



Enabling Health Information Exchange to Support Community Goals

Learning Guide Executive Summary

The seamless exchange of health information across providers and other stakeholders is widely recognized as a fundamental component of delivery system reform efforts to improve care coordination, lower costs, and achieve better population health outcomes. This Learning Guide captures insights and guidance from eleven¹ Beacon Communities² around developing, enhancing, and strengthening health information exchange (HIE) capabilities within a region to meet specified goals around improving health care and increasing the efficiency of the health care delivery system. This Learning Guide also contains key strategic objectives distilled from the Beacon Community experience and other authoritative sources to successfully implement HIE to support community goals.

HIE is defined as the secure electronic movement of health-related information among health care entities according to nationally recognized standards. HIE allows patient health information to be shared across health care providers and institutions securely and efficiently, regardless of geographic or organizational boundaries, and follow patients across health care settings and visits. Since 2008, hospitals' electronic exchange of health information with other providers increased by 41 percent³. These trends are likely to continue as a result of improvements in technology, increased EHR adoption, and a powerful business case for data exchange. With more robust exchange of health information communities can:

- *Improve* patient safety by sharing current information on a patient's medical status, medications, lab results, and allergies and contraindications to medication.
- *Reduce* duplicative treatments and tests.
- *Capture* administrative efficiencies through decreased paperwork.
- *Improve* care management for patients with complex and often costly chronic conditions.
- *Facilitate* better coordination across care settings; track infectious diseases.
- *Aggregate* data across disparate providers to conduct population health management tasks.

¹ The 11 Beacon Communities that contributed are: Bangor Beacon Community, Central Indiana Beacon Community, Colorado Beacon Consortium, Crescent City Beacon Community, Delta BLUES Beacon Community, Greater Cincinnati Beacon Collaboration, Greater Tulsa Health Access Network Beacon Community, Rhode Island Beacon Community, San Diego Beacon Community, Southeast Minnesota Beacon Community, Western New York Beacon Community

² The Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) provided \$250 million over three years (2010-2013) to 17 selected communities throughout the United States to build and strengthen health IT infrastructure, test innovative approaches, and make strides toward better care, better health, and lower costs.

³ Furukawa, M. F., V. Patel, D. Charles, M. Swain, & F. Mostashari (2013). Hospital electronic health information exchange grew substantially in 2008-12. *Health Affairs*. 8: 1346-1354.



Inside the Learning Guide

Setting the Stage for Success. The Learning Guide begins with a review of the policies driving HIE adoption, and how they have affected the demand for increased HIE to support care coordination and care management. This Guide specifically provides practical information about the current landscape for exchange, infrastructure and services supporting exchange across the country today, how regional collaboration around exchange can add value, and how to realize goals around exchange in a multi-stakeholder environment.

A Learning Guide describes a promising IT-enabled intervention that can be deployed in a community to accelerate health care transformation.

Lessons from the Beacon Community Experience. Each Beacon Community's path to enhancing exchange and interoperability capabilities varied depending on the community's goals, drivers of improvement, and existing systems and infrastructure. The lessons from the contributing communities are organized into five Strategic Objectives:

- 1. Convene Stakeholders and Develop a Governance Structure to Foster Trust and Sustain Collaboration.**

Developing HIE capabilities requires collaboration among entities – such as payers, hospitals and health systems, and community providers – that may not have a history of collaboration or sharing information. This section describes practical insights around understanding market dynamics and environmental considerations that may influence willingness to collaborate; strategies for convening key stakeholders; and attributes of a governance structure that can sustain collaboration among stakeholders.

- 2. Create a Legal Framework for Sharing Protected Health Information.**

State and Federal laws and regulations govern the exchange of protected health information (PHI), and each entity and user sharing data as part of a health information exchange bears significant legal responsibility for proper stewardship of the data. Creating a legal framework that complies with all Federal and state laws and regulations, protects the governing entity's directors and officers, and is acceptable to all participating entities can pose a significant challenge. This section explores how the Beacon Communities approached: engaging the right expertise to navigate the complexity of the legal environment; developing the HIE legal framework and policies with the collaboration and engagement of all key stakeholders; and providing initial and ongoing training for exchange users and participating entities on security and privacy practices.

- 3. Identify Funding Sources and Define the Financing Strategy.**

Whether developing sustainability strategies around existing HIE platforms, or supporting the launch of new exchange solutions, Beacon Communities explored a range of revenue generation and financing options as part of their program efforts. This Strategic Objective provides an overview of the startup and operational costs that are typically incurred when establishing HIE services and identifies initial and



ongoing funding sources. It also reviews the process for developing a financial model for long-term sustainability in collaboration with regional stakeholders.

4. Define Technology Paths to Facilitate Data Sharing.

Strengthening or establishing exchange capabilities is a significant undertaking; this section highlights important considerations around technology strategy that communities should keep in mind. For instance, Beacon Communities frequently relied on available technologies to expand exchange capabilities, such as the prevalent use of the Direct protocol for secure, provider-to-provider email. Using available systems, services, and standards reduces unnecessary duplication and can reduce the costs associated with developing or acquiring new technology. This section provides insights on assessing current infrastructure, building on and connecting existing platforms for exchange; and evaluating technology solutions as a community.

5. Define Metrics, Monitoring Progress, and Evaluate Success.

Beacon Communities emphasized the importance of defining metrics and measuring progress as an important part of demonstrating the value of exchange capabilities to stakeholders. A robust measurement and evaluation program will consider both operational metrics to assess adoption and use of new technology, and clinical process and outcome measures to demonstrate longer-term effect. This section addresses the advantages and challenges of different types of measures, and the value of engaging stakeholder involvement when developing a strategy for gauging progress.

The full Learning Guide is available at <http://www.healthit.gov/policy-researchers-implementers/beacon-community-program/learning-guides>

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