

Spotlight on: Arizona’s REC Partnership & Boots on the Ground

August 2012

❖ **The Challenge**

With limited adoption of health information exchange in the state, Arizona was challenged with quickly enabling HIE infrastructure that helps providers achieve meaningful use.

❖ **The Approach**

The state decided to partner with their REC and develop a HISP marketplace to quickly and efficiently offer providers Direct services.

❖ **Arizona’s Key Takeaways**

- ✓ Leverage partnerships with RECs and other stakeholders to achieve greater buy-in and build upon existing relationships.
- ✓ Adopt messaging that resonates with providers, i.e., draw a clear connection between HIE services and meaningful use.
- ✓ Consider demonstration projects as a means to increase adoption and success.

Arizona is engaged in a collaborative effort to build and maintain a Direct marketplace to help health care providers find options for secure health information exchange (HIE) that they can feel confident about. To drive wide scale Direct adoption that achieves network effects, Arizona partners are focusing on providers who are members of the Regional Extension Center (REC) and using a “sales funnel” approach that has providers complete online interest forms on the REC website. We highlight them in this implementation brief because their collaborative efforts are gaining traction: more than 270 providers and 58 labs expressed interest in Direct services before the marketplace even launched.

Arizona’s Direct profile

Approach	Develop a “marketplace” of approved health information service providers (HISPs) so providers have a trusted source to learn which services meet minimum specifications. A steering committee composed of various health care stakeholders throughout the state evaluates HISPs against a set of criteria. HISPs act as the Registration and Certificate Authorities within the state.
Branding	Arizona has named the webpage where approved HISPs can post their information the “Arizona HIE Marketplace.” HISPs use their own branding and marketing materials, though these are complemented by general outreach and educational efforts managed by the REC.
Payment model	Arizona is subsidizing the first 600 providers to sign up with a no cost account for one year. Following the promotion, qualified HISP vendors establish market rates.
Use cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care summary exchange • Lab results delivery • Public health reporting • Immunizations to state registry
Go live date	April 12, 2012
Success to date	250+ providers are working with the HISPs for enrollment; 300+ additional providers have expressed interest in moving forward with Direct via an interest form.

The REC/HIE partnership

The State of Arizona, and its information technology division—the Arizona Strategic Enterprise Technology office (ASET)—recognized that, as the organization operating the state’s regional extension center, Arizona Health-e Connection (AzHeC) was naturally positioned to help support the implementation of a Direct marketplace because of its broad reach into the provider community. To quickly enable Direct and spur some early network effects, ASET forged a contractual partnership with AzHeC to establish and manage the Direct marketplace. Through this arrangement, ASET plays an oversight role while AzHeC implements and is responsible for:

"The partnership between AzHeC and ASET drives a common goal of connecting all Arizona providers with a viable health information exchange option. Together, we are building a solid foundation for the success of HIE in our state."

Lorie Mayer, Arizona State HIT Coordinator

- establishing a steering committee,
- defining technical standards for participation,
- creating the vendor application and related forms,
- producing a vendor outreach strategy,
- developing evaluation processes and a scoring matrix for applicants,
- providing maintenance and operations support for the marketplace, and
- producing education and outreach materials for providers.

Setting Up the HISP Marketplace

Arizona pursued the marketplace approach to enabling Direct for a variety of reasons. The state recognized that it would need to go through a rigorous process if it wanted to become a HISP and thought it would be more time and cost-effective to partner with HISPs that already had the credentials. In addition, the state wanted to provide all health care providers with a variety of exchange options that are viable and trusted to meet their exchange needs. With these guiding principles in mind, ASET and AzHeC have taken a thoughtful approach to establishing the marketplace.

- **Diverse and Knowledgeable Steering Committee.** AzHeC, with guidance from ASET, convened a steering committee to guide the development and implementation of the Direct marketplace. The steering committee is made up of hospital CIOs, payers, lab representatives, and large practices as well as representatives from AzHeC and ASET. The committee is responsible for facilitating the HISP application process, which involves interested HISPs completing an application and undergoing an evaluation process based on defined criteria. The involvement of the steering committee has helped promote vendor neutrality, while also creating a sense of partnership and buy-in from the participating stakeholders.
- **HISP Application and Selection Process.** AzHeC reached out to HISPs directly to invite them to apply to participate in the Arizona HIE Marketplace, along with a general announcement for qualified vendors to apply for participation. After completing and submitting an application, AzHeC evaluates applicants based on selection criteria. The Steering Committee collaboratively developed the criteria to ensure alignment with national and state technical requirements, ONC promising practices and specifications, and Arizona’s unique health care landscape. Criteria include:
 - Business strength and long-term financial viability
 - Adherence to stated implementation methodology specifications

- Compliance with HISP technical architecture specifications
- Compliance with email account configuration requirements and specifications
- Commitment to upholding local and national HIE industry standards that are commonly identified as “best practices”
- Agreement to provide AzHeC and the State of Arizona’s state-level directory services with their directory of Direct accounts in Arizona

The [application](#) also explains the HISP requirements for signing and issuing certificates, providing clear pricing models, and terms of participation. AzHeC received 10 applications during the first round of application reviews and has selected one qualified vendor to date. Two additional vendors have since applied to the program and are currently under review. The application opportunity is open until October 15, 2012, to allow additional qualified vendors to apply for participation in the marketplace. The state is currently considering additional opportunities for application submission in the future.

Working to Create Network Effects

- **Marketing the Marketplace.** AzHeC is taking several approaches to communicating about the marketplace, beginning with outreach efforts even before the true launch. The organization created an [online interest form](#) that providers can complete to receive more information about Direct and then be referred to a participating HISP for enrollment. AzHeC and ASET representatives did specific outreach and identified provider champions to assist in getting the word out and driving providers to the interest form. The forms are used to create a database of interested contacts used in current and future outreach efforts.

In April, AzHeC and ASET hosted a webinar launching the marketplace to provide an overview of Direct services and to announce the approval of their first HISP vendor, GSI Health. To encourage attendance at the webinar, AzHeC made personal telephone calls, sent electronic announcements, and conducted a fax blast to all REC providers, inviting them to the event. AzHeC also enlisted their provider champions to send one-on-one invitations to their peers and contacts. All these efforts resulted in 60+ attendees on the first webinar. One week later, GSI Health conducted another webinar specific to their Direct messaging solution, quickly increasing Arizona provider interest in adopting Direct. Going forward, AzHeC will continue to hold

general outreach and educational events in collaboration with approved HISPs, while approved HISPs are also deploying their individual marketing strategies.

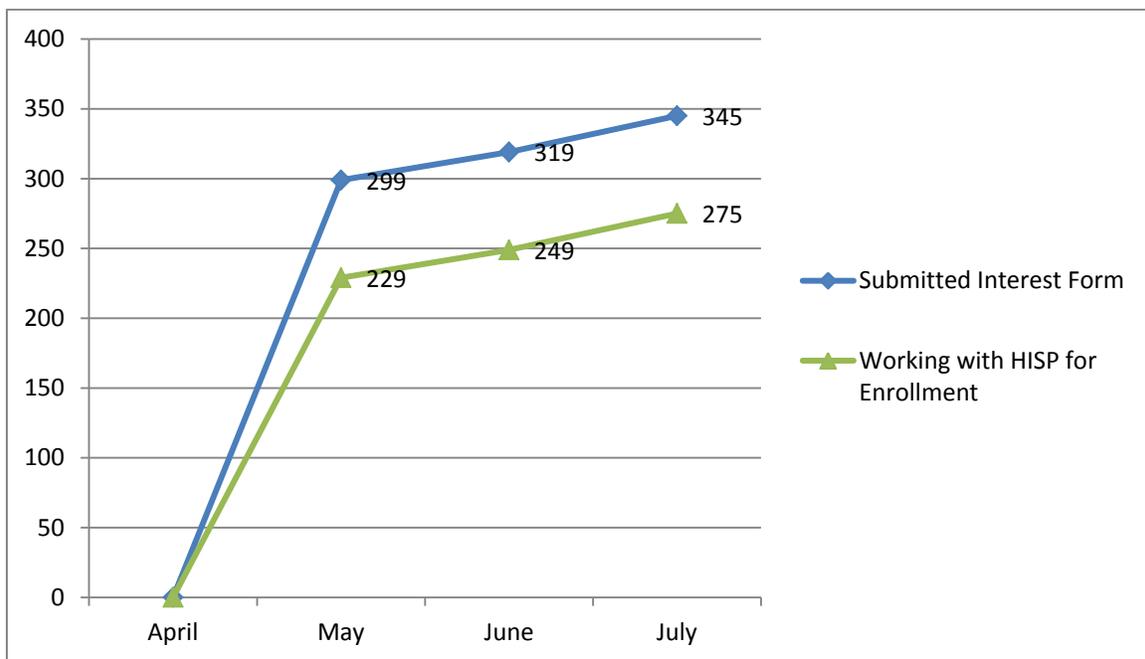
Boots on the Ground Support

AzHeC has established technical assistance expertise and resources to be the “boots on the ground” necessary to help providers understand their exchange options and adopt Direct in a manner that fits their workflow and helps them achieve meaningful use. In operating the REC, AzHeC originally contracted with health IT specialists to deploy teams of experts to help providers adopt EHRs. Recently, AzHeC provided training to these teams on Direct exchange, specifically how Direct assists in meeting meaningful use. In addition, internal staff at AzHeC have been trained to be Direct specialists to work directly with providers to help them make decisions about purchasing HISP services and about integrating Direct with their clinical workflow.

Progress to Date

As shown in **Figure 1**, since April 2012, AzHeC has received provider interest forms from nearly 350 providers. Over 75% of the providers who have expressed interest (275) are currently working through the enrollment process with Arizona's approved HISP vendor. Arizona has acknowledged that since the initial flood of interest—which resulted from a rigorous educational campaign in early spring 2012—providers completing interest forms for Direct, while still increasing, has slowed. Although there may be a myriad of reasons why provider interest has slowed, one reason the state has pointed to is the hesitation among providers to be a pioneer in Arizona as a first-time user of Direct.

Figure 1: Arizona Direct Adoption as of July 2012



New Tactics

To help combat slowed progress and mitigate provider hesitation, on Friday, July 13, 2012, AzHeC announced a limited opportunity for 600 providers to adopt Direct, called the Direct Exchange Demonstration Project. This demonstration will allow the first 600 providers to receive a no cost Direct account for one full year. The rationale for implementing this project is two-fold: one, it allows providers to get comfortable with Direct without financial risk, and two, it helps build use cases and critical mass as quickly as possible. In the first five days of communicating the new promotion, 25 new providers submitted [participation agreements](#) to receive a Direct Demonstration account.

Looking Forward

AzHeC and ASET are optimistic about the future of Direct in Arizona, as their program strategies have addressed each barrier that has presented itself thus far. One anticipated future challenge, moving into Stage 2 of meaningful use, is that many EHRs have not yet integrated Direct into their products and have not implemented mechanisms for easily consuming discreet data from Direct attachments. Arizona believes it will be important to address this concern at the vendor level prior to the end of the demonstration project. If Direct is to be successful in a provider's workflow, it needs to be accessible, simple, and affordable. These strategy conversations are already taking place at the state level, and Arizona is collaboratively working to

develop a plan that will allow many more Arizona providers to enjoy the benefits of HIE.

References and links

To learn more, please contact Ryan Sommers at ryan.sommers@azdoa.gov and April Bills at april.bills@azhec.org.

And for more information please visit:

- [AzHeC Arizona HIE Marketplace website](#)
- [Arizona Health Information Exchange website](#)