



Beacon Community Program

Awardee of The Office of the National Coordinator for
Health Information Technology

The Beacon Community Program goals include building and strengthening a health information technology infrastructure; improving health outcomes, care quality, and cost efficiencies; and spearheading innovations to achieve better health and health care.

Hawaii County Beacon Community

Overview of the Hawaii Beacon Community

As a result of a rural population, diverse patient needs, and shortages in licensed health care providers, health care access is a significant challenge for the people of Hawaii County, also known as the “Big Island” of Hawaii. According to census data, there are about 37 people per square mile on the Island — a much lower population density than the average for the state as a whole. This population is served by 395 physicians, which is approximately 40 percent fewer physicians than is estimated to adequately serve the population. These shortages affect nearly all specialties. Patients experience long waits for an appointment to see a health care professional, particularly primary care and specialty care. Many residents must travel more than an hour for routine medical care. Specialty care often requires travel off the island.

Native Hawaiians between the ages of 19 to 35 are more than five times as likely as non-Hawaiians to be diagnosed with diabetes. Between age 36 and 64, Native Hawaiians have a rate of diabetes that is more than twice that of other populations, contributing to the wide health disparities on the island.

The Hawaii County Beacon Consortium (HCBC) is working toward a vision for the health care delivery system on the Big Island that will address these multiple challenges together using technology. The Big Island’s new information technology-enabled care models are helping support more scalable solutions that would previously have been unaffordable in most rural communities. For example, nurse care managers will start leveraging health information exchange capabilities to provide care management services for high-risk patients with diabetes across several physician locations, thereby improving patient outcomes without adversely impacting physician practices. Moreover, Hawaii plans to invest in new telemedicine programs that will allow residents of the Big Island to access needed services in other parts of Hawaii without having to get on a boat or airplane. This will help ensure that patients are receiving the right care at the right time.

Goal of the Program

The goal of the HCBC is to improve the health of the Hawaii Island residents through implementation of a series of health care system improvements and interventions across independent hospitals, physicians, and physician groups and in partnership with public and private health insurers. Engaging patients in their own health care is also a primary focus. The HCBC is targeting the following specific community objectives:

- Monitor patients more carefully and in a more targeted manner to help avert the onset and advancement of diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol
- Reduce health disparities for Native Hawaiians and other populations at risk by developing personalized interventions that ensure that Native Hawaiians receive the care they need

Using Health Information Technology to Make a Difference

The HCBC is leveraging health information technology (health IT) to help improve the quality of care, increase efficiencies, and expand capacity by:

- Creating scalable health IT-enabled care management models which provide small, rural physician practices access to care coordinators to better manage high-risk, chronically ill patients
- Pursuing a regional health IT-enabled strategy to facilitate coordination of care across sites, and empower physicians and other care providers with more comprehensive patient information
- Embedding health workers and volunteers in communities to provide culturally sensitive, group classes to promote patient engagement and provide health and wellness education
- Developing IT-enabled referral triage tools to expand access to specialty care by ensuring referrals to specialists meet threshold criteria
- Assisting physicians in achieving “meaningful use” of electronic health records, which will drive further improvements in health and health care delivery

A Team Approach

The HCBC program involves a consortium of organizations and agencies including Hawaii County, the University of Hawaii at Hilo College of Pharmacy, health plans, associations, hospitals, clinics, physicians, and community groups. The HSBC is also working with the Hawaii Health Information Exchange, a Regional Extension Center funded by the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, to encourage and assist providers to adopt EHRs. The Regional Extension Center will provide technical assistance in achieving meaningful use and qualifying for Medicare or Medicaid incentives, offer continuing education credits for classes in health IT implementation, and coordinate efforts among vendors, EHR resellers, and consultants.

Improvements for Patients and the Community

The HCBC program aims to provide every resident of the county with a medical home and a personal health record. By the end of 2013, the HCBC expects to improve the quality of care for its community through:

- More comprehensive, coordinated health care, particularly for the chronically ill
- Shorter waits for appointments
- Greater access to medical specialists
- The opportunity for more involvement in their own health care

The lessons learned in Hawaii will be shared with other communities across the nation.