

**Spotlight on: Tennessee's Electronic Prescribing Success
through Partnerships and Incentives**

❖ **The Challenge**

Electronic prescribing had been a priority for Tennessee for many years; however, they had a noticeable gap in e-prescribing adoption among independent community pharmacies.

❖ **The Approach**

Through a combination of **strategic partnerships and financial incentives**, Tennessee made measurable strides in increasing the number of independent community pharmacies that actively e-prescribe

❖ **Tennessee's Key Takeaways**

- Taking the time to ensure an accurate pool of pharmacy data and using these data iteratively to drive outreach and monitor progress is worth the effort.
- Partnerships with trusted entities among the pharmacy community can help build trust and interest in state initiatives.
- A little money for each pharmacy can go a long way in helping address barriers and making pharmacies feel like valued stakeholders in health care transformation efforts.
- Create a sense of urgency and excitement about programs by instituting deadlines for grants or other incentives.

Because many factors influence changes in pharmacy e-prescribing rates, it can be difficult to connect state efforts directly to results and outcomes in the pharmacy space. We highlight the Tennessee Office of eHealth Initiatives in this implementation brief not only because they have implemented a complement of promising approaches, but because they have collected data that helps clearly connect their strategic efforts to increases in adoption and utilization of e-prescribing by independent community pharmacies.

Tennessee's Grant Program for Pharmacies

From December 1, 2008 – November 30, 2011 the Tennessee Office of eHealth Initiatives (OEHI) and the Tennessee Pharmacists Association (TPA) along with its educational arm—the Tennessee Pharmacists Research and Education Foundation (TPREF)—partnered to offer up to \$675,000 in state-funded grants to help independent community pharmacies adopt e-prescribing. Pharmacies were eligible to receive up to \$3,500 towards any expense related to e-prescribing.

- **Eligibility requirements.** To be considered eligible for a grant, the independent community pharmacy had to complete a two-page application and return it with time-stamped invoices for e-prescribing-related expenses as well as a completed IRS W-9 form.

Pharmacies also had to commit to activate e-prescribing software and remain activated for a minimum of five years. Tennessee uses Surescripts and other data in addition to pharmacy reporting to ensure the requirement is upheld.

- **Funding allowances.** Initially the program was intended to offset costs of adopting e-prescribing systems. However, after gathering pharmacist feedback, the team learned that system costs weren't the only barrier to pharmacy e-prescribing adoption. The team made a change two years into the grant program to introduce more flexibility, allowing pharmacies to use grant funds to address any barrier to adoption, including implementation services, workflow analyses, training, etc. After this change, there was noticeable uptake in program participants.

At the completion of the program, the state awarded 139 distinct grants totaling \$352,774.86.

Making the Program Work

- **Effective Partnerships.** The TPA operates as a federated membership organization, with twelve district-oriented groups covering the entire state. As a professional association, TPA is a trusted organization with solid relationships among commercial and independent community pharmacies. To reach pharmacies across the state, foster a sense of trust in the state's e-prescribing efforts, and ultimately make the program a success, the OEHI had to develop and maintain a strong partnership with TPA and TPREF. This partnership not only helped the state develop inroads with pharmacies, it allowed them to leverage established data sources, contacts, and communication channels among the pharmacy community. The partnership created a "win" for the TPA and its constituents and a "win" for the state as they looked to increase e-prescribing.
- **Using Data Iteratively.** TPREF used several sources of data to verify the status of the target population for the grant program—independent community pharmacies. TPREF conducted a thorough assessment of pharmacies beginning with a list they received from Surescripts containing 1,817 total pharmacies (1,600 were identified as independent community pharmacies). Cross-referencing this list with TPREF data and a list of licensed state pharmacies from the TN Board of Pharmacy as well as conducting verification via phone, TPREF concluded that 162 independent community pharmacies were currently not e-prescribing. Throughout the life of the program, the team continued iterative analyses of their data to ensure outreach efforts reached their target population as well as to assess progress. Most recently, in Q2 2011, the state reached a new target list of 124.
- **Communication and Outreach.** The state worked with TPA to help get the word out and encourage participation when the grant program launched. Messaging went out through established and effective communication channels including articles and announcements in the Tennessee Pharmacist printed journal, the NEWSStream electronic newsletter, the Independent Link fax blast, and the TPA email listserv as well as postings on the TPA website.

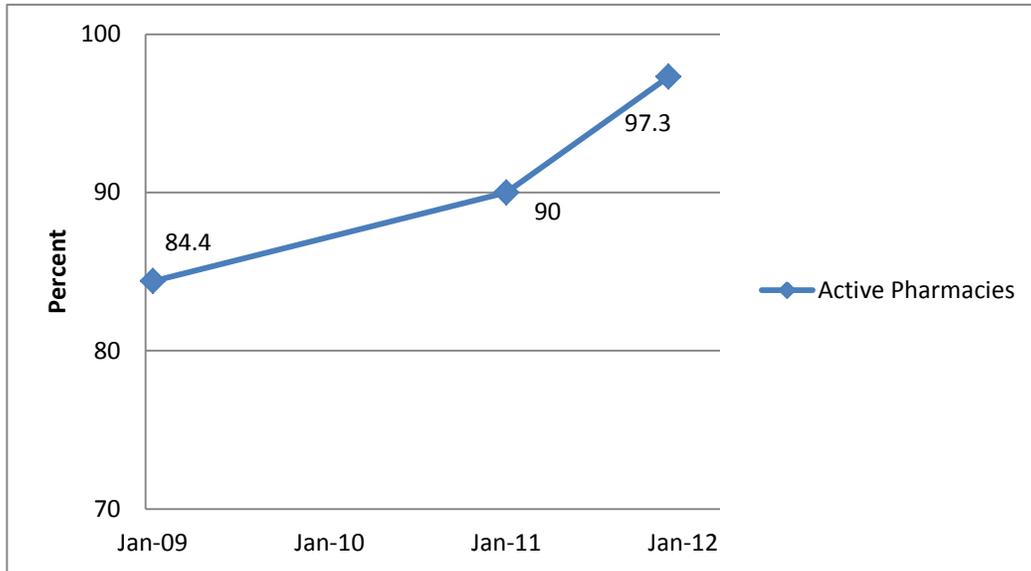
TPREF made successful contact with all 124 eligible pharmacies using key messaging that included details about the program and important reasons why they should consider e-prescribing. Messaging focused on appealing to the pharmacies' sense of community and collaboration with prescribers in their area, including letting them know that their lack of e-prescribing may cause physicians to be docked up to 2% of their Medicare reimbursement for e-prescribing non-compliance.

TPREF continued outreach to targeted pharmacies primarily through phone calls, faxes, e-mails, and speaking engagements. TPREF attended university seminars and other pharmacist-targeted educational programs. Over the three-year grants program, TPREF representatives spoke to over 2,000 pharmacists every year.

Getting to Results

As of Q4 2011, Tennessee's data show that 97.3% of independent community pharmacies are accepting electronic prescriptions (**Figure 1**). This represents a 13% since Q1 2009.

Figure 1. Percent change in independent community pharmacies accepting electronic prescriptions



References and Links

To learn more about Tennessee's pharmacy grant program, please contact Eric Harkness at eric.harkness@tn.gov or Will Rice at will.rice@tn.gov.

And for more information please visit:

- [Tennessee Office of e-Health Initiatives](#)
- [Tennessee Pharmacy Association](#)
- [Grants application](#)
- [Final TPREF grant report](#)