



March 17, 2020

The Honorable Don Rucker, M.D.
National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20201

RE: Draft 2020-2025 Federal Health IT Strategic Plan

Dear Dr. Rucker:

The Healthcare Leadership Council (HLC) welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology's (ONC) Draft 2020-2025 Federal Health IT Strategic Plan. HLC appreciates the administration's efforts to use health IT as a catalyst to empower patients, lower costs, deliver high-quality care, and improve health for individuals, families, and communities. We applaud the vision of this draft strategy and ONC's review of input from a wide range of healthcare stakeholders.

HLC is a coalition of chief executives from all disciplines within American healthcare. It is the exclusive forum for the nation's healthcare leaders to jointly develop policies, plans, and programs to achieve their vision of a 21st century healthcare system that makes affordable high-quality care accessible to all Americans. Members of HLC – hospitals, academic health centers, health plans, pharmaceutical companies, medical device manufacturers, laboratories, biotech firms, health product distributors, post-acute care providers, home care providers, and information technology companies – advocate for measures to increase the quality and efficiency of healthcare through a patient-centered approach.

We have reviewed ONC's Draft 2020-2025 Federal Health IT Strategic Plan and offer the following comments on the strategic plan's goals to promote health and wellness; enhance the delivery and experience of care; build a secure, data-driven ecosystem to accelerate research and innovation; and connect healthcare and health data through an interoperable health IT infrastructure.

Individual Access to Health Information

We applaud ONC's efforts to strengthen the ability of patients, healthcare providers, and payors to exchange health information to give patients greater control over their own health information. HLC members are committed to sharing comprehensive access to health data consistent with applicable privacy and security protections. Improving an individual's access to their own health information supports the strategic plan's goal of promoting health and wellness. Ensuring that individuals can easily obtain, use, and share their electronic health information empowers them to be actively engaged in their healthcare to manage and achieve their health goals. Individuals

who are actively engaged in their healthcare are better able to manage their health conditions and stay healthy. We believe providers, payors, and technology developers should engage individuals to identify and prioritize information access expectations.

Interoperability

HLC believes that health IT can play an important role in enhancing the delivery and experience of care. For example, today, the vast majority of clinicians and hospitals have implemented electronic health records (EHRs) to collect and store patient information. While progress has been made in both the public and private sectors, the next step is to accelerate the interoperability of EHRs and health IT systems to bring information to the point of care to support care delivery. As outlined in the HLC-Bipartisan Policy Center report, *Advancing Interoperability, Information Sharing, and Data Access: Improving Health and Healthcare for Americans*, interoperability will require leadership in four key areas: 1) strengthening the business case; 2) improving technical infrastructure; 3) improving policies and regulations; and 4) governance and leadership. We are pleased that many of the provisions in the ONC final rule on interoperability and information blocking align with recommendations in the report, including the rapid adoption of open source standards to improve data access and interoperability.

Transparency

HLC fully supports increased transparency that helps patients, their clinicians, their family members and other key stakeholders access important information about the potential cost and quality of care. Patients and providers need actionable data that can help them become more informed and engaged healthcare consumers. Sharing irrelevant information, however, could inhibit their ability to make informed decisions and could actually have the unintended consequence of making it harder for patients and providers to get a full picture of cost and value. It is important that any sharing of cost data with patients and consumers should be released alongside accurate information on quality. Otherwise, we are concerned that individuals reviewing the pricing information would not have adequate information or appropriate context in selecting a healthcare provider.

Application Programming Interfaces

HLC agrees that the use of standards-based application programming interfaces (APIs) are essential to building an integrated system that supports research, clinical decision making, population health management, and individual access to quality and cost information. We applaud ONC's adoption of Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources 4.0 (FHIR)-based APIs in the ONC final interoperability and information blocking rule. We believe the implementation and adoption of FHIR-based APIs will make it easier for individuals, healthcare providers, payors, and researchers to exchange their data.

While we are excited about the possibilities FHIR-based APIs can unlock, we want to raise important privacy and security concerns related to using APIs to provide access to third party applications of a patient's choice. While HLC supports efforts to make it easier for patients to obtain access to their health information electronically, third party applications selected by individuals often are not subject to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act's (HIPAA) Privacy and Security Rules because these applications are offered directly to consumers, and are not offered on behalf of a HIPAA covered entity or business associate. Many patients do not fully appreciate that the protections of HIPAA do not apply to their health information used with these applications. We encourage ONC to work with consumers, providers, health plans, and technology companies to address this concern.

Overall, we are pleased with ONC's vision for federal health IT and look forward to working with the administration on implementing its strategic plan. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft strategy. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Tina Grande at (202) 449-3433 or tgrande@hlc.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary R. Grealy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and "G".

Mary R. Grealy
President