

# Impact of the New Health Information Technology Strategic Plan

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As part of the *Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act of 2009* (HITECH Act), which was contained in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the [Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology \(ONC\)](#) periodically is required to update its strategic leadership plan. This plan provides national guidance on the use and implementation of healthcare information technology to the private and public sectors.



Although the specifics for implementation are still in flux, the ONC's [broader strategy for 2015-2020](#) has been set forth. To ensure their IT initiatives are in line with the federal government's expectations, providers – as well as their vendors and staff – should be familiar with the new plan and alert to updates on regulations and requirements.

## What Is the New National Health Information Technology (HIT) Strategy?

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reports that 93 percent of eligible hospitals and 76 percent of physicians and eligible professionals participated in the first stage of the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs.<sup>1</sup> In an effort to maintain this momentum, the U.S. government continues to promote health IT and further its potential uses. To that end, the ONC has adopted a new strategic plan for 2015-2020. The plan – which is an update of the ONC's original 2011 health IT strategic plan – presents a coordinated effort for collecting, sharing, and using interoperable health information.

Created in collaboration with more than 35 federal agencies, this plan also seeks to disseminate health IT beyond hospitals and physician practices. The new plan now covers:

- Long-term care
- Post-acute care
- Behavioral health
- Community-based care
- Others ineligible to participate in the Medicare and Medicaid EHR incentives

In addition to the financial and regulatory incentives the HITECH Act provides to promote health IT implementation, the strategic plan encourages innovation that will help bring new tools to health IT consumers.

## What Are the Goals of the HIT Strategy?

The overarching purpose of the ONC's plan is to empower patients, support clinicians and care processes, and facilitate the shift to value-based care. In the four years since the original strategic plan was developed, health IT has been revolutionizing the way care is delivered. The proliferation of mobile health technologies has increased the accessibility and portability of health information. In addition, providers and patients are looking for seamless and safe ways to share health information across providers and platforms.

The updated strategic plan addresses the new reality of health information while providing direction and commitment. To move the industry beyond EHR implementation, the strategic plan includes **five broad goals** as well as several objectives to support each goal:

- **Goal 1:** Expand adoption of health IT.
- **Goal 2:** Advance secure and interoperable health information.
- **Goal 3:** Strengthen healthcare delivery.
- **Goal 4:** Advance the health and well-being of individuals and communities.
- **Goal 5:** Advance research, scientific knowledge, and innovation.

By establishing a broad federal strategy, the ONC's 2015-2020 plan provides a framework for the more detailed **nationwide interoperability road map**, which has been released in draft form. The road map will help define specific ways the federal government and private sector will approach sharing health information. The public comment period ended on April 3, 2015, and a final version is expected to be delivered later this year.

## How Should Organizations Respond?

Although the new road map specifics will continue to evolve, providers should begin to align their strategic IT plans with the ONC goals. The mobility of patient information and the ability to share data care processes and analytical purposes will become the standard in the coming years.

Providers should stay abreast of requirements and changes as they emerge this year. Providers also should ensure that their application vendors and system developers are current with the ONC plan. Both technical and operational processes for capturing and sharing information will need to be in compliance with the new standards as they evolve.

Providers, their staff and clinicians, and their vendors should work together to assess their internal processes and systems in the context of the government's expectations.

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## Contact Information

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<sup>1</sup> "New Federal Health IT Strategic Plan Sets Stage for Better Sharing Through Interoperability," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services news release, Dec. 8, 2014, <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2014pres/12/20141208a.html>