North Carolina is taking a comprehensive approach to reforming Medicaid and making it more efficient and effective for the millions of individuals receiving Medicaid services. NC HealthConnex will be a critical foundational element of reaching that goal.

Security and Privacy

- The NC HIEA takes patient health data privacy and security very seriously. In accordance with HIPAA regulations and state and federal law, the NC HIEA has and will enter into appropriate data sharing agreements and Business Associate Agreements with all organizations that will receive protected health information (PHI) from the NC HealthConnex network. The NC HIEA

is fully compliant with HIPAA and state law.

- The NC HIEA is working with an industry leader, SAS Institute, to audit and strengthen NC HealthConnex and ensure the highest level of patient and data security.

The Value of Connecting to the NC HIE

- Having access to NC HealthConnex helps us work more closely with other providers, make better care decisions, and reduce the chance of medical errors. This is especially important in emergency situations and during transitions in care.
- We've always shared information with other providers when needed to support patient care, but NC HealthConnex makes it easier, faster and more secure across the state.
- Research has shown that using a network like this will help improve care quality and safety, reduce medical errors, and lead to lower health care costs. Studies show that use of HIE in an emergency department reduces the odds of hospital admission,¹ and access to HIE reduces hospital readmissions² and repeat diagnostics like imaging.³
- NC HealthConnex also helps prevent the spread of disease through faster reporting of health threats to public health departments.

What You Can Expect from this Connection

- We are currently working to connect our electronic medical record to NC HealthConnex and anticipate to go live in [month of anticipated go-live].
- In addition to the connection for the exchange of health records, NC HealthConnex offers additional services for our organization including notifications, registries, eHealth Exchange, Direct Secure Messaging, DSM Provider Directory, and single sign on to the Controlled Substance Reporting System. To learn more about the Suite of Services, visit nchealthconnex.gov.
- These services are available once we have a participation agreement in place. We do not need to wait to be live and submitting data to use these services.

Patient Education

- Patients do not have to participate in this system and can choose to opt out of having their PHI shared through the NC HealthConnex by sending the [Patient Opt Out form](#) found on the NC HIEA website, nchealthconnex.gov, to the NC HIEA business office. We will also be able to provide the forms here in our office.
- If you have questions or concerns, please contact [desired contact].

¹ Vest JR, Kern LM, Campion TR Jr, Silver MD, Kaushal R. Association between use of a health information exchange system and hospital admissions. *Appl Clin Inf* 2014; 5: 219–231. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4338/ACI-2013-10-RA-0083>

² Vest JR, Kern LM, Silver MD, et al. The potential for community-based health information exchange systems to reduce hospital

readmissions. *J Am Med Inform* (published online first). Available: <https://academic.oup.com/jamia/article/22/2/435/694158>

³ Vest JR, Kaushal R, Silver MD, Hentel K, Kern LM. Health information exchange and the frequency of repeat medical imaging. *Am J Manag Care*. 2014;(11 Spec No. 17):eSP16-eSP24. Available: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25811815>

N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Press Release

***Instructions:** Please coordinate the release of this with the NC HIEA Executive Director Sam Thompson (contact information below).*

[Your organization's name] Joins NC HealthConnex, North Carolina's State-designated Health Information Exchange, to Improve Patient Care

[Organization] recently announced its participation in the state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex. This health information exchange network is being used statewide and will help [Organization] share a patient's important health information like drug allergies, prescriptions, medical conditions, and lab and test results with other health care providers with whom the patient has a relationship. This secure network is available through [Organization's] partnership with the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), part of the Data Division of the North Carolina Department of Information Technology.

"We're very enthusiastic about this partnership," said [Chief Medical Officer or other medical professional]. "Having access to the NC HealthConnex network will help our clinicians get the information they need to make more informed decisions about our patients' care when they need it."

North Carolina is taking a comprehensive approach to reforming Medicaid and making it more efficient and effective for the millions of individuals receiving Medicaid services. NC HealthConnex will be a critical foundational element of reaching that goal. Connection to NC HealthConnex is available to all providers and required of providers who receive state funds such as Medicaid and the State Health Plan for the provision of health care services. It links information from separate health care sites to create a more complete health record for individual patients. This record combines health information from [Organization] and other participating health care providers a patient may see. NC HealthConnex is currently connected to [number] hospitals, [number] health departments, and [number physician practices,] and is growing steadily.

Health information exchanges like NC HealthConnex are being built in states and regions across the country and are widely viewed as central to supporting lasting improvements in our nation's health care system. These systems can reduce medical mistakes, improve care coordination, provide better patient outcomes and lower overall health care costs.

[Optional: Include information about your organization's experience with health information technology, particularly accolades, awards and other recognitions.]

For more information about [organization], visit [website]

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About the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) and NC HealthConnex:

In 2015, the North Carolina General Assembly established a state-managed Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) to oversee and administer the NC Health Information Exchange Network (NCGS 90-414.7). Housed within the NC Department of Information Technology's (DIT) Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC), the NC HIEA operates North Carolina's statewide health information exchange-- NC HealthConnex. NC HealthConnex is a secure, standardized electronic system in which providers can share important patient health information. The use of this system promotes the access, exchange, and analysis of health information to help improve care

coordination, quality of care, and enable better health outcomes. Additionally, the legislation requires that health care providers who receive State funds for the provision of health care services (e.g. Medicaid, State Health Plan) connect to NC HealthConnex by certain dates in 2018 and 2019.

For more information about the NC HIEA, visit nchealthconnex.gov.

-END-

[Organization Communications Contact Information]

Media Contact NC HIEA:

Sam Thompson, NC HIEA Executive Director

Sam.Thompson@nc.gov

984-484-4760

N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Go Live Employee Email

***Instructions:** This is a sample email to send out a couple weeks before “go live” to educate your employees on the NC HealthConnex connection and the opt out process. This should be signed and sent out by a senior leader of your organization.*

Dear Colleague,

[Organization name] will be going live with North Carolina’s state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex on [date]. This means we will start sending patient data to the NC HIEA’s secure health information exchange network. When we go live we need to ensure our patients are aware and understand the benefits of having their key medical information linked in NC HealthConnex, as well as their ability to opt out.

North Carolina law requires that our staff notify patients of the benefits of the NC HealthConnex network as well as the opt out process and the right to rescind a previous decision to opt out. (See NCGS § 90-414.7b1d)

HIPAA requires that we notify our patients about the uses and disclosures of their health care data such as our participation in NC HealthConnex in [organization’s] Notice of Privacy Practices. (See 45 C.F.R. 164.520.)

To help you in this education process, the NC HIEA has provided:

- Talking Points for your use in educating patients (attached)
- 8.5x11 Patient Education Fact Sheet (attached)
- Tri-fold Patient Education Brochure [x number of copies available in waiting room]
- Opt Out Form (attached and found on the NC HIEA website at <http://hiea.nc.gov/patients>)

Additionally, we will begin assigning user access and providing training to the staff on our team who will be utilizing NC HealthConnex in care and treatment of patients. The person on our staff who is in charge of setting up NC HealthConnex participant user accounts is [insert name]. [He/she] will be following up separately to facilitate the necessary training and access credentials.

Remember, this is an important partnership for [organization], and we want to encourage our patients to participate. If patients have questions that you cannot answer, please direct them to the [NC HIEA website](#) or business office.

If you have additional questions regarding our partnership with the NC HIEA, contact [desired contact].

Thank you,

[Leader]

N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Go Live Talking Points

***Instructions:** These talking points are being provided to assist staff when speaking with patients about the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) and the state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex.*

Tell them about North Carolina's Health Information Exchange, NC HealthConnex

- The state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex, is operated by the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority, part of the Data Division of the N.C. Department of Information Technology.
- NC HealthConnex provides a secure, electronic network (computer-based) that will facilitate a conversation between your health care providers allowing them to access and share health-related information statewide - so that no matter where you are providers can access your information.
- The system combines information from all your participating health care providers to create a more complete patient health record.
- NC HealthConnex will be available to all providers and is required of any provider receiving state-funded health care. (NCSL 2015-241 as amended by NCSL 2017-57)
- States around the country have built similar health information exchanges to help improve patient care and reduce health care costs.

Explain the benefits of the system

- Having access to your NC HealthConnex record helps us work more closely with other providers, make better decisions about your care, and reduce the chance of medical errors. This is especially important in emergency situations.
- While we've always shared information with other providers when necessary to support your care, NC HealthConnex makes it easier, faster and more secure.

Explain how patient information is linked

- Your NC HealthConnex record includes important information like prescriptions, immunizations, lab and test results, image reports, conditions, diagnoses or health problems. This not only helps us provide you with better care because we have a full view of your health, but it also reduces health care costs because it avoids duplicating expensive tests that have already been done.
- Starting on [go live date], your medical information will be automatically included in the NC HealthConnex secure system after each visit to [organization name]. You don't need to do anything.
- Even if you haven't been a patient of ours before, you may already have an NC HealthConnex record. A number of organizations have already started using NC HealthConnex.

Talking Points, p. 2

Security and Privacy

- We have always been committed to safeguarding the privacy and security of our patients' information and you can be assured we will continue to protect your information.
- The NC HIEA takes patient health data privacy and security very seriously. In accordance with HIPAA regulations and state and federal law, the NC HIEA has and will enter into appropriate data sharing agreements and Business Associate Agreements with all organizations that will receive protected health information (PHI) from the NC HealthConnex network. The NC HIEA is fully compliant with HIPAA and state law.
- The NC HIEA is working with an industry leader, SAS Institute, to audit and strengthen NC HealthConnex and ensure the highest level of patient and data security.
- Only health care providers with correct identification and passwords can use the system, and they only use it when they need to support your care. Every time your NC HealthConnex health record is accessed, it's recorded in the system.

Educate about patient choices

- You have the right to opt out of allowing your data to be shared through NC HealthConnex. You can fill out and mail in the opt out form to the NC HIEA Business Office. We recommend participating in NC HealthConnex as it helps us take better care of you.
- Opting out must be done by the patient or by a legal representative. Staff at [organization name] cannot do this for you. This is a privacy precaution.
- Your choice to opt out of NC HealthConnex will not affect your ability to access medical care.
- When you opt out, your health care data is still sent to NC HealthConnex but it will be hidden.
- If you opt out and later decide you would like to participate, you will need to fill out another opt out form rescinding your opt out and send it to the NC HIEA Business Office.
- Opt out forms are available on the NC HIEA website - <http://hiea.nc.gov/patients> and also [insert where in your office located]

N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) Frequently Asked Questions for Patients

Q. What is the NC HIEA?

A. The North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) was created to oversee and administer the North Carolina state-designated HIE network, NC HealthConnex. (NCGA § 90-414.7).

Q. What is an HIE?

A. 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 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 securely whenever health care providers need it. The state-designated HIE in North Carolina is called NC HealthConnex.

Q. Can non-Medicaid providers connect to NC HealthConnex?

A. Providers who do not receive state funding for the provision of health care services may also connect to the NC HealthConnex on a voluntary basis.

Q. What information is used to identify patients in the system?

A. Information used to identify patients in the system is: name, date of birth, sex, address and telephone number. The HIE uses this information to make an accurate patient match and reduce errors.

Q. Is it against the HIPAA Privacy Rule for you to share my information?

A. No. The HIPAA Privacy Rule does not require patient consent when information is used to support treatment, payment or health care operations as is the case with NC HealthConnex. It acts as a “virtual medical record department” to collect and store medical records on behalf of participating organizations. Having a third-party entity such as NC HealthConnex to provide electronic health information management services for busy practices and hospitals is a common practice that allows your providers to have timely access to the right information at the right time.

Q. What if I receive care at a health care organization that is not participating in NC HealthConnex, what happens to my records?

A. Only providers who are participating in NC HealthConnex can access and include information in the system. If your provider does not participate, they will continue to update your medical record in their own system, and they will share your medical records as they always have, by mail, email or fax.

Q. What about mental health provider records? Are those part of my record?

A. Information collected by a licensed mental health provider or facility will be included in NC HealthConnex. However, information that comes from a substance abuse treatment facility or psychotherapy notes will not be included.

Frequently Asked Questions, p. 2

Q. Is there a record of who has viewed my health information and why?

A. NC HealthConnex tracks who views patient records and performs regularly-scheduled audits of the HIE system. The system has strict user access policies in place so that only a clinician can see your complete record. Please let us know if you have questions or concerns about access to your records.

Q. Do I have rights to access the portal to view my medical history?

A. At this time, patient access to the NC HealthConnex is not functional. As North Carolina continues its focus on patient-centered population health to improve health care outcomes, it is possible that the NC HIEA would look to expand this functionality.

Q. Will my medical information be posted on the Internet or sold for a mailing list?

A. No. All data is protected, stored and accessed only for purposes permissible under state and federal 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 protected health information (PHI) from the NC HealthConnex. Information that identifies you will never be sold, and you will not be added to any mailing list.

Q. How often is the system checked for security failures/hackers?

A. Security tests are performed on an ongoing basis, to make sure that the records remain secure. For more information about security, please contact the NC HIEA business office directly at (919) 754-6912.