



A FOCUS ON BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



What is NC HealthConnex

NC HealthConnex is the state-designated health information exchange for North Carolina that is managed by the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA).

NC HealthConnex links patients' health information to build a more comprehensive electronic health record. It also facilitates conversations between authorized health care providers allowing them to access and share health-related information statewide to improve the coordination of care.

What Does NC HealthConnex Mean For Behavioral & IDD Health?



One of the goals of a transformed health care system is for near real-time clinical and demographic data to be made available to all health care providers involved in a patient's care, so that they can securely share information with each other. This vision includes behavioral and intellectual/developmental disability providers.

Behavioral health is essential to general health and well-being, which underscores the importance of the integration of behavioral health records into the health information exchange.

The NC HIEA recognizes the importance of health care providers having access to behavioral health and treatment records in their daily practice. We also recognize the importance of behavioral health/IDD providers having access to their patients' physical health records to enable whole person care.

BH/IDD providers with a Full Participation Agreement will have access to a longitudinal view of health records for patients with whom they have a treatment relationship. This enables BH/IDD providers to:

- Work more closely with other providers to make better decisions about patient care.
- Reduce the chance of medical errors, especially in emergency situations where having medical history and medications in one place can help expedite care and improve outcomes.
- Have a more complete list of medications prescribed to a patient by other providers, which can reduce potential complications from drug interactions.
- See other procedures/encounters that a patient has had 30-60 days prior to a visit.



Benefits To Behavioral Health Practices

- HIPAA-compliant sharing with other providers
- Access to comprehensive patient records (CCD) at the point of care
- Access to secure, encrypted email through Direct Secure Messaging and a Provider Directory of secure DSM addresses.
- Cost savings due to elimination of duplicative tests
- Improved care coordination across providers with easier, faster and more secure sharing of information
- Improved diagnoses
- Improved workflow
- Easier patient referral process
- Ability to set up clinical notifications on patients to receive Admission, Discharge and Transfer (ADT) alerts, follow in-patient care, and set up follow-up care



Benefits To Behavioral Health/ID Patients

- Stronger trust in behavioral health/ intellectual and developmental disability providers, knowing there is communication across health care teams
- More coordinated care between providers
- Less risk of unnecessary testing
- Less risk of avoidable complications
- Improved satisfaction/experience
- No more bringing hard copies of tests and information from other doctors' offices

It's Safe and Secure. It Has to Be.



The NC HIEA takes its role as a steward of patient data very seriously and abides by the highest security standards as set by federal and state law. NC HealthConnex is built with many security protocols and data use policies, including disclosure limitations, heavily encrypted data, user authentication and more.

Only participating health care providers and other HIPAA-covered entities that have signed Full Participation Agreements with the NC HIEA will be able to access a patient's medical information through NC HealthConnex. Patient data may be provided to third parties who have entered into contracts with the NC HIEA for limited purposes (e.g., Tailored Care Managers with NC Medicaid for coordinating patient care).

These contracts ensure that all relevant privacy statutes and regulations are followed in how health information is viewed, used and shared. The NC HIEA has the power to audit the use of patient information by each participating practice and each third party to ensure the law is being followed.



What Can Be Shared?

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| • Inpatient Admissions | • Allergies | • Results |
| • Discharge Information | • Prescription Medications | • Immunizations |
| • Diagnoses | • Procedures | • Smoking Status |
| • ER Reports | • Problems | • Referrals |
| • Laboratory Results | • Vital Signs | • Encounters |

Types Of Information Not Shared

Federal laws and regulations prevent the NC HIEA from receiving and/or managing certain types of mental health or substance use treatment data without patient consent.

Federal regulation 42 C.F.R. Part 2 prohibits certain health care providers from disclosing data that would identify a patient as having a substance use disorder unless the patient consents to the disclosure or the disclosure is permitted under Part 2. Consult with your legal counsel to determine if your services should be considered as a federally-assisted substance use disorder treatment program.

While most behavioral health information is permitted to be shared through NC HealthConnex, participants cannot submit Part 2 data or psychotherapy notes (as defined in HIPAA and below) to the NC HealthConnex data repository.

However, participants are permitted to share this type of information with other participants through the NC HealthConnex Direct Secure Messaging service, providing they comply with applicable law and obtain the required consent or authorization from the patient before disclosing the data.

The HIPAA Privacy Rule defines "psychotherapy notes" as follows: *Psychotherapy notes means notes recorded (in any medium) by a health care provider who is a mental health professional documenting or analyzing the contents of conversation during a private counseling session or a group, joint or family counseling session and that are separated from the rest of the individual's medical record. Psychotherapy notes exclude medication prescription and monitoring, counseling session start and stop times, the modalities and frequencies of treatment furnished, results of clinical tests and any summary of the following items: diagnosis, functional status, the treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis and progress to date.*

How Does It Work?



State law requires that all health care providers who receive state funds (e.g. Medicaid, State Health Plan) for the provision of health care services must connect to NC HealthConnex (NCSL 2015-241). The deadline to initiate this connection was January 1, 2023.

While the law regarding this connection mandate is complex, we hope the following will provide some clarification:

- Signing a participation agreement demonstrates a good-faith effort to meet the connection mandate.
- Once you have an executed agreement, meaning that both your practice and the NC HIEA have signed, you are placed in the onboarding queue where your organization will wait for an invitation to begin your technical connection.
- Full participants have access to our suite of value-added services, including the NC HealthConnex Clinical Portal, upon executing a participation agreement. Your connection does not need to be live to begin using these services or to participate in training.
- Actively engaging in the onboarding process with your technical vendor and the NC HIEA also demonstrates a good-faith effort to meet the connection mandate.



Technology In Place

For health care providers who will be submitting patient health care data to NC HealthConnex, the NC HIEA Participation Agreement requests EHRs that are minimally capable of sending HL7 messages version 2 and higher.

EHR products that are ONC-certified for Meaningful Use for the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Incentive Programs are preferred. We are continuously connecting to additional vendors who are capable of meeting the connection requirements, and they will be added to the website as they go live.

While there are currently no fees charged by the state for the connection to or use of NC HealthConnex, some EHR vendors may charge fees (technical build, maintenance, etc.) to their customers for this connection.

NC HealthConnex Suite of Services



Direct Secure Messaging

Direct Secure Messaging (DSM) is an encrypted, secure email tool that allows providers to send secure messages to other providers.

With direct secure messaging, you can securely exchange health records with other providers in your patients' care network. NC HealthConnex offers providers a HISP solution that is certified by DirectTrust and is provided to Full Participants at no extra cost.

Other value-added services available to Full Participants of the NC HIEA:

- Access a patient's longitudinal health record via the web-based Clinical Portal or bidirectional EHR integration.
- Query neighboring state HIEs and the VA/DoD via the eHealth Exchange network.
- Get alerts in near real time as patients receive care in other settings with NC*Notify, our event notification service.
- Provide more timely follow-up, improved continuity of care and reduce admissions with NC*Notify alerts.
- Classify and Measure Patient Population via Registries & Integrations
- Meet Quality Measures for Promoting Interoperability

