



Welcome Packet

Payer/Health Plan

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 member education about your upcoming connection to NC HealthConnex. In the packet you will find:

Initial Announcement Tools

- Sample initial email from CIO/CEO
- Talking points to educate employees, contracted providers and members
- N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) fact sheet

Go Live Announcement Tools

- Sample press release
- Frequently Asked Questions for members

Patient Education

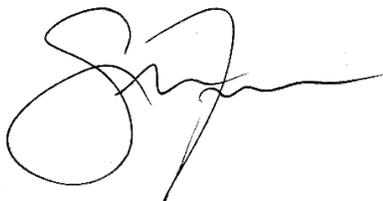
- 8.5 x 11 patient education fact sheet (also available via the [NC HIEA website](#) for you to print or provide electronically)
- Tri-fold brochure order form for your contracted medical facilities
- Opt Out form (also available via the [NC HIEA website](#) for patients/providers to access)

If you have any questions, please contact our team at hiea@nc.gov or (919) 754-6912.

Your participation brings us one step closer to achieving the NC HIEA's mission of connecting health care providers and payers 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.

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) Leadership Email

Instructions: You may use this template email to alert 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), the entity that operates the state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex, to begin exchanging data to facilitate improved patient care.

In addition to partnering with the NC HealthConnex team to receive clinical data to better inform care transitions and improve quality of care for our members, this connection will allow [organization name] to comply with North Carolina law that requires Prepaid Health Plans and LMEs/MCOs to submit encounter and claims data to the HIE for the delivery of Medicaid services. Much like other health information 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 assist contracted providers to:

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

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 members about this option along with general information about our use of NC HealthConnex, we provide our connected providers with educational materials.

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 members and the health care community.

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

These talking points should be used to educate and assist contracted providers and members when speaking about the NC HIEA and the state-designated HIE - NC HealthConnex.

What It Is

- North Carolina's statewide health information exchange, NC HealthConnex operated by the NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA), provides a secure, statewide network for 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 approved entities in disparate locations.
- 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 those involved in the care of patients need it.
- The network combines information from all participating health care providers to create a more complete health record for patients in the NC HealthConnex network. This includes important health information like prescriptions, allergies, vaccinations, lab results, X-rays, test results, conditions and diagnoses.

Efficiency

- Under NC Medicaid Managed Care, the state works with Prepaid Health Plans (PHPs) to develop a data-driven, outcomes-based continuous quality improvement process. NC HealthConnex is a critical foundational element for 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 NC HIEA follows the highest information security standards available. Information is always encrypted at rest and in transit. Additionally, the environment is SOC 2 compliant.
- All data is protected, stored and accessed only for purposes permissible under federal and state law. The State does not allow data it receives to be used or disclosed for commercial purposes or for any other purpose other than those set forth in G.S. 90-414.4(a) or G.S. 90-414.2. 2015-241, s. 12A.5(d).

The Value of Connecting to NC HealthConnex

- Having access to NC HealthConnex services will help us work more closely with our network to make better care decisions, reduce the chance of medical errors, improve the quality of care, and ultimately lower the cost of care.
- Health care providers have 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 admission¹, and access to HIE reduces hospital readmissions¹ and repeat diagnostics like imaging.²
- NC HealthConnex also helps prevent the spread of disease through faster reporting of health threats to public health departments.

Patient Education

- Although state law requires NC HealthConnex participants (including health plans/payers) to educate patients on the benefits of participating in health information exchange, patients may choose to opt out of having their PHI shared through the NC HealthConnex. Patients do this by sending the [Patient Opt Out form](#) found on the NC HIEA website, www.nchealthconnex.gov, to the NC HIEA business office. (*Spanish opt out forms are also available.*)
- The NC HealthConnex website also provides a [For Patients section](#) of our website as a way of introduction to the electronic exchange of health records and the benefits of exchange.

¹ Porreca D and Yaraghi N. The Impact of Population Health Analytics on Health Care Quality and Efficacy Among CPC+ Participants. Millbank Memorial Fund. October 6, 2022. Available: <https://www.milbank.org/publications/the-impact-of-population-health-analytics-on-health-care-quality-and-efficacy-among-cpc-participants/>

² 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 Communications Specialist Jessica Hagins at Jessica.Hagins@nc.gov, (919) 754-6912.*

[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 to help medical facilities share a patient's important health information like drug allergies, prescriptions, medical conditions, labs and test results with other health care providers with whom the patient has a relationship. [Organization] will partner with NC HealthConnex and our provider network to more effectively manage patient care to improve the quality of care and lower the cost of care.

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

North Carolina takes a comprehensive approach to ensuring the ongoing quality of Medicaid services and to making it more efficient and effective for the millions of beneficiaries in the state. NC HIEA's secure network, NC HealthConnex is a critical foundational element of that goal. , NC HealthConnex is available to all providers and payers and is required for those that receive state funds for the provision of health care services such as Medicaid and the State Health Plan. The network links information from separate health care sites to create a more complete health record for individual patients.

[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]

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

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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.

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

Q. What is the NC HIEA?

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

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 is called NC HealthConnex.

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

A. Providers and payers 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 patient 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 providers to have timely access to the right information at the right time.

Q. What is the patient consent model for North Carolina?

A. The HIE Act explicitly provides individual patients the right to “opt out” of NC HealthConnex. The legislation defines “opt out” as “an individual’s affirmative decision communicated to the Authority in writing to disallow his or her protected health information from being disclosed by the Authority to covered entities or other persons or entities through the HIE Network.

The opt out model for North Carolina was adopted in 2012. The decision to choose this consent model was included in an operational plan that was submitted to the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology within HHS. As an opt out state, all data related to North Carolina patients that are submitted to NC HealthConnex, regardless of payer, are viewable by certain authorized users who can access clinical records unless a patient opts out of exchange. The HIE Act also permits the NC HIEA to retain a copy of an opted-out individual’s patient records in the NC HealthConnex system but prohibits disclosure or access unless an exception applies.

Q. What about mental health provider records?

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

Q. Is there a record of who has viewed member health information?

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 those involved in a member's care can access the complete record for treatment purposes and quality assurance.

Q. Do members have rights to access the clinical portal to view their 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. However, the NC HIEA does provide NC Medicaid with data which they make available to beneficiaries in support of the patient access policy of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

Q. Will member 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 members will never be sold, and members will not be added to any mailing list.

ABOUT NC HEALTHCONNEX



Your health care provider is connected to NC HealthConnex, the state-designated health information exchange.

What You Need To Know



Health Information Exchange (HIE) systems have been in development nationwide since a federal law was passed in 2009 to promote the use of electronic movement and use of health information among health care providers. North Carolina's health information exchange, NC HealthConnex, brings added value to the health care conversations that are happening at all levels in the health care industry. Use of HIEs break down information silos between health care providers, help achieve greater health care outcomes for patients and create efficiencies in state-funded health care programs such as NC Medicaid.

What Is It?

NC HealthConnex is a secure, electronic system for doctors, hospitals and other health care providers to share information that can improve your care. The system links your key medical information from all of your health care providers to create a more complete electronic health record.

How Does It Work?

NC HealthConnex helps health care providers quickly access the information they need to make more informed decisions about your care, especially in an emergency. When needed, health care providers already share patient health records for your care through fax, email and mail. NC HealthConnex makes receiving information easier, faster and more secure.



Without using NC HealthConnex, health care providers see only the information they have entered into your medical record. With NC HealthConnex, they see a more complete record, enabling them to provide you with the best care possible.



What does it mean to be a part of NC HealthConnex?

As a patient, it means having peace of mind in visiting a new health care provider's office if they are participating in NC HealthConnex. If your information has been uploaded before, your new provider will be able to access that data. This means they can spend less time taking down your history and spend more time treating you.

NC HealthConnex helps improve health care through:

- Better coordination between health care providers
- Fewer medical errors
- Improved patient safety and health outcomes
- Fewer repeat tests and procedures
- Less paperwork
- Reduced health care costs
- Faster identification and reporting of public health threats

NC HealthConnex is a Secure, Private Network



The state entity operating NC HealthConnex - the NC Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) follows the highest information security standards available. Housed in the N.C. Department of Information Technology, information is always encrypted and sent over a private network when shared between NC HealthConnex and health care providers participating in the network.

NC HealthConnex is compliant with all federal and state privacy and security laws.

Information that identifies you will not be sold in any way or shared with anyone other than authorized health care providers or organizations that have entered into HIPAA-compliant, data-sharing agreements.

What Does the NC HealthConnex Record Include?

Important information is included in your NC HealthConnex record:

- Medicines (prescriptions), allergies, lab and test results, image reports, conditions, diagnoses and vaccination history
- Demographic information

Not included in your health record:

- Substance abuse records or psychotherapy notes unless authorized by you, the patient



Your Choices



You have the right to opt out of having your information shared between providers through NC HealthConnex.

Opting out of NC HealthConnex will not adversely affect your treatment by your physician, and you cannot be discriminated against if you decide to opt out.

If you change your mind about participating in NC HealthConnex, you can opt back in at any time by completing a new form.

Opt-Out forms are accessible via the NC HIEA website: hiea.nc.gov/patients/your-choices. Your provider may also be able to provide a form to you.

Complete the form and mail it to:

NC Health Information Exchange Authority
Mail Service Center 4101
Raleigh, NC 27699-4101

The North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (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. It is housed within the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center.





NC HIEA Patient Information Brochure Order Form

The North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) makes available tri-fold brochures to assist health care providers in educating patients about the benefits of participating in the state-designated health information exchange, NC HealthConnex, as well as their option to opt out of having their medical information shared.

PLEASE PROVIDE PATIENT EDUCATION ORDER INFORMATION IN THE BOX BELOW:

Practice Name: _____ Date Requested: _____
Contact Name: _____
Shipping Address: _____ _____
Packages Requested (<i>100 brochures per package</i>): _____ English _____ Spanish _____

IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL PRACTICE LOCATIONS AT WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE PATIENT EDUCATION MATERIALS DISPLAYED, PLEASE PROVIDE THAT INFORMATION IN THE BOXES BELOW:

(If additional space is required, please attach an Excel file.)

Practice Name (if different from above): _____
Contact Name: _____
Shipping Address: _____ _____
Packages Requested (<i>100 brochures per package</i>): _____ English _____ Spanish _____

Practice Name (if different from above): _____
Contact Name: _____
Shipping Address: _____ _____
Packages Requested (<i>100 brochures per package</i>): _____ English _____ Spanish _____

Please email completed form and any attachments to hiea@nc.gov.



N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority Patient Opt-Out Information

Updated 8/29/2023

The North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority (NC HIEA) is operating North Carolina's Health Information Exchange, now called NC HealthConnex. NC HealthConnex is a secure, electronic network that allows participating medical providers to share your health information with one another. This enables participating physicians, hospitals, laboratories, pharmacies, and other health care providers to have access to important medical information about you that can assist them in making critical medical decisions for you.

Your Patient Record

Your patient record in NC HealthConnex will include information about your medications, allergies, laboratory results, and other information gathered during your encounters from your health care provider. Your record will also include your demographic data to help identify you when you visit different health care providers across the state. It will not include any information about you that federal law prohibits sharing without your express authorization, like psychotherapy notes and substance abuse treatment records.

Benefits of NC HealthConnex

What does it mean to be a part of the NC HealthConnex network? As a patient, it means having peace of mind in visiting a new health care provider's office if they are participating in NC HealthConnex. If your information has been uploaded before, your new provider will be able to access that data. This means they can spend less time taking down your history and spend more time treating you.

Participating in NC HealthConnex is even more important if you visit an emergency department at a participating hospital and you are unable to provide critical information about your current health status to hospital staff, including your diagnoses, medications, and allergies.

Who Can See My Record?

Only participating health care providers and other HIPAA covered entities that have signed contracts with the NC HIEA will be able to access your medical information through NC HealthConnex. Your NC HealthConnex data may also be provided to third parties who have entered into contracts with the NC HIEA for limited purposes (i.e., the NC Department of Public Health for immunizations). These contracts ensure that all relevant privacy statutes and regulations are followed in how your health information is viewed, used, and shared. The NC HIEA also 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.

Right to Opt Out of NC HealthConnex

You have the right to opt out of having your information shared between providers through NC HealthConnex. If you choose to opt out, please fill out the form on the following page and mail it to the NC HIEA. Opting out of NC HealthConnex will not adversely affect your treatment by your physician and you cannot be discriminated against if you decide to opt out. You can also use the form to rescind a previous opt out if you change your mind. However, your information may also be shared as required or permitted by law, for instance, for public health purposes.

Please note that the NC HIEA will only process opt out forms that are signed by adults over the age of 18. If you are under the age of 18 and have not gone through the legal process to become emancipated, you must have a parent or legal guardian sign the opt-out form.

If the information you provide to the NC HIEA on a Patient Opt-Out Form changes (for example your name or address changes) then you will need to submit a new Patient Opt-Out Form to the NC HIEA to ensure your opt out is applied to all of your information.

The information presented is not legal advice and is not to be acted on as such, may not be current, and is subject to change without notice.

**N.C. Health Information Exchange Authority
Patient Opt-Out Form**

Please complete one box and the information requested below, and mail to:
NC HIEA, Attn: **Opt-Out Processing, 4101 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-4101**

Please include a return address on the mailing envelope.

Opt-Out: The NC HIEA may not share any of my health information.

By completing and signing this form, I certify that I have been notified of the benefits of NC HealthConnex and of my right to opt out of having my data shared between participating health care providers through NC HealthConnex. I understand that if the information I provide on this Patient Opt-Out Form changes, then I will need to submit a new Patient Opt-Out Form with my current information to ensure my opt out is applied to all of my information. I also understand that my personal health information may be accessed and used in certain circumstances pursuant to HIPAA and NC law, such as reporting public health threats. **I understand that the information provided to me is not legal advice and I will hold the North Carolina Health Information Exchange Authority harmless for the direct or indirect consequences of my decision to opt out.**

Signature of Patient or Parent/Legal Guardian

Date

Print Name

Rescind Opt-Out: I request to terminate my previous decision to opt out.

By completing and signing this form, I am allowing my health information to be accessible to my health care providers through NC HealthConnex as permitted or required by North Carolina or federal law.

Signature of Patient or Parent/Legal Guardian

Date

Print Name

Please complete all of the following fields for the patient who is requesting the opt-out or the opt-out rescission. Incomplete forms will not be processed.

First Name of Patient

Middle Name

Last Name

Street Address

Mailing Address

City

State

Zip

City

State

Zip

Date of Birth

Sex

Email

(____)_____
Primary Phone Number

(____)_____
Secondary Phone Number

Please use the following fields to list previous addresses which may be required in order to positively identify your patient record in NC HealthConnex.

Street Address

City

State

Zip Code

Street Address

City

State

Zip Code