Get the Facts about
USING ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORDS TO IMPROVE HEALTH CARE IN YOUR PRACTICE AND COMMUNITY

Many health care providers already know that electronic health records (EHRs) can help them provide higher quality and safer care for their patients. Some health care providers now use EHRs to reduce paperwork and increase efficiencies. Other benefits such as improving care coordination will come with expanded health information exchange.

There are resources available to you NOW that can help you make the transition to electronic health records and securely exchange health information with other health care providers and facilities.

Health IT implementation takes know-how and money.
The HITECH Act provides these through:

- Technical assistance and other helpful resources administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

- Financial incentive programs and technical support administered by CMS

Know-how: Nationwide, Community-based Health IT Support for Health Care Providers

The HITECH Act has set up 62 Regional Extension Centers (RECs) to help more than 100,000 primary care providers nationwide implement and meaningfully use EHRs and engage in health information exchange over the next two years. Primary care providers do not have to become technology experts to achieve meaningful use of EHRs; RECs will provide them with on-the-ground assistance. The RECs and several other programs will combine to build a foundation for every American to benefit from an EHR. To find the REC serving your area, please visit http://healthit.hhs.gov/programs/REC.

Where are these resources for health IT coming from?

The nation has embarked upon an unprecedented effort to transform the flow of information in health care in order to improve the quality and efficiency of care. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), or "Recovery Act," contains the Health Information Technology for Economic and Clinical Health Act, or the "HITECH Act," which establishes programs to accelerate the adoption and use of electronic health records and other types of health IT.

The HITECH Act provides over $20 billion to promote the use of health IT among health care providers nationwide and to train thousands of people for careers related to health IT.

Your state has also established a health information exchange (HIE) organization, through the State HIE Cooperative Agreement Program, to develop and advance methods for information sharing across states. This will help ensure that health care providers and hospitals meet national standards and meaningful use requirements. To find the HIE organization in your state, please visit http://healthit.hhs.gov/programs/stateHIE.

Additionally, 70 community colleges across the nation will begin training health IT professionals to fill the expanding need for a skilled workforce to help health care providers implement EHRs. To learn more, visit http://healthit.hhs.gov/communitycollege.

Each CMS Regional Office has established points of contact who receive and respond to inquiries on the Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs, including general, technical, and complex questions from the public. In addition, CMS regional staff support and conduct local outreach and education, including building and supporting local partnerships and delivering outreach messages through CMS HITECH regional teams.

Money: Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs

The HITECH Act established programs under Medicare and Medicaid to provide incentive payments for the "meaningful use" of certified EHR technology. The Medicare and Medicaid EHR Incentive Programs will provide incentive payments to eligible professionals and eligible hospitals as they demonstrate adoption, implementation, upgrading or meaningful use of certified EHR technology. The programs begin in 2011. These incentive programs are designed to support providers in this period of health IT transition and instill the use of EHRs in meaningful ways to help our nation to improve the quality, safety and efficiency of patient health care.