

Summary of the Public Health Reporting Initiative

Goal

To standardize and simplify how healthcare providers electronically submit mandated reports to health departments. This is expected to yield faster, more complete and more reusable information for public health use at lower costs to both senders and receivers.

Approach

The approach being used in this initiative is to engage public health practitioners, standards experts, vendors and others to select one situation where reporting to multiple public health programs currently occurs, identify common data elements across them all (such as demographic data) and identify unique elements (such as a newborn hearing screening result), and develop a single guide that includes and harmonizes all data into a generic report. The report will include both the common and the unique data elements but be structured in the same format, likely using the [Clinical Document Architecture](#) (CDA) standard. This makes electronic reporting faster and cheaper for both senders and receivers. The goal of the initiative is not to create a single message capable of all public health reporting, but if the first effort is successful, it will be possible to replicate it to create a small number of report formats to manage a large number of public health program areas.

Whose initiative is this?

This is an initiative that belongs to the public health community as a whole, working with healthcare providers and IT vendors. It is occurring under the [Standards and Interoperability Framework](#) of the [Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT](#) (ONC). The S&I Framework provides a venue and a mechanism to bring stakeholders together to solve interoperability problems. It requires the active participation and direction of the public health practice community, as well as standards experts and others. It is called by the ONC a “do-acracy,” in that those who show up, participate, contribute and “do” things make the decisions.

What problem does this initiative address?

From the perspective of healthcare providers, laboratories and EHR vendors, reporting to public health is complicated and increasingly expensive. Different programs require different events to be reported, in different formats, sent in different ways or hand-entered in different web-based applications to different jurisdictions. This can include anything from paper forms to sophisticated batch electronic files using the HL7 messaging standard. As the healthcare sector invests billions in certified, interoperable health IT, the opportunity exists to define EHR system functionality for more consistent, unified reporting to public health. If carefully constructed, the process can increase the number, accuracy and completeness of reports to public health. Data that either has not been submitted or was incomplete in the past has the potential to be fully or partially captured automatically by health IT systems and reported to public health in one

standard message format. Further, by standardizing the form in which data is electronically received, the cost to public health agencies to receive, parse, route and reuse information can also be reduced.

What does this mean for public health agencies?

While it's hard to predict all the possible impacts of this approach to reporting, the intent is to speed the delivery of more complete and accurate reports by making it easier for healthcare providers to report. Ideally, follow-up calls to providers to obtain client demographic or clinical information as part of case investigation may be reduced. If the CDA standard is adopted as the appropriate standard for this initiative (or elsewhere as part of Meaningful Use), public health agencies will need to upgrade relevant systems to accept and process those messages. A centralized approach to receiving and routing data to programs may also be required (which is likely cheaper in the long run than maintaining multiple separate receiving systems). More complete reporting will also increase data volumes for some public health programs.

How does this relate to Meaningful Use?

The Public Health Reporting Initiative, while under the ONC, is aimed at solving the challenge of exchanging data with the thousands of health providers, health departments, and federal agencies around the country. If a more generic, standardized and harmonized case report can be created across multiple public health domains in time, it may be considered for inclusion as a new public health reporting objective for stage 3 of Meaningful Use (for implementation in late 2015)..

What is the timeframe?

If this initiative is found feasible and useful, it is possible it could be recommended as an objective for stage 3. For that to happen, pilot testing would have to be underway by Fall of 2012—a very tight timeline!

How do I monitor or participate in the PHRI?

The central clearinghouse for information and discussion on this initiative is on the PHRI Wiki site, found [here](#). Sign up to become a member, watch for meeting announcements and documents, join a work group and vote on future directions!

Who do I contact for more information?

Contact the informatics staff of your professional association.