



LOUISIANA
HEALTH CARE
QUALITY FORUM

PRESS RELEASE

Jamie Davis, Marketing/Communications Coordinator
225 300 4837 ▪ jdavis@lhcf.org

For Immediate Release

Louisiana prepares for seamless exchange of health records after disasters

Ten states have established infrastructure for secure exchange

BATON ROUGE, LA. – July 15, 2013 – Louisiana, along with three other Gulf States, has partnered with six states in the East and Midwest in a program to help assure patients who are dislocated because of hurricanes or other disasters that their health information will be available to health care providers like doctors and hospitals.

The Louisiana Health Information Exchange (LaHIE), the statewide health information exchange (HIE) developed and managed by the Louisiana Health Care Quality Forum, is partnering with health information exchange programs in Alabama, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, Michigan, Wisconsin and West Virginia. This effort will enable the secure exchange of electronic health records (EHRs) through the [Direct](#) program. Direct is a tool created by the U.S. Health and Human Services' Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology (ONC) that allows for the secure exchange of health information over the Internet.

All of the state HIE programs participating in the initiative currently have established at least one operational interstate connection and are working with other states including Arkansas and Mississippi. The 10-state initiative is being made possible through information technology infrastructure provided through Direct.

“In a state often fraught with natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornados, Louisiana’s HIE is invaluable,” said Quality Forum Executive Director Cindy Munn. “The devastation our state faced after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita was compounded by the losses of hundreds of thousands of patients’ paper medical records. As Louisiana rebuilt its health care system, our state’s leaders recognized the need for advancements in health information technology and a statewide health information exchange to help ensure that those circumstances will not be repeated in the event of another disaster of Katrina-like proportions. Louisiana has demonstrated its commitment to developing the information technology infrastructure necessary to provide that level of secure accessibility for its residents.”

“Through disasters like Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy and large tornadoes in Alabama and Joplin, Missouri, in 2011 and more recently in Moore, Oklahoma, we have learned the importance of protecting patients’ health records through electronic tools like health information exchanges,” said Farzad Mostashari, M.D., National Coordinator for Health IT. “Patients are better off when states and health information exchange organizations work together to ensure that health information can follow patients when they need it the most.”

The Southeast Region Health IT and Health Information Exchange Collaboration (SERCH) is leading the collaborative effort. SERCH was originally funded through ONC’s State Health Policy Consortium. In addition to Louisiana, current members of SERCH include Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee and Virginia. Since SERCH began in April 2010, collaborations have helped to resolve cross-border barriers toward facilitating the multi-state exchange of health information.

In 2012, SERCH completed an analysis of barriers to health information exchange and issued recommendations for developing health information exchange infrastructure for disaster preparedness and response. The final report recommended a phased approach that would enable use of existing data sources such as health plans and state agencies. The report concluded:

“We should not, and do not need to wait for a fully integrated, cross-state health information exchange platform to become available in order to provide data during a disaster.”

According to Munn, “This project focused on building on the lessons learned during major disasters over the years. The findings of the SERCH Project illustrate the importance of making health information available when and where the patient needs it. This access is even more critical during disaster situations when patients may be relocated far from their homes, physicians and pharmacies.”

“The SERCH effort will enable health care providers to contact patient’s health plans and available health care providers for information about the patient’s medical history when it is most needed,” added Nicole Lurie, M.D., Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response. “But patients can help protect their own information and that of their children by saving it electronically.”

LaHIE currently has participation agreements with more than 130 health care providers, hospitals, home health companies, school-based health centers and other health care companies across the state. For more information about LaHIE, or to view a current list of LaHIE participants, visit www.lhcqf.org, or call 225.334.9299.

About the Louisiana Health Care Quality Forum

The Louisiana Health Care Quality Forum is a private, not-for-profit organization, dedicated to advancing evidence-based, collaborative initiatives to improve the health of Louisiana residents. Its focus areas include quality measurement and analytics, clinical quality improvement, the patient-centered medical home/care coordination model, Louisiana Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment (LaPOST), outreach/education and health information technology (IT). The Quality Forum is the State-Designated Entity to lead the planning and implementation of the state’s health information exchange and to support health care providers and critical access/rural hospitals as they adopt and meaningfully use electronic health records. For more information, visit www.lhcqf.org.